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VOLUME ONE

POETRY

LIONEL ELVIN

PRINCIPAL OF RUSKIN COLLEGE

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Preface

THIS book is an introduction to literary criticism through its most difficult and delightful discipline, the study of poetry. It is based on lectures given to adult students in Ruskin College and on discussions with them to which I owe a great deal. As the approach is somewhat different from that customary in schools and universities, and may possibly be of wider interest (especially in adult education), I should like to say why I have adopted it.

There are to-day many readers of books, but comparatively few critical readers. But among the readers who would never call themselves literary critics there are many with a critical disposition: that is to say, they make conscious choices in their reading, they discuss books with their friends, they note the differences between different reviews of the same book, and they are interested in any changes that take place in their own tastes. But from this to "literary criticism" seems a very big jump. It seems to involve something professional and to demand an apparatus of scholarship that they cannot hope to possess.

Now I do not think this is true, at any rate in the sense in which such readers fear it. I am not suggesting that to be a reasonably good critic of literature is easy or can be achieved without conscious training. That is decidedly not true. But in what does that training consist? I have known adult students with no command of foreign languages or of the classics, with an ignorance of "Beowulf" that would shock the more old-fashioned university teachers (but not the great English writers), with a very slight acquaintance

with tendencies, influences, schools, and the similar detail of literary histories: and yet these students, because they had a sense of language and brought a mature sense of values to bear on their reading, were often able to make comments of real critical penetration. If they went on to discover that there was a discipline of literary criticism which, given hard work and sensitivity, they could acquire, their whole reading took on a new interest and vitality. And very often, of course, the relevant scholarly knowledge, of literary history, of social and philosophical background, even sometimes of foreign literatures, afterwards came as a natural extension of an activity that was the essential one and was itself a source of the keenest pleasure.

Now it seems to me (as it has to many others) of great importance that the number of critical readers should be increased. This cannot be done by giving the general public, or the semi-special public attending classes in adult education, popular, easy, or "potted" versions of honours courses in universities. If standards of integrity are not maintained then everything is lost. The problem is to teach the discipline (the relevant, not substitute disciplines) with as much rigour, but with a less extensive material than would be expected from specialists. Now can this be done ? Without in any way underestimating the value of fuller and related studies it does seem to me that it can be. This book is an attempt to carry that statement into practice.

When it was originally planned the book was intended to afford within one volume an introduction to criticism of plays and novels as well as of poetry, but it was soon evident that to attempt so much within a limited space would involve just that superficiality which I wished to avoid. As a choice had to be made it seemed much the

most important to begin with the criticism of poetry. There are many readers who are not bad amateur critics of a novel or a play but who feel the criticism of poetry to be beyond them. Furthermore poetry lends itself best to study in a limited space, for it may be quoted more easily and the evidence placed fairly on the page so that the reader may come to his own conclusions and check the observations of the author. The novel and the play have their own possibilities and limitations, one might almost say their own laws of structure, and therefore criticism of the novel or the play will not be just like the criticism of poetry. But one may be tolerably sure that anyone who is a good critic of poetry will have in him the essentials, even though not the technical details, for criticism of other forms of literature as well.

This volume therefore confines itself to poetry. The method used may appear a little novel, but it is based on two conceptions that are familiar. One is that the analysis of short passages of poetry gives a training which is indispensable to the reader who would become a critic. The other is that there are more modes of literature than one and that to value any work rightly the reader must understand the conventions the writer is using and the kind of satisfaction it is appropriate to expect. If there is anything fresh in the approach used in this book it is in the attempt to combine these for the reader who has a mature experience of life but a limited knowledge of the extent of his own and other literatures and a limited amount of reading time. But I should like to say a word about each of these two familiar ideas that I have tried to combine in a systematic short course of study.

Attention to the language in which passages of poetry are written is at least as old as Longinus, but the recent

emphasis upon it comes from the teaching in the English School at Cambridge. I would like to say (without any disrespect to Dr. F. R. Leavis, whose use of this method has of course been outstanding, and the most persistent and influential example of its potentialities in print) that it goes back to the impetus given by Dr. I. A. Richards some twenty-five years ago and has been used by many teachers at Cambridge, some of whom differ sharply from Dr. Leavis in particular judgments of poetry. There can hardly be anyone who has read in the English School at Cambridge who would not bear witness to the effect of "practical criticism" of this kind in making him a more vigilant reader than he would otherwise have been and who would not defend this discipline as the one that really makes the study of literature serious instead of the philological studies that still so largely dominate the English Schools in other universities.

There is, however, one caution that ought to be borne in mind when extolling this particular kind of exercise. It may tempt the student to over-praise of those poets whose powers in the use of language are best revealed in the study of short passages, and to underestimate those who lend themselves to this test less. Keats is bound to come out of it better than Shelley, Pope will come out of it better than Byron, Donne will come out of it better than Chaucer. I am not suggesting that the best-known advocates of this method would necessarily place the first of the poets in these pairs above the second, or on the other hand that it would necessarily be wrong to do so. My point is that without an equal regard to work with the broad brush injustice may be done. This discipline unchecked by others may exalt the miniaturist at the expense of the man who uses the large canvas. One might add, as a subsidiary caution

here, that this method, if relied on greatly, may tempt a critic to pay less attention than is fair to qualities of structure that are to be seen only in works studied as a whole. I feel myself that Dr. Leavis in his criticism of Shelley has been less than fair to that most excellently constructed poem, the "Ode to the West Wind", by basing his condemnation on an analysis of one section of the poem only and by treating the mode of imagery as if the poet were aiming at an effect to be concentrated in the single line. With this cautionary note, however, I would like to say that in training oneself to read more critically there is no better method than that familiarised by Cambridge teachers in recent years.

The second principle I have followed is the one admirably expressed by Mr. T. S. Eliot in his book, "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism". Mr. Eliot there discusses the stages in our enjoyment of poetry as we grow up. He says that most children seem to enjoy rhymes and verses, no doubt indiscriminately. In adolescence there comes a second stage when we feel the work of a poet not as something outside ourselves, but as taking complete possession of our youthful consciousness. Then for some of us there comes a third stage when "we cease to identify ourselves with the poet we happen to be reading, when our critical faculties remain awake, and when we are aware of what one poet can be expected to give and what he cannot". This third stage of enjoyment might be called the first stage of criticism. To enter it one needs of course to study a poet's use of language in the way that has been already described, and that will be illustrated in the body of this book. But one needs to do more than that. One needs to understand the conventions of literary structure that a writer is using. To take a familiar example : one can

easily demonstrate the superiority of Shakespeare to Dryden by comparing his "Antony and Cleopatra" with the latter's "All for Love", but that is hardly enough. One should show that they were to some extent aiming at different things. Dryden, by his acceptance of the unities of time, place and theme gained an effect of concentration which seemed to him preferable to the apparent diffuseness of Shakespeare ; but he lost the magnificent sweep over time and over the whole Roman and Egyptian world that Shakespeare's method allowed. Again, Dryden gained a "heroic" dignity that is no doubt a poor thing compared with Shakespeare's combination of regal and human greatness, his combination of tragedy and the humorous sides of life ; but Dryden's play has a temper of its own, with its own value, which makes it the work of a real though inferior artist, not an imitation. There are many other illustrations that one might give. One that is often given, and is still worth giving, is that we must not expect the same kind of pleasure from the novels of Jane Austen as we get from those of Scott. This does not mean, of course, that all books are equally good if they do equally well whatever they attempt. A good detective story is not as good, "other things being equal", as a major imaginative novel. The point is that the other things are not equal, and cannot be. This takes us into further critical problems, ones into which, except perhaps incidentally, the present introduction does not go. To learn to read critically and to understand what is meant by Mr. Eliot's phrase about being aware "of what one poet can be expected to give and what he cannot" seem to me the two things on which an introduction to poetry should insist first.

In the attempt to do both these things I have therefore taken short passages, superficially similar in subject-

matter, from three very different poets, Milton, Wordsworth, and T. S. Eliot. I have followed the comparison of these by chapters on each of these poets in turn, not attempting comprehensive criticism of their poetry but emphasising their distinctive modes of writing and of experience and indicating how criticism should direct itself within the conventions of language and structure adopted by each. Lastly I have discussed three further short passages, involving more complex problems than those raised by the earlier ones and leading to preliminary consideration of some critical questions that are exercising our minds at the present time.

Other poets might equally well have been chosen, no doubt. But these three are sharply distinguished from one another, their ways of writing are broadly representative of different general tendencies, and each is good in his kind. I make no apology for being selective rather than vainly "comprehensive", for it really is so much more important to have learned to read one poem well than to know whole outlines of literary history or be master of all the variations in different editions of a text. With the latter one has only the husk ; with the former one has the seeds of everything in one's reading life.

In one matter I should apologise to any one already well versed in critical literature who may read this book. I have deliberately chosen to write about poets who are indisputably good, whose works may be purchased or borrowed easily (and should be, for reading with this book), but that have been written about a great deal. Anyone who comments on poets that have been written about so much already discovers that his debt to others is so pervasive that he cannot always know where acknowledgment is due. (I discovered, for instance, in looking again at

Professor Matthiessen's book about Mr. Eliot that he had commented on the passage I discuss in my first chapter ; I had forgotten this, though I had read it in the past, and I do not doubt that what I say, though not the same as what he says, owes something to him. With Mr. Eliot's work in particular every critic is very much in the debt of some of the skilled commentators who have pioneered !)

To conclude.—Literary criticism is not a "subject" of study in the sense of having a corpus of knowledge to be mastered. It is rather a technique to be learned. I have tried in this book to introduce the reader to the two essential things in the critical reading of all literature, and if one can learn these, from however limited an extent of literature of the first order, then one will know how to begin to criticise other writers either of the present or the past. These two essential things seem to me to be: standards which will enable one to discriminate, through the examination of language, between the good and the bad; and a reasonable catholicity of taste.

The passages in this book from the works of Mr. T. S. Eliot are quoted by permission of himself and Messrs. Faber and Faber ; W. B. Yeats' "Byzantium" by permission of Mrs. W. B. Yeats and Messrs. Macmillan, the publishers of Mr. Yeats' "Collected Poems" ; "Carrion Comfort" by Gerard Manley Hopkins by permission of the poet's family and the Oxford University Press, publishers of his poems ; the translation from the Chinese by Mr. Arthur Waley by permission of the translator and Messrs. Constable ; and "Cock-Crow" by Edward Thomas by permission of Mrs. Thomas. To all these I express my sincere thanks.

One: Three Kinds of Poetry

For every ten playgoers or every hundred readers of novels there is perhaps one reader of poetry. Why is the number so small ?

Poetry was the earliest form of literature and is still the most honoured. So strong is our sense of this that we sometimes call all great imaginative writing poetry, whether it is so formally or not. And it is the English poets especially that give us the claim to have one of the great literatures of the world. We have had fine novelists, but it is doubtful whether the English Novel can rank as high as the French or the Russian. Our prose is in general very varied and vigorous, and we have the King James Bible ; but few even of Englishmen would claim that our prose is the finest in the world. Some would say that the Greeks had a poetry at least as great as our own, but there is no modern literature that in poetry excels ours. Then why do so few English people, and perhaps even fewer Americans, read poetry ?

Are the great majority of people naturally incapable of enjoying poetry? If so, it is difficult to explain the universal popularity of folk poetry in so many early societies. Is it that the conditions of our mechanical and commercial civilisation make most people incapable of enjoying poetry now ? If so, so much the worse for the social conditions that blunt the sensibilities and frustrate the imaginative growth of our people. But were the groundlings of the Elizabethan theatre, who would at least listen while great poetry was spoken, so much superior to the men and

women of our own time ? The causes for the comparative neglect of poetry among the reading public today seem too complex for an easy generalisation. But what may be stated with some confidence is that the present audience for poetry is much smaller than it need be.

Boys and girls who grow up where poetry is habitually read and talked about may become administrators, scientists or business-men ; but one notices that they often continue to read poetry for pleasure. The number who have not had the good fortune to grow up with poetry at home, and yet come to read it, is rather small. Why should such an introduction to poetry when young be apparently more necessary than such an introduction to the play or the novel ?

The explanation almost certainly lies in the fact that the conventions of the art of poetry now seem to the average man much further removed from normal life, from what he thinks is reality. If familiarity with these conventions is acquired when young then it may not seem odd for a grown man to read a volume of verse. Otherwise it may. (How many people will you see reading a volume of verse on a train journey between London and Edinburgh, and how many—especially men—between New York and San Francisco ? Most of them would feel rather self-conscious about it unless they have grown up to accept it as the normal pleasure that of course it should be.) Without this early habituation a real effort has to be made to enter into the conventions of poetry, as it has with some other arts (such as ballet, or symbolist as distinct from "straight" drama).

There are moreover different conventions used by different poets and at different times. In our present general state of half-education a good number of people

get an introduction to one set of conventions but not to others. The commonest experience is for us to be introduced at school and at home to the way of writing poetry that had vitality fifty years ago. We grow up believing that this alone is poetry and unable to enter into poetry whose conventions are markedly dissimilar.

At the moment we are in a very interesting transitional stage. What may be called the outer public still believes that real poetry is poetry such as the Victorians (or at best the Georgians) used to write. They expect it to minister to certain moods, to be "beautiful" in a particular (and limited) way. And if they come upon poetry that brings into play wit as well as feeling, that reasons carefully, or even that is set out differently on the printed page, they feel outraged. This isn't poetry at all!

But at the same time as the outer public are still in this outer darkness there is an inner public whose members have already been accustomed so long to writing in a different convention that they too are in some danger of a similar fate. Thanks to such writing as T. E. Hulme's essay on " Classical and Romantic " in his "Speculations," to various essays by Mr. T. S. Eliot, to the earlier chapters of "New Bearings in English Poetry" by Dr. Leavis, they long ago began to expect something quite different from contemporary poetry. Some of the conventions that were new and exciting twenty-five to fifteen years ago are for them almost clichés now, though the more imitative versifiers do not seem to have noticed it. These and their readers seem to think that unless contemporary verse has its echoes of Gerard Manley Hopkins and T. S. Eliot, and above all an incoherence and an allusive obliquity of manner worthy of the great burden they feel in trying to express themselves at all, then it cannot possibly be

good verse. And in their evaluation of the poetry of the past they still date themselves as belonging to the 'twenties and early 'thirties. They underrate Tennyson (though it is over twenty years since Mr. Harold Nicolson wrote his most discriminating defence) and indeed find hardly anyone except Matthew Arnold sympathetic among the Victorians ; they overrate Donne ; and they find Shelley an ineffectual poet as well as an ineffectual angel.

When critics go wrong—even good ones—it is often because they are so attached to one particular way of writing that they cannot sympathise with the conventions of writing used by poets in some other mode. It is generally agreed that this is the chief explanation of some of the surprising strictures passed by Dr. Johnson on Milton. It is said, though naturally not universally agreed, that this is also the chief explanation of the failure of Dr. Leavis to rank Milton as one of our great poets. (This we will discuss later.) These conventions used by poets are no merely external matter : they go deep into a writer's personality, and they have in addition much that goes with the cultural interests of the group or class to which he belongs. Thus the differences between poets may be discussed in formal terms, or in terms of more organic structure. They may be personal ; they may be broadly social. They are partly concerned with the way of saying a thing, and partly with a difference in apprehending what has to be said. To indicate the totality of these qualities in a way of writing I propose to speak of poetry written in different *modes*.

By a mode of poetry I of course do not mean what is sometimes called a " genre ", such as Lyric, Satiric or Heroic, a kind of poetry that has rules of its own to which the poet should try to subscribe, writing always with the

best models before him. I mean a way of writing that expresses both a man and his age, that is both the way a writer shapes his experience and that distinctive experience itself.—An illustration from architecture will explain what I mean.

We commonly say that an eighteenth century building, whether it be a palace, a church or a small house, has something distinctive about it that makes us recognise it as "eighteenth century". A historian of architecture might explain what this was in technical terms of the materials used, the proportions sought, and embellishments that were characteristic. But these technical expedients would express something more general, a quality of living that we feel in the other eighteenth century arts, such as a desire for grace with utility, and dignity with simplicity. Why would a building like the *Daily Express* building look wrong in Bath ? Not merely because Bath did not build that way, but because Bath did not live that way. Not merely because its materials and its technical features would look wrong in eighteenth century Bath, but because the way of life for which it stands is antipathetic to the traditions that gave Bath its distinction.

Now within the general eighteenth century tradition there was room for considerable individual diversity. Vanbrugh is a very different architect from Gibbs. We still talk of an Adam fireplace or an Adam fanlight or ceiling. So that if one speaks of the mode of building of any one of these men one means something that is broadly representative but that is also made personal. The general tradition did not crush the individual architect or the individual owner who wanted his house designed. Rather it was in the general tradition that each expressed and realised himself.

In principle it is the same in poetry, though perhaps with the important qualification that poetry is a more personal art than architecture, less decisively subject to social requirements. But this is a matter of degree only. When we look at a poem we have to consider the general mode in which the poet is writing, which will be based on certain conventions or understandings between himself and his readers. He may, like Pope, write almost entirely in conventions that are already well accepted ; or, like Wordsworth, feel that new conventions are needed and so have to wait for recognition until he has created the taste by which he is to be enjoyed. Whichever he does, he will (if he is a good poet) use his convention with vitality. In reading him one will note the external form that he chooses, one will observe the way in which he exploits the technical possibilities of his medium, one will study the interplay of the personal and the general in his work, and through a growing sense of the subtlety of detailed perception and of the rhythm and shaping of the whole one will enter fully into the kind of experience that he can give and will recognise its particular quality as well as trying to evaluate it in relation to other kinds of experience given by other works. For purposes of analysis one may take these stages one by one, but in good reading of a good poem they will fuse together to make a satisfying whole in the mind of the reader.

It is important to remember, if one speaks of modes of poetry, that one's labels are tentative not final. The labels may be useful provisionally, and it seems to me that they almost always are. But they should not lead one into a false dichotomy between matter and manner. It is doubtful philosophy, and more than doubtful criticism, to assume that there is one ideal experience of every kind

—one ideal way of looking at nature, of falling in love, of expressing friendship or patriotism or what you will—and merely different media through which this may be conveyed (as a painter might choose between oils or water colours) or different external styles (say a neo-classical, a romantic, a realistic) which may be applied to the same subject-matter. What we call a neo-classical rendering of a scene is in fact a different experience, an expression of a different scene, from what we call a romantic or a realistic rendering. Let me illustrate this from painting, as I illustrated my previous point from architecture.

There are technical differences of many kinds between eighteenth and nineteenth century landscape painters. Everyone knows that for the former natural landscapes tended to be "brown" ; in, say, the landscapes of the Pre-Raphaelite painters there is much more vivid colour, often given an almost unhealthy glow by the free use of a ground of white. Again, the eighteenth century painters seem to have imposed more deliberate proportion on their landscapes, as if they were painting not nature but nature that had been treated by a landscape gardener (as indeed it often had). The Pre-Raphaelites prided themselves on more fidelity to exact detail, on getting every blade of grass right, and troubled less about the ordered proportion of the whole. But was this merely a difference of technique ? Would it not be quite true to say that the eighteenth century painters and the Pre-Raphaelites looked for different things in nature, that in fact the landscapes they saw were different ? Some years ago a visiting Chinese artist, Mr. Chiang Yee ("The Silent Traveller") who was used to landscapes that were different and trained in different conventions of drawing, did a series of books about England which greatly delighted his English

readers. And since then they have discovered, through the illustrations to his text, that perfectly solid and familiarly "English" scenes, like Trafalgar Square or the Oxford High or a field with trees in the home counties, are much more "Chinese" in quality than they had ever supposed. Now is that "Chinese" quality really there, or have we been bemused by a Chinese visitor with a delightful pencil ? For that matter, where have the "English" qualities come from ? Are they really there, or are we seeing these much painted and described English scenes through the eyes of English artists and writers who may also have bemused us ?

The recent great exhibition of the paintings of Van Gogh had a startling effect on many of those who saw it. They soon realised that it was idle to ask whether fields of corn or flowers or cypresses really "were" like that. We may well admit that Van Gogh imposed an order of his own on nature : of course he did, for we all do. We may agree that some of his effects may be described technically, like his method of applying paint till it stands out from the canvas knife-thick. But we soon realise that with a flatter, more strictly two-dimensional technique of applying paint, his personal vision of nature could not have been expressed. His early pictures indeed, before he had found his real style, are not by "Van Gogh" at all ; they are by some rather laborious uninteresting Dutch apprentice. Visitors to the exhibition, however, were surprised when they left it and looked at fields of corn and flowers and cypresses to discover that they were now seeing nature very much in the Van Gogh style themselves. That is of course what one means when one says that artists give us a fresh vision of life. That is what was meant by the aphorism that "Nature imitates Art".

So we may say both that there are general modes of apprehending life from period to period and place to place, and that artists of great personal insight create these and give them force and then change them again. Those who have been brought up on text-books of the history of literature or art probably see this process too much in terms of schools, and periods, too little in relation to the distinctive personal qualities of great writers or painters. The text-books, for instance, talk about the "Romantic" period of English literature and label such poets as Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron and Keats, "The Romantics". When one reads these poets one wonders just how far writers so very different may be said to have anything in common. They have something, no doubt, belonging to what (in despair at finding greater precision) we call "the spirit of the age". But they are so individual, so markedly different in almost everything that matters, that we are driven back behind the label and ask what consistent meaning the word "Romantic" may be said to have at all. And perhaps we are so baffled that we end by refusing to define it. The corrective then to too much text-book is to read passages of poetry with as sensitive a response to detail as we have it in us to command ; just as the corrective to this, in turn, is to consider works of some length as wholes and to try to place a writer as intelligently as we can in his time and place, and in his artistic, literary and intellectual tradition.

These remarks, obvious as they may seem, are meant to serve as a cautionary preface to what follows, for I wish to discuss three poets who have written in modes that may be described as generally representative, though this general representative quality must not obscure their highly original personal force. These three poets are Milton,

Wordsworth, and T. S. Eliot. Each of them may be said to have created a style, not quite alone of course (for to be original in that extreme sense would be to deny oneself readers) but in a way that has shown both technical leadership and a deeply personal apprehension of life. Each of them, and Milton and T. S. Eliot especially, have been strongly conscious of literary tradition. But Milton's style is so personal as to have led to the coinage of the word "Miltonic", Wordsworth created something like a revolution in English poetry, and T. S. Eliot has influenced English poets of the last twenty years (and English taste in poetry) more than any other writer.

Remembering then that each of these poets is a highly individual writer as well as a representative, and remembering the admitted inadequacy of labels, I shall tentatively take their poetry as illustrative of three modes of writing, which for convenience I shall call respectively: (*a*) the stylised or artificial, (*b*) the simple or natural, and (*c*) the impressionistic. I shall begin by taking short passages from their works which apparently describe a similar experience, that of dawn.

Every one knows that "Paradise Lost" is written in a highly artificial language, but to make the distinction between Milton's style and that of our other two representative poets even more striking I would like to consider first some lines from his very familiar and simple early poem, "L'Allegro". These are the lines:—

> And if I give thee honour due,
> Mirth, admit me of thy crue
> To live with her,* and live with thee,
> In unreproved pleasures free;

* Liberty.

To hear the Lark begin his flight,
And singing startle the dull night,
From his watch-towre in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise ;
Then to com in spight of sorrow,
And at my window bid good-morrow,
Through the Sweet-Briar, or the Vine,
Or the twisted Eglantine.
While the Cock with lively din,
Scatters the rear of darknes thin,
And to the stack, or the Barn dore,
Stoutly struts his Dames before,
Oft list'ning how the Hounds and horn
Clearly rouse the slumbring morn,
From the side of som Hoar Hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill.
Som time walking not unseen
By Hedge-row Elms, on Hillocks green,
Right against the Eastern gate,
Wher the great Sun begins his state,
Rob'd in flames, and Amber light,
The clouds in thousand Liveries dight,
While the Plowman neer at hand,
Whistles ore the Furrow'd Land,
And the Milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the Mower whets his sithe,
And every Shepherd tells his tale
Under the Hawthorn in the dale.

These lines (especially if we have been brought up with them since childhood) may seem like simple, straightforward nature poetry, like fresh and unsophisticated description of dawn in the English countryside. But are they?

As a matter of fact it is quite possible to combine freshness of feeling with stylised and even derivative descriptions (Chaucer does it a hundred times). The nature that

Milton describes is a special kind of nature, the nature that a delightful and delighted young scholar sees as he looks out of his window in the country. This is not the nature of the naturalist (only a false critical canon, of course, would make this comment in derogation), It has nothing, for instance, of the minute observation of a Tennyson, who visited gardens with a notebook and noted "when rosy plumelets tuft the larch" and many other exact details. Nor does it have a heavy pressure of subjective feeling, as so much nature poetry in the Victorian mode was expected to have. A contrast with a description of dawn by Tennyson will bring out both these differences. Here are some lines from "In Memoriam" :—

Till now the doubtful dusk reveal'd
The knolls once more where, couch'd at ease,
The white kine glimmer'd, and the trees
Laid their dark arms about the field :

And suck'd from out the distant gloom
A breeze began to tremble o'er
The large leaves of the sycamore,
And fluctuate all the still perfume,

And gathering freshlier overhead,
Rock'd the full-foliaged elms, and swung
The heavy-folded rose, and flung
The lilies to and fro, and said

"The dawn, the dawn", and died away ;
And East and West, without a breath,
Mixt their dim lights, like life and death,
To broaden into boundless day.

That is poetry in a completely different mode. You know that Tennyson has felt that particular dawn in a particular place, and you feel it laden with a subjective mood.

Milton's lines are not like this. They have all the stylised delightfulness of a fairy story or a ballet. They impose a trim, dancing order on nature. They do not leave it wild and free of the cultivated, human touch, nor do they humanise it in a purely subjective way. Only what is normal and general is invoked. Tennyson's field and garden, with its sycamore as well as its elms, and its roses and lilies, is Victorian, Milton's is more generally English. The Lark and the Hedge-row Elm may seem particular, but they are really general in their effect: indeed they could hardly be left out, and their very capital letters (in Milton's special, but not entirely arbitrary spelling) suggest that they stand for a class. The figures in the landscape are also general, not particular. Contrast, for instance, Milton's Milkmaid with the last line of Edward Thomas's fine poem "Cock-Crow":

> Out of the wood of thoughts that grow by night
> To be cut down by the sharp axe of light,—
> Out of the night, two cocks together crow,
> Cleaving the darkness with a silver blow.
> And bright before my eyes twin trumpeters stand,
> Heralds of splendour, one at either hand,
> Each facing each as in a coat-of-arms:
> The milkers lace their boots up at the farms.

Out of a subjective mood expressed much more subtly than in Tennyson comes the summons to a reality, particular and almost brutal, but yet stated quietly, for after all it is commonplace: "The milkers lace their boots up at the farms". Milkmaids don't lace up their boots (they probably don't wear them), and no mere milker "singeth blithe". Between two words that in a merely prose sense seem so close there is a difference of experiences that are worlds apart. The subject in each, formally, is dawn. But

there are two completely different modes of apprehension that could not be more precisely indicated than in the difference between these two words.

Not the particular and the subjective, then, but the general and the normal are to be found in these lines of Milton's : the Lark, the Cock, the Hunt, the Plowman, the Milkmaid, the Mower, the Shepherd, and all with their capital letters to indicate (as has been said) that they are "classic" at least in the sense of standing for a class. And where has Milton seen all these classical figures of a landscape at dawn ? In the countryside ? No doubt. But also, most certainly, in his old story-books and in a hundred traditional pictures. They are the familiar figures of childhood, no doubt even more so for us than for him, but for him too the figures of a stylised not a naturalist's or a subjective poet's "nature".

A comparison between the rhyme and the rhythms of Milton's lines and those of Tennyson and Thomas would reveal further significant and appropriate differences. In Tennyson the rhyme has a certain formalising effect, for he needed to formalise his grief ; but the gap between the rhyme in the first and the fourth lines of each stanza saves him from an effect that might kill the flowing subjective feeling. And frequently he lets the sense run on beyond the rhyme, for the same reason. Thomas does rhyme in couplets, but his rhyme, in association with his quieter rhythm, has nothing like the neat insistence of Milton's. From the very first couplet of Milton we are conscious of the framing effect of the rhyme. The sense, with certain allowances for variety, ends with the couplet, and there is a pause at the end of most of the single lines, so that the rhyme can strike home. The rhythm is gay and forward-stepping, rather than plaintively plangent as in Tennyson

or meditatively stationary as in Thomas. So that in Milton's lines we get at once a sense of delightful artifice, of an artifice so familiar that it seems instinctive, so assured that it seems not "artificial" at all, but natural. So in a ballet nothing, soberly speaking, could be more unnatural than perpetual movement on the points of the toes, but once we have accepted the convention it would seem utterly wrong and unnatural for "Les Sylphides" or "Symphonic Variations" to be danced in any other way.

The specific intention of the poem is reinforced in almost every line by the words that Milton chooses. Why should the Lark startle the dull night from his "watch-towre" in the skies? Even in Milton's day the word must have had a slightly old-world flavour, and through its use one slips into seeing nature as in the page of some mediæval story-book. Then why "Vine" ? No doubt in the first place because its general sense of a trailing or wall-climbing plant fits an English window well enough, but to Milton it must also have carried some association of Theocritus and Virgil and the highly stylised nature of their poetry about the Sicilian and the Tuscan country-side. Then, a little lower down, that trick of humanising the Cock is a very old one : at least as old as Æsop and continued for English readers through the mediæval fables and above all in Chaucer. Milton's Cock that "stoutly struts his Dames before" reminds one at once of Chaucer's Chaunticleer strutting in that very humanised farmyard in the "Nonnes Preestes Tale". If there is a difference it is merely that Chaucer, being less insistent than Milton on the innate superiority of husbands, though showing Chaunticleer strutting "in al his pryde" yet has him not strutting before but with "His sevene wyves walkynge by his syde". Again, where has the Hunt come

from ? Seen from the window at Horton ? Quite possibly, of course ; but also seen many a time in a book or heard many a time in a story.

If there is still a temptation to think of these lines as simple descriptive nature poetry note how the sun rises. It is no prosaic business of the sun coming up, just like that. Rather he "begins his state" "right against the Eastern gate". All the earth and sky are really a palace, by the great gate of which the King of the Sky enters in magnificent robes of flame and amber light, while the clouds (another touch from a mediæval story-book) attend him "in thousand Liveries dight".

Lastly come the traditional figures of the countryside : the Plowman, the Milkmaid, the Mower, the Shepherd. Did Milton see all these figures on some particular morning when he looked out of his window ? It is to be doubted. And it is not of the slightest importance. Are they particularised ? Hardly at all—only just enough to make them, as general figures, more convincing. This is again a familiar device that one finds often enough in Chaucer. Professor Manly of Chicago was so impressed by the particular touches in Chaucer's description of his pilgrims that he decided that nearly all of these portraits must have been drawn from individuals known to Chaucer : in one or two cases they may have been, but Professor G. W. Owst had no difficulty in showing that many of these portraits were perfectly familiar stock themes, as used in mediæval sermons and similar writings. The point about Chaucer is that his unerring eye for the really vivid particular detail enables him, to adapt a famous phrase of Aristotle, to make the particular and the general to shine together. So the one thing we are told by Milton about his Plowman is that he "whistles o'er the Furrow'd Land", and that is

enough : he is alive in the scene before us. The one thing we are told of the Milkmaid is that she sings blithely, as milkmaids of course always do (in story-books) ; the one thing of the Mower that he whets his scythe, of the Shepherd that he counts his flock. Milton does not abandon convention for life (the antithesis is unreal anyway) : he makes his conventions live.

That is why these lines always delight anyone who reads them. Not because they give an accurate description of a countryside as it actually is at dawn, not that at all; but because they impose a pattern on nature, a pattern that is at once familiar and freshly felt. Milton's aim is general : to express the character of a gay and lively young man, "L'Allegro". And he quite rightly summons general conventions to his aid. This is how such a man, blending all he sees with his most happy and unspoiled traditional associations, would feel the country on such a morning to be. The poem is artifice, but artifice as it were without sophistication.

The first business of a poet, then, would seem to be not to avoid conventions so much as to know how to use them. But the word "conventional" has come to imply a dead use of conventions, as stereotypes. Why do we delight in these lines of Milton as we should not if they were conventional in that way ? The use of labels carrying a merely traditional prestige is a device for covering up an absence of genuine vitality. It is something quite different from the expression of vitality through conventions. No reader could fail to feel the vitality in these lines from "L'Allegro". The evidence is in the freshness and vigilance with which language is used even though nothing highly subjective or personal is being attempted. Take one couplet as an example :

> While the Cock with lively din
> Scatters the rear of darknes thin.

This cock is very much alive. But he does not simply "crow", as the cocks of Edward Thomas quite properly did. Nor does he "give voice unto the jocund morn" or something of that sort, as a cock might in some deadly conventional poem of the eighteenth century. He "scatters the rear of darknes thin", as if there were a sort of mock heroic battle taking place and he, the brave (but slightly absurd) cock, were harrying the last stragglers of a defeated army. The word "thin" adds to the effect of irony (it was nearly light anyway) and keeps the fancy from being extravagant. The cock is really only like the fly on the grinding stone that thinks he is making it turn ; yet he is a fine fellow for all that, and very spirited. At least he must seem so to his hens. Hens ? No, indeed, nothing so prosaic. He stoutly struts his "dames" before. The word humanises the birds, and at the same time continues the note of irony, for "dame" carries with it a suggestion of rather shapeless bulk and pretentiousness. It was "Dame" Pertelote, we remember, in Chaucer.

One of the great attractions of poetry of this kind is that by being general and yet leaving room for an occasional vivid particular it can give us the very essence of a scene or a subject. This cannot be done if conventions are used as mere clichés. When Englishmen abroad wish to summon before them the English countryside as they would like to remember it there are probably no two lines that say more to them, or say it more exquisitely, than—

> Som time walking not unseen
> By Hedge-row Elms, on Hillocks green.

Poetry in the Romantic mode can also be highly evocative,

but the magic does not work in quite the same way. There is, for instance, a superb phrase of Matthew Arnold:

Some wet, bird-haunted, English lawn.

That in fact says very little, yet it seems to say almost everything. But whereas Milton expresses the general and brings it home to us with the help of an occasional vivid particular, Arnold seizes on a few particulars, and they are so well chosen and so truly felt that they acquire the force of the general.

Arnold of course had a great respect for both Milton and Wordsworth, but in his mode of writing at his best he is nearer to Wordsworth. The next short passage I should like to discuss is from Wordsworth's "Prelude", a passage in which he is describing the dawn he saw, and felt, as he was striding home over the hills one summer vacation when he had been dancing all night. This is the passage :—

Magnificent
The morning rose, in memorable pomp,
Glorious as e'er I had beheld—in front,
The sea lay laughing at a distance ; near,
The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds,
Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light ;
And in the meadows and the lower grounds
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn—
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
And labourers going forth to till the fields.

As soon as one reads this one realises that it is not poetry of conventions as Milton's was. These lines describe a dawn that Wordsworth certainly saw with his own eyes on a particular occasion, and the experience was one of particular moment to him. And one is conscious that Wordsworth was a person with a particular gift (in fact

seeing this dawn helped to make him conscious of it) and the rest of us would hardly have felt the significance of that dawn as he did. This poetry then is more personal than Milton's. Yet it is not private. If it were we should be much less interested in reading it, or at least we should find it much more difficult to read. Wordsworth persuades us that although he is describing a dawn of especial significance to himself yet it is such an experience as we might have had, and we do indeed have this experience through his poetry. Yet the interplay of the general and the particular, of convention and of direct personal sight and insight, are here very different from what we found in Milton.

It would not be true to say that Wordsworth does not rely on conventions at all. Notice the difference between the language of the first part of this passage and that of the second. Wordsworth, as every one knows, experimented with poetry that was to be written in "a selection of language really used by men". What he meant exactly by that phrase is not very clear, but what he meant in general is clear enough. He meant poetry that confined itself to words that would not be out of place in familiar conversation. How does this passage fit such a criterion ? Every word in the last four lines does. But several words in the opening lines do not: "memorable pomp" "e'er", "grain-tinctured", "empyrean". And as to the last four lines (as Coleridge might have pointed out) even though the vocabulary is that of familiar speech, the language, if only because of its order and rhythm and the pressure of feeling felt through it, is not.

While noting these points, however, we can still say fairly enough that there is a major difference between Wordsworth's description of dawn and Milton's. While

both passages have simplicity one has the simplicity of a generalised nature seen through familiar conventions, the other (especially in its last lines) has the simplicity of everyday things felt as everyday things : not "the rear of darknes thin" but the "common dawn", not the Lark "from his watch-towre in the skies" but "the melody of birds", not "the Plowman neer at hand" but "labourers going forth to till the fields". It is in the last four lines especially that we have what may be called Wordsworth's distinctive quality, when his style is completely translucent, and consists almost in the absence of style as other writers have conceived it.

But Wordsworth, as is evident from this passage, did not write consistently like this. When he tried to his poems were often failures. In his best poetry there is an interplay between such a style and that other style illustrated in the opening lines of the passage, where the pressure of feeling within himself demands a language that is more highly-wrought. There are superb examples of both these styles in Wordsworth, and of their blending. But the very simple style exposes Wordsworth to the danger of bathos, just as the more highly wrought style exposes him to the danger of just that conventional diction against which he wrote his famous Preface to the "Lyrical Ballads". In his collected works there are many examples of both kinds of failure. But at his best (in "Tintern Abbey", for instance, or many passages in "The Prelude") he can show the kind of interplay between them that we have here.

Wordsworth described more than once how when young he had experienced a trance-like ecstasy and had had to put out his hand to touch the rocks so as to reassure himself of the actual existence of external things. That is exactly the kind of blending of inner and outer vision that

one finds in his best work: a sense of deep subjective power, but checked, reinforced, kept real, by a putting out of his hand to concrete, everyday things. As some one once observed, what he said of the skylark applied also to himself: he was "true to the kindred points of heaven and home". In the opening lines of this passage he is nearer to heaven (even though heaven was for him very much in his subjective experience), in the closing lines he is looking down to the "lower grounds" and reminding himself of home. The modulation of the language from one to the other is entirely fitting.

If the next poem I should like to discuss—Wordsworth's well-known Sonnet On Westminster Bridge—is finer still, it is because here there is not so much a sequence from one of these styles to the other, but a perfect fusion. Here is the poem:—

> Earth has not anything to show more fair ;
> Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
> A sight so touching in its majesty ;
> This City now doth, like a garment, wear
> The beauty of the morning ; silent, bare,
> Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
> Open unto the fields, and to the sky ;
> All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
> Never did sun more beautifully steep
> In his first splendour, valley, rock or hill ;
> Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep !
> The river glideth at his own sweet will :
> Dear God ! the very houses seem asleep ;
> And all that mighty heart is lying still !

This poem, like the passage we shall come to after this, describes dawn not in the country but in the city, though it has often been pointed out that that magnificent return of

thought in the sestet to the sun in his first splendour steeping valley, rock, and hill could only have been written by Wordsworth, the North Countryman, looking at London but thinking of home.

The sonnet has the same combination of qualities that we noticed in the previous passage from "The Prelude", but here they are more evenly and more subtly combined. In the first three lines there is nothing "poetic", except the slight heightening that comes from the grammatical inversion at the beginning of the second. The -th form of the verb ("doth", "glideth") strikes us as a poeticism now, though it was less noticeably so in Wordsworth's time. The word "temples" is slightly poetic, but, suggesting an ideal city, its association with the matter-of-fact ships and towers and theatres is not unhappy. "Domes" perhaps is half-way between the two. The word "steep" is familiar enough in its straightforward sense, meaning to drench in liquid for the purpose of cleansing and softening, and so conveys excellently the sense of liquid light in the early morning over the river ; but it perhaps carries an overtone (though this is not demanded logically) of the more poetical use of the word for a mountain or height. The one technical blemish in the poem is the awkward variation, for the sake of the metre, from "unto" to "to" in the seventh line.

So far as the vocabulary goes, then, one may say that this poem conforms fairly closely to Wordsworth's announced ideal, but that it has a slight heightening of diction, without any danger of the dead epithet or the pretentious one. And this is entirely appropriate to a poem whose purpose on the surface is quiet observation of an actual city at dawn and whose underlying impulse is a restrained but deeply felt sense of awe.

There is very little metaphor in this poem, and nothing bordering on extravagance. There is a restrained personification of the city, seen as wearing the morning's beauty like a garment ; and of the river, that is said to be gliding at "his" own will. The one great metaphor comes at the end, and is the culmination of the poem. It is drawn—and this is typical of Wordsworth—from common experience, and only a great poet would have dared to use it, for fear of its seeming commonplace. It is superbly simple and superbly central, and expresses exactly the sense of living power that is now asleep.

In this poem the combination of subjective feeling with indication of external reality is entirely Wordsworthian. This is undoubtedly the real London and the real Thames. And yet the poem is a highly personal one. It took a Wordsworth to see London and the Thames like that. Wordsworth is not expressing the general delight of cultivated minds that can be simple with art, as Milton was. He is expressing his personal feeling at a quiet though deep spiritual moment. And the sense of this works through the words directly, with hardly any artifice at all. It is this quality that makes Wordsworth more immediately congenial to the average reader than Milton usually is. There are more conventions at work in Milton (especially in his later poetry), more conventions to understand and therefore more that may be misunderstood, that may fail now to carry with them a conviction of reality. It does not follow that Wordsworth is a greater poet than Milton. That is quite another question. But it does follow that one must not expect the same kind of writing in each, or the same kind of satisfaction.

This quality no doubt makes Wordsworth also more available to the average reader than T. S. Eliot, although

Mr. Eliot is our contemporary. The passage from his work that I should like to consider also describes dawn in London. It comes from the end of the first section ("The Burial of the Dead") of his poem, dated 1922, "The Waste Land". These are the lines:—

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
> Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
> To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
> With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
> There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying:
> "Stetson!
> "You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
> "That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
> "Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
> "Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
> "Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
> "Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
> "You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!"

This is dawn over London Bridge, not Westminster Bridge. But that, obviously, is the least of the differences between these verses and Wordsworth's.

The difference is not that Eliot's language is less natural than Wordsworth's. If you take his lines phrase by phrase you find them at least as close to ordinary speech. Indeed in some parts of "The Waste Land" (as in the scene in the pub.) he uses the real language of men as Wordsworth would never have dared to do. And yet we have an immediate feeling that this poetry is less "natural" than

Wordsworth's and even, for some readers, than Milton's. What is the explanation of this ?

The first difference to be observed is that what some critics have called the "substratum of prose" has been taken away—or, shall we say, has never been put in. This poetry does not explain what it is going to do : it does it. It moves swiftly from one position to another, without explaining how the transition is to be made by the reader or indeed how it was made in the mind of the poet. It may be described, in a tentative classification, as "impressionistic".

In the second place, although one might say that this passage from "The Waste Land" is subjective it is clearly not so as Wordsworth's was. Wordsworth's subjective feeling was expressed within a framework of public reference : a London or a Lake District that we all know and recognise perfectly well. The frame of reference of T. S. Eliot's poetry seems to be private, or at least less public. Most readers probably say as they read this passage for the first time : And who is Stetson ? And what was a man with a good American name like that doing in the ships at the battle of Mylae in 36 B.C.? And what has all this to do with corpses that sprout in gardens ? And what is that line of French doing there at the end ? By now of course the poem has become familiar to many readers, and commentaries have been published on Mr. Eliot's poetry that help one in these difficulties. But this is the kind of question that most readers not unsurprisingly asked when the poem first appeared and still ask if they come upon it for the first time.

At a first reading it might be better to hold such questions in suspense. But it is not reasonable to imply that they should not rise or that they should not be faced.

They are quite proper. Some of them may be easier to deal with when one has got used to Mr. Eliot's conventions. But although Mr. Eliot has emphasised the importance of tradition, and although in some ways he has not so much abandoned tradition as returned to particular traditions that had been forgotten, there is no doubt of his originality as a poet and of his technical innovations. This passage probably would have been more easily accepted by, say, the audience of a late Elizabethan play in some passage where the hero was distracted and in which the whole world for him was turning into phantasmagoria, but it still has difficulties of a kind one does not find in "Hamlet". Like so much of Mr. Eliot's verse it has dramatic intensity with a dissolving view technique, and it abandons almost entirely the framework of prose structure and public reference that made both Milton's and Wordsworth's work easier to follow.

Nevertheless, and before any elucidation of these difficulties has taken place, the reader will feel in this passage a certain unity of tone and theme. The theme is the phantasmagoria experienced by the man living in a modern city whose sense of values and of delimiting distinctions is slipping from him. The uncertainties here—of time, of place, of personal identity, of who is friend and who is foe, of what is living and what is dead—are not blemishes due to carelessness but part of the deliberately intended effect.

This passage is written out of a background, a background not only of an experience of modern life but of a particular reading and world of thought. Some indication of this is provided in the notes given by the poet at the end of the poem. Sometimes these notes indicate a reference to a writer with whose name at least most readers will be

familiar, though they may not know his works so well that they could have done without the note. In this passage these references are more public than they sometimes are. They are to Baudelaire, Dante and Webster. Sometimes the echo of reading in the text is so personal that it is just not reasonable to expect even a well-educated reader to surmount the difficulty. It is not reasonable to say, as for instance Professor Matthiessen does in his generally excellent book, "The Achievement of T. S. Eliot", that Mr. Eliot makes no more demand on the reader's erudition than does Milton. Milton demanded of his readers knowledge of the classics and of the Bible, and these readers in his own time might reasonably be expected to have and even now to achieve with the help of a classical dictionary and a concordance. Milton's learning may in some ways have been intricate and special, but this is not essential to following a passage of his poetry as it certainly is to some of Mr. Eliot's. This does not mean that Eliot may not have been right to use these methods and these references: he may, so to speak, have had to. But it is a little disingenuous, I think, to pretend that anyone could hope to read the final lines of "The Waste Land", with their Sanscrit and Italian as well as echoes from English writers, without a great deal of preliminary detective work.

How do these references to a partly private background of reading and experience function in relation to the general impressionistic technique? The effect of Mr. Eliot's verse depends very much on dramatic intensity, on power of suggestion, and on economy. These would all be destroyed by an elaborate exposition such as one might find in poets writing in a different mode. Particular experiences that Mr. Eliot seems to have had, certain lines of

verse that he has read and meditated on, seem to crystallise for him, or at the least to summon up before him, whole tracts of significant experience, for which they have become almost symbols. But his method does not permit him to explain this at length. Within the conventions that he is using, within his poetic method, a reference to "the children in the rose garden" does the work for him that Wordsworth, for instance in the part of "The Prelude" from which our first passage came, sets out in full. The difficulty about Wordsworth's method is that he loses intensity, and may at times indeed become a little prosy. The difficulty about Mr. Eliot's method is that the reader may never—I will not say, be sure, but be as sure as he needs to be to read the poetry well—of what the "children in the rose garden" are supposed to summon up. But now we have reached the stage of appreciating that it is not *which* convention is used that matters, but the *way* in which the chosen convention is used. Looking at "The Waste Land" from this point of view, major poem though it is, one must say that it is also an uneven poem, much more uneven that the "Four Quartets", where the conventions seem to be mastered and not to involve that mannerism that in the earlier poem sometimes gives the reader grounds for fair complaint.

In the passage we are considering extreme difficulties do not arise. A good deal of the relevant response will come at once. But to gain a reasonably full appreciation it is still true that the reader will have to do some work, and, so to speak, outside the poem. Then, when he has done this work, he must go back to the poem, having the key now to what is relevant in the background of the experience, and he should then be able to respond to the poetry as a whole. How would this work out with the passage I have quoted ?

One would begin with Mr. Eliot's note inviting him to compare the first line of the passage with two lines from Baudelaire :

> Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
> Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant.

If the reader knows French he will translate by some such lines as

> Swarming city, city full of dreams,
> Where in full daylight spectres accost the passer-by.

No exact reference is given (it might easily have been) so if the reader is not thoroughly familiar with the works of Baudelaire he will hunt through them until he discovers that these are the opening lines of a poem called "Les Sept Vieillards". This poem tells how, when a yellow fog was over the teeming city, the poet had seen an old man in rags, with intense evil in his eye ; and then not one, but seven of these old men, and all of them identical to the last detail. The city was dirty and evil, both real and unreal, and Baudelaire had gone reeling to his room, recoiling from the mystery and unreason of his vision and trying vainly to keep his grip on reality. Undoubtedly to have this poem at the back of one's mind gives body to the passage. Equally to have written this all out in full would have destroyed the poem. The method must be conceded as legitimate, though perhaps fuller notes might have helped (and those readers who did know their Baudelaire intimately might not perhaps have felt unduly insulted thereby).

In the same way one needs to look up the two references to Dante. This time the exact references are given and it should be easy for the reader with no Italian to find the

passages in the excellent edition in the Temple Classics which has the Italian and the English translation on opposite pages side by side. The first of these references is of crucial importance. Dante is on the outskirts of Hell and is being shown those souls who were just dull, without real intellect or real vitality, not alive enough to do either evil or good. God did not like them ; neither did his enemies. Like the smile of disillusioned love in Hardy, they had been scarcely "alive enough to have strength to die". Eliot has this passage of Dante in mind as he watches the clerks come in from the southern suburbs and pass over London Bridge to work in their offices as the winter dawn breaks over the dreary modern city. It is, in one sense, London. It is also Paris, as the echo from Baudelaire tells us. It might be Florence, or Rome. In any case it is Hell.

The note on the third line from the end of the passage refers us to the dirge in John Webster's play, "The White Devil". This is well known and apt to be in anthologies. If one looks it up one finds, of course, not what is in Mr. Eliot's line, but "Keep the *wolf* far thence, that's *foe* to men". The modern poet's ironic echo of an Elizabethan poet who was himself disillusioned gives disillusionment one last bitter twist. Now we do not know who is friend and who is foe, for dog and wolf are after all of very much the same stock and in the wrong conditions the dog may very well throw back to the wolf.

In this unreal city the normal distinctions—or those that we thought normal, and that kept us straight—are going down. They are blurred in the general confusion of our time. (This, it should be noted, is only the first section of this poem, and is far from Mr. Eliot's final word). Even life seems to spring out of death. Is this just

one man's reaction, is this just the poet feeling so ? He turns on the reader with another line from Baudelaire, from his Preface to the "Fleurs du Mal" : " You, hypocrite reader, you are my like in this, you are my brother ! "

So much, with the help of the poet's notes, we can manage. But what about Stetson ? There is no note on him. Since other things in the poem need to be followed up, since they are anchors with real contact with the depths, we might suppose Stetson to be so too. But apparently he is not, or if he is Mr. Eliot has not made it clear. Here in fact is a device (one meets with it frequently in Mr. Eliot's earlier poems) of using a particular name to summon up a type. It is a kind of christening before we are sure that there has been a birth. I confess that I feel there to be a touch of wilfulness in it, and it is interesting to notice that Mr. Eliot hardly ever uses this device now. It is as it were implied that the poet and the reader are in a coterie within which the reference is commonplace enough and will be quite understood. If perhaps we were, like new readers, just joining the coterie we should probably get the general drift and leave it at that. That is no doubt what we must do. In this particular case, however, the device does have a further justification. It conveys, and not unsuccessfully, the sudden grasping at a particular identification (which may turn out to be wrong) when we are in a fog and all the normal landmarks are disappearing. Even the sense of the supporting divisions of time is deserting us. In these last days the church clock itself has a dead sound on the final stroke. And now Mylae and London and modern America are all confused in our mind.

The most important of all these references to a background of experience is one which Mr. Eliot mentions in a

general note: it is to Sir James Frazer's "The Golden Bough". Perhaps few readers of the poem will have read very deeply in "The Golden Bough" but it is fair to use it, for, as Mr. Eliot says, it has influenced our generation profoundly. Frazer's work helps to give the poet a framework of symbolism for the important thing that he has to say: the sense that birth is painful and implies a death, that suffering and salvation go together, that a sacrificial death is necessary before life can spring again. The theme of this part of the poem is death in life: the whole living city has death in the air, just as the great crowd streaming over London Bridge has death in its eyes. The larger theme of the poem as a whole, and of Mr. Eliot's poetry as a whole, is life through death. Emotionally this is the central paradox, the central "truth", of the poem. Could the poet have expressed it as well in any other way?

The method he has used involves difficulties, as we have seen, that really are new in their degree and very nearly new in their kind, for the ordinary reader of however much good-will. Occasionally, though less and less as Mr. Eliot has continued to write, they seem a little unnecessary. But fundamentally they are not so. They are involved in the method. That method allows of an extraordinary richness and at the same time of great compression. Mr. Eliot's longer poems, in which the theme is at once a deep personal development, a commentary on the age, and an attempt to go beyond even that, are short in comparison with the poems of others on comparable themes. At the same time, and because of his impressionistic, dissolving-view technique, the compression is not hard or rigid. The flow of feeling is maintained while each passing particular image is given all the vividness that the situation requires. The sense of unity is maintained,

not by the methods of formal argument and plot used in "Paradise Lost", not by the autobiographical framework used in "The Prelude", but by the most sensitive of transitions and by the interweaving of themes through the length of the poem. In any case the conventions that were open to Milton and Wordsworth (and they were different from one another) were no longer available for a contemporary poet. Something new had to be attempted. New methods had to be found if there was to be creative comment on a deep experience in our own time. Mr. Eliot has achieved this, and that is why it does not seem unreasonable now to discuss his work side by side with that of Milton and Wordsworth.

Hitherto, however, we have looked only at short passages from these three poets. It is hoped that enough has been said to show that there are indeed different modes in which poetry of the first order may be written, and that while as a matter of personal taste we may prefer this mode or that, as critics we must understand something of the distinctive satisfactions to be found in each. Now there are wider questions to be discussed and especially the implications of these modes of poetry for a poet's work seen as a whole.

Two: Milton and Artificial Style

POETRY is an art. Poems, like other works of art, are made by the application of skill to materials. They are not works of nature, as a stream or a mountain range may be. Good poems, like other good works of art, express something worth expressing through the exercise of skill of a high order. This being so, and for all poems, can we reasonably distinguish one mode of poetry from others by saying that it has more of art in it ?

That there is a distinction in kind between the poetry of Milton and that of Wordsworth or T. S. Eliot must be felt after even so preliminary a glance at their work as the last chapter afforded. But it is difficult to find the right word to distinguish Milton's mode of poetry from the others. If one says that it illustrates a more finely or highly developed art one almost implies that a poem by Milton is a better poem than one by Wordsworth or Eliot, which may well not be true. If one says that Milton wrote in a more "artificial" style then one is weighting the scales against Milton, for the word artificial carries strong overtones of disapproval.

Oscar Wilde said that the artist's first business was to be artificial. But he was indulging in special pleading for his own way of living and writing, and he did so by suggesting that if this was artificial so was all art, as the literal sense of the word showed. The trick of speech was intended to have the sort of effect on the hearer that we get when we discover that the word "poet" means in Greek a "maker" and that in Middle English indeed

poets were called "makers". It is useful for dismissing people who think that all the artist has to do is to copy nature directly. If some one merely takes a photograph, and without even a thought for the composition of his picture, then he is not an artist.

But we cannot be content with the epigram, for we know perfectly well that the word "artificial" has come to mean, not merely different from nature, but false to it. This is where our difficulty as critics begins. If all works of art create something that is not in nature already, if they all in fact employ conventions of one kind or another, how are we to distinguish those that work with nature from those that outrage it ?

No naive answer will satisfy for long. The apparently natural way may be the wrong way to make art seem to function naturally, just as an actress who does not use make-up at all may seem to suffer from unnatural pallor on the stage. The natural way to play cricket is no doubt rustic-wise, with a cross bat. The right way is so artificial that we have to be trained to it ; but we find from experience that the artificial way enables us to work better with nature and to hit the ball to the boundary without so much risk of losing our wicket.

There are actors who, though by art, create an impression of being natural. There are others (or the same ones in different rôles perhaps) who create an impression, not so much of something unnatural, as of something greater than nature, or at least of something abstracted from nature strikingly and for a purpose that we accept. They may of course strive at this and fail, and then we say, in a derogatory sense, that their acting is artificial. The good actor or actress in, say, a play by Congreve must be artificial and give us the impression of artifice,

whereas the actor who does not convince us within the convention of his play, who is actually outraging nature in our eyes, we dismiss as declamatory (or "ham", according to our taste in critical terms).

Now this question as to the virtue of what we had better resign ourselves to calling artifice is perpetually recurring in the discussion of poetry. Of all the English poets who have been acknowledged to be great Milton is the one who has most consciously used a style of high-wrought artifice. He has been praised, and he has been attacked, for it. The discussion, by no means new, has taken a newly vigorous (one might almost say virulent) turn in recent years. For these reasons a study of Milton's poetry affords perhaps the best introduction that there could be to this problem in criticism, and as reputable critics still differ very much in their conclusions, it has the advantage that the student, more imperatively than is usual, must make up his mind for himself. In what follows I propose to set out my own views, but to indicate as fairly as I can what has been said on the various sides of the question by other writers.

Let me begin by saying what qualities I have particularly in mind when I call such poetry as Milton's "artificial". One must obviously use the word with a more limited sense than Oscar Wilde invoked. I take the word to imply three things in particular in a work of literature: first, an emphasis on what the eighteenth century called "Invention", an imposing of an external pattern on events or experience that is understood by the writer and the reader to be made by the writer and not to be "in" nature already; secondly, a consciousness of other works of art or literature that to some extent serve the writer as models and as the background world from which he draws

experience and inspiration ; and thirdly, a language that is in marked measure special to his art and that is not intended at all to give the illusion of familiar speech.

The first of these characteristics, that of stress on Invention, may be seen on either the small or the large scale. It may be present in a conceit, or in the structure of the whole machinery of an epic. We may observe in Milton's earliest poems both detailed artifice and structural artifice, and good examples of both are to be seen in his noble poem "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity".

At the beginning of the Hymn there are conceits, not typical of Milton but rather in the manner of the "Metaphysical" poets, his near-contemporaries ; and those are generally and rightly regarded as unfortunate. But in the third stanza is an artificial figure of the kind much practised later, in the eighteenth century, and it makes an interesting comparison with the sixth stanza, in which the artifice has much more of the authentic Miltonic power. The third stanza describes how God, to quieten the fears of the Earth lest with the coming of Jesus her guilt be seen too closely, sent Peace down from Heaven.

> But he her fears to cease,
> Sent down the meek-eyd Peace,
> She crow'd with Olive green, came softly sliding
> Down through the turning sphear
> His ready Harbinger,
> With Turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing,
> And waving wide her mirtle wand,
> She strikes a universall Peace through Sea and Land.

Now this is not to be dismissed as merely frigid ; but it is not completely satisfying. (Milton of course must not be blamed for our difficulty in accepting "turtle" as "dove" without the intrusion of its now more common meaning,

for that meaning of the word did not come into the language until some thirty years after the poem had been written). The device of Personification requires great tact in the poet, or what is intended to be convincing effect will be felt by the reader to be merely stage-effect. Here Milton is on the edge of failure and only his seriousness of tone and purpose at the end save him. The minor poets of the eighteenth century worked this sort of thing to death.

In the sixth stanza Milton wishes to impress us with the universal stillness that accompanied this solemn moment in the world's history:

> The Stars with deep amaze
> Stand fixt in stedfast gaze,
> Bending one way their pretious influence,
> And will not take their flight,
> For all the morning light,
> Or *Lucifer* that often warn'd them thence ;
> But in their glimmering Orbs did glow,
> Untill their Lord himself bespake, and bid them go.

One feels this to be quite different. It is still Invention, not nature, for Milton did not mean in any prosaic sense that the stars stayed on into the morning and could be seen after they should have become invisible. But it was as if it had been so. The fiction of an unnatural occurrence greatly increases the feeling that was natural to contemplation of this great event.

What I have called structural invention of course has the same purpose, but it involves the erection of a whole framework of thought or plot within which natural feeling can develop. In this poem, although it is of moderate length, there is an excellent example of what I mean. Milton wishes to give dramatic expression to his

feeling of the world's great gain when Christianity superseded paganism, and he does this by having us suppose that on the very night that Christ is born the pagan gods, all of them—Greek, Roman, Syrian, Carthaginian, Egyptian—are driven from their shrines.

> The Oracles are dumm,
> No voice or hideous humm
> Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving.
> *Apollo* from his shrine
> Can no more divine,
> With hollow shrie'· the steep of *Delphos* leaving.
> Nor nightly trance, or breathed spell,
> Inspires the pale-ey'd Priest from the prophetic cell.
>
> The lonely mountains o're,
> And the resounding shore,
> A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament ;
> From haunted spring, and dale
> Edg'd with poplar pale,
> The parting Genius is with sighing sent,
> With flowre-inwov'n tresses torn
> The Nimphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

The working out of this piece of structural invention takes a third of the poem and so affects the shape of the whole. But it also expresses the central argument most clearly. The significance of this mourning is that henceforth the Powers of Darkness will have but half their sway ; the bliss that will be perfect at the Last Day is now half begun. In addition this piece of invention enables Milton to bring together in a properly ordered synthesis his interests in classical myth and in the Christian religion. His tone seems to suggest that he does not deny all sympathy to the "parting Genius" and the mourning nymphs "with flowre-inwov'n tresses torn". But his central emphasis on the

triumph of Christianity is resounding. In this way artifice works with nature and apparent fiction aids sincerity.

The whole poem may be regarded as belonging to the more serious part of the poetry of compliment, for it is essentially a tribute to the infant Christ. And the poetry of compliment (either personal or official) is a considerable part of the whole corpus of our poetry. In it, especially, artifice and invention may charm and delight and add force to the tribute that the poet wishes to express. There are few kinds of poetry in which to study better the conditions upon which artifice and invention are to be praised. One has only to begin such a study to realise how little naive notions of sincerity apply. Even in a complimentary speech, on some prose occasion, we may be allowed to use a happy hyperbole and not be misunderstood by our hearers or thought to be insincere. Hyperbole and truth in such a situation are well understood to be co-present.

One of the younger poets who was establishing himself in Milton's last years was Dryden, and he has more in common with Milton (whose abilities he greatly respected) than the common coupling of his name with Pope sometimes allows to be seen. Dryden's verses of compliment are numerous and show examples both of failure and of marked success. In his time it seemed to be understood between writer and reader, better than it is now, that a certain almost theatrical hyperbole might be entirely in place in poetry whose subject was serious but not solemn. This quality, especially where it tends to be florid, might be called "baroque", like much of the characteristic architecture of the time. There is an interesting and pleasing example in Dryden's "Annus Mirabilis", a poem written while Milton was still alive. Dryden is describing the British Fleet:

To see this fleet upon the ocean move
Angels drew wide the curtains of the skies ;
And Heaven, as if there wanted lights above,
For tapers made two glaring comets rise.

If a prosaic person protested that the comets did not in fact appear just to let the angels see the British fleet, one would surely reply, with a smile : " Of course they did not —but they ought to when the British Navy puts to sea". There is in fact an understanding, amounting almost to a sharing of an undercurrent of humour, between the poet and his audience, that permits such artifice to please without impugning either sincerity or good sense.

When, however, the mood is not merely serious, but solemn, when our deeper impulses are engaged, much greater care is needed. Milton himself did not start too happily with the conceits of the first two stanzas of the Nativity Hymn, but he moved with assured purpose as his poem gathered power. Dryden would be expected to be a poet less good in employing such modes of artifice when moving in a world of deeper feeling. But there is at least one superb example in his work, the Ode in Memory of Mistress Anne Killigrew. One wonders indeed if in his reference to the "last assizes" he may not have had at the back of his mind Milton's Nativity Hymn with its

When at the world's last session
The dreadful Judge in middle Air shall spread his throne.

Dryden's whole poem is fine, but the last stanza is magnificent :

When in mid-air the golden trump shall sound,
To raise the nations under ground ;
When, in the Valley of Jehoshaphat,
The judging God shall close the book of Fate,

And there the last assizes keep
For those who wake and those who sleep ;
When rattling bones together fly
From the four corners of the sky ;
When sinews o'er the skeletons are spread,
Those cloth'd with flesh, and life inspires the dead ;
The sacred poets first shall hear the sound,
And foremost from the tomb shall bound,
For they are cover'd with the lightest ground ;
And straight, with inborn vigour, on the wing,
Like mounting larks, to the new morning sing,
There thou, sweet Saint, before the quire shalt go,
As harbinger of Heaven, the way to show,
The way which thou so well hast learn'd below.

The blending of artifice and nature here is remarkable. Artifice is central: the culmination of the poem is in the conceit that this lady at the Last Day shall lead the blessed on their way to Heaven. Hyperbole at such moments as death can easily be felt as outrageous, as I at least feel Donne's to be in his conceit that all the world is dead now that Mistress Elizabeth Drury has died. But we are so persuaded of Dryden's justness and sincerity in telling us of this lady's skill and virtue that we feel that if such a thing were to happen it would indeed seem entirely natural.

Dryden so persuades us partly because of his rhythm, which is strong, varied, and masterly in its control, and partly through his language. The language invokes occasionally the stately word (golden trump, harbinger) but it is for the most part of a daring and forceful plainness. There is an earthiness about it that gives a most strong conviction of reality: the rattling bones that together fly from the four corners of the sky might have been in Donne, the last assizes in Herbert. Yet this is blended with a celestial harmony that prevents any effect

of incongruity. (If some readers do find themselves doubtful of the rattling bones and the last assizes they might do well to ask if they have not been reared in the traditions of a false poeticism.) In this poem the development of the conceit and the familiar language, the artifice and the natural feeling, match one another and work together, whereas in "The First Anniversary" of Donne they fight against one another and produce a perpetual sense of the incongruous. In Donne's poem there is wilful idiosyncrasy, whereas Dryden's artifice is in a public mode that we can fully understand and accept. People speak disparagingly of the "artificial school" of Dryden and Pope. After reading this stanza one understands that artifice could be Dryden's glory and is not to be naively set in juxtaposition to the natural and sincere.

The second characteristic of the poetry of artifice to which I drew attention was the use of previous works of literature as models. Here again it is a matter of emphasis. No doubt there is hardly a poet of any kind who has not been conscious of working in some literary tradition, of having been influenced by some predecessor (even the tediousness of the search for "influences" by those doomed to write dissertations for doctorates cannot obscure the fact that writers are "influenced", even though not always in ways that lend themselves to theses). Consciousness that poetry is an established art leads a young writer to study the work of the established artists. Artifice, especially, is something to which one needs to be apprenticed, and therefore among poets who have a high regard for what may be done by conscious and highly-wrought art there is almost certain to be a special emphasis upon previous works as affording models, or at least a general tradition, to which present writers may work.

Now the conditions in which such following of models or traditions may be successful are not altogether easy to determine. It is foolish to throw away the advantages that a tradition can give. A writer continuing an accepted tradition has half his work with his public done for him. He can, so to speak, begin erecting his building at once, for the scaffolding is already there. On the other hand a tradition may have outlived its usefulness, and it may be necessary for a writer to wage a deliberate campaign against conventions that now dominate the public mind too much, and then to develop fresh conventions (or give a new form to old ones recently neglected) which will again give the feeling of naturalness in literature.

The discussion of this problem of the use and abuse of traditional literary models has nowhere been more animated than à propos of Milton's poem, "Lycidas". The most famous attack on "Lycidas" is of course that of Dr. Johnson, in his Life of Milton, who criticised him strongly for adopting the pastoral convention that the poet and the man he mourned had been shepherds together and that the one was now left desolate by the death of the other. In a way Johnson's attack is surprising, for he was well disposed to the disciplines and modes of classical literature, and the pastoral convention in general went back to Theocritus, had reached its height with Virgil, and had been followed, not without success, by poets of many literatures including our own. But Johnson was a man of strong common sense and he was offended by the palpable gap between the fiction and reality ; and no doubt the fact that in his own time pastoral poetry had become insipid through lifeless imitation also urged him on in his attack.

For the Greek poet Theocritus, whose poems describe

and no doubt somewhat idealise the life of Sicilian shepherds and herdsmen, there was much less of a gap between fiction and reality. It is generally said that Theocritus is pretty close to the life of the Sicilian peasant, although he himself is not one of them and is admittedly a courtly and polished poet. But the problem we are considering, of the validity of artifice in poetry, is at once raised when we compare Virgil with Theocritus. As J. H. Hallard points out in his translation of Theocritus, Bion and Moschus (in the Broadway Translation series) Virgil's Eclogues are much more artificial than Theocritus' Idylls, and yet are much more profoundly charming. The peasants of Theocritus do come from Sicily, where he lived. The peasants of Virgil hardly come from northern Italy, where he lived; they come from Theocritus. For this editor of Theocritus, however, the problem of critical evaluation is yet more complex: he finds Virgil more artificial, yet more charming, as has been said—but in sheer artistic rightness Theocritus still has something finer than Virgil can contrive (the distinction is between essential rightness and power of moving language only).

To follow this question up one would have to be a good classical scholar as well as a literary critic. Our more immediate concern is not with pastoral poetry in general, but with the use of the pastoral convention for the purpose of elegy, as we find it in "Lycidas". This tradition goes back to two near-contemporaries and disciples of Theocritus: Bion, who wrote a "Lament for Adonis", and Moschus, who wrote a "Lament for Bion". The first of these two poems is more artificial than the second, at any rate in the sense that it is not meant to be an elegy for a personal friend who has died. It has of course a certain religious reality, as a poem on the crucifixion of Jesus

might have in the Christian tradition, though anything like Christian personal devotion is of course not to be expected in such a context. It might be regarded as the prototype of deliberate elegiac poems on a set non-personal theme. (In English, Shelley's "Adonais" at once springs to mind : this poem is more personal, since its occasion is the death of Keats; but the title in itself shows that Shelley did not mean the poem to be directly personal to Keats beyond a point, but something more generally expressive as well.) Moschus' poem, written when he heard of the death of Bion, describes Bion as if he had been himself a Sicilian herdsman, and this was appropriate enough, for Bion had been a pastoral poet of the Sicilian countryside. This poem may be regarded as the prototype of elegies for a particular personal friend who is commemorated as if he had been a shepherd or herdsman in a country that both he and the poet had known and loved. This is the tradition in which Milton wrote his "Lycidas", to commemorate Edward King, who had been known to him at Cambridge and for whom, after his death at sea in the Irish Channel, his friends brought out a volume of verses.

This, for Dr. Johnson, just would not do. In a famous passage he says of the poem : "Its form is that of a pastoral; easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting ; whatever images it can supply are long ago exhausted ; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind. . . . We know that they never drove a-field, and that they had no flocks to batten ; and although it be allowed that the representation may be allegorical, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote, that it is never sought because it cannot be known when it is found". At the basis of Johnson's criticism is the charge of improbability amounting almost to insincerity. What is to be said of this ?

There would seem to be two good reasons for using a style of artifice in an elegy : one is that the poet does feel deep grief, the other is that he does not. There is no inconsistency here : each is a good reason. If we are deeply distressed it is a great help for us to be able to frame our expression in a form that is not unbearably intimate and personal. That is the reason for the common experience that a funeral service that has an established ritual may be less harrowing than one that leaves everything to the expression of purely personal feeling for the friend who is mourned. Through expression in a recognised and, if you like, "artificial" form (so long as feeling may flow through it) a poet may as it were externalise his sorrow and give it what has been called the impersonality of art. The pastoral style did not cease to be used for personal elegy after Johnson's strictures upon it. One of the finest poems in our language is Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis", written in the pastoral style in memory of his friend Arthur Hugh Clough, with whom indeed he had often roamed the countryside so superbly evoked in the poem.

Clough, indeed, had been a closer friend of Arnold than King had of Milton, and it is the second reason even more than the first that may give Milton his justification for using the pastoral convention in his poem. If one does not feel a very deep personal grief, and yet wishes to comply with a request to honour in verse a man one has known and respected, is it not better to use a style that is not exposed to the temptation of personal overstatement ? A sculptor who is asked to make a piece of statuary in memory of some distinguished man and who does so by means of appropriate symbolical figures is not accused of insincerity. Why should a poet be, in like case ?

In fact it is largely through adopting this convention

that they were both shepherds together that Milton is able to place the mind of the reader far enough away from the world of immediate personal grief and to express his own thoughts on death while complying honourably with the request to commemorate King. The real subject of the poem (as has been pointed out by Dr. Tillyard in his "Milton") is not King, but Milton. So far from this indicating insincerity it is the only way in which, since Milton did not know King well enough to feel deep grief, he could be sincere. One might properly describe the poem as "Thoughts on the subject of Death occasioned in the mind of John Milton on learning of the death of his acquaintance Edward King", but such a title would have been positively Wordsworthian, and the simple but indicatively indirect "Lycidas" is no doubt better.

So scholarly a convention must certainly have seemed to Milton at the time not only appropriate, but decorously so. For his acquaintance with King had been academic. They had been members of the same college, known the Muses in the same haunts, been "nurst upon the self-same hill." A poem invoking this common academic background must have seemed right for the purpose. Then, again, King was a young clergyman, and the symbol of the shepherd faithful to his flock is a familiar but by no means an exhausted symbol for the good clergyman. As long as the phrase "The Lord is my shepherd" has evocative power so long may we say that the image is available for poet and reader. The pastoral convention, then, enabled Milton to express both the things that he had in common with King, his learning and his interest in religion. And it enabled him to do this while expressing himself, though he was formally paying tribute to King.

That these comments are just may be seen if we follow the course of the poem. A young man has died, and the high hopes that he has inspired have been dashed to the ground. He had been a young clergyman, virtuous and learned, and that at a time when these were all too few. (The late Dr. Hutchinson, in his useful "Milton and the English Mind", thought Milton's protest about the state of the clergy irrelevant and unfair : but one must remember that in the heat of the struggle about church government virtue in an opponent was less easy to recognise than it might be now, and such a matter was far from irrelevant to Milton's sense of his own mission in relation to public affairs). Edward King, like the poet, had abstained from the normal delights of youth in order to prepare himself for his calling, and this suggests to Milton that he too, one who has devoted all his youth to learning and discipline for a high task, might at any moment be cut off by death. Here come some of the best-known lines in the poem, which show excellently how deep personal feeling can infuse the apparent artifice of the convention.

> Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
> To tend the homely slighted Shepherds' trade,
> And strictly meditate the thankless Muse,
> Were it not better don as others use,
> To sport with *Amaryllis* in the shade,
> Or with the tangles of *Neaera*'s hair ?
> *Fame* is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
> (That last infirmity of Noble mind)
> To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes ;
> But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,
> And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
> Comes the blind *Fury* with th'abhorred shears,
> And slits the thin-spun life.

Dr. Johnson said that the poem was not to be considered as the effusion of real passion. It is true that it is not to be considered as a passionate lament for King, but that is a different matter. These lines are instinct with horror at the thought that death may ruthlessly cut short the most devoted life.

The powers that might have been expected to watch over such a man were not there when disaster overtook him. Nor could they be, Milton more calmly realises, for the sanction of a life of virtue is in heaven, not on earth. Such a disaster, real though it be indeed, must not make one feel angry disharmony with nature, but rather the reverse. For Lycidas is part of nature now, and his spirit is in heaven. There must be an end to sorrow. In the surface argument of the poem Milton has made reconciliation with the thought of the death of Edward King ; the real point is that he has reconciled himself to the thought of his own possible death. "Tomorrow we die" is no valid plea against preparation for a virtuous life. And meanwhile we must do our appointed work here.

After re-reading the poem, and Johnson's criticism, and reflecting on the problems involved, what would be our preliminary conclusions as to the place for the imitation of literary models and conventions of this kind ? Perhaps our first reflection (innocent enough even though critically it does not take us very far) would be that if so many readers trained in the classics, who have loved their Theocritus and their Virgil, have found it pleasant to live again in this tradition through the verses of an English poet surely that is a legitimate pleasure. If a poem may make a pleasing link with our experience of life there is no reason why it should not make a pleasing link with our experience of literature, which after all is part of our experience of life.

But this is almost more a matter of taste than of criticism, and we must go further.

Our literary experience is a continuous thing, and for a poet to write in a great tradition is (other things being equal) for him greatly to reinforce his work. But he must not imitate slavishly. Rather he must "invade his authors like a monarch". Milton, one of our poets with the strongest personality and the strongest will, is assuredly no servile imitator. "Lycidas" is no mere imitation of any other poem. John Milton has written it, and although he is using a familiar convention he has certainly made that convention his own.

What we really have to decide, however, is whether the convention still works, whether it is still vital and valid. This was the criterion Johnson applied. It was the right criterion, though he may have applied it wrongly and therefore have come to a wrong conclusion. We have seen how appropriate it must have seemed to Milton at the time to write his elegy in this way. It does not necessarily follow that he was right.

The question we have to answer is whether, in a given case, there is congruity enough between the artifice imposed by the tradition and the actual experience of the poet. The congruity needs to be between fiction and fact in both the personal relationship and the setting. For instance, if a business-man in Chicago with a turn for traditional verse (there may conceivably be such) were to write a pastoral elegy to commemorate one of his business partners we should all be a little unconvinced. Chicago, "hog-butcher to the world", may be an exciting city, and its exponents of the virtues of "private enterprise" may have great vigour, but to ask the reader to accept it as the setting for an elegy in the tradition of the Greek

Sicilian poets would be too much. A certain degree of adaptation is of course possible. Virgil may have described the countryside of Theocritus, and his peasants, more than those of Tuscany; but no great violence was done. Matthew Arnold in "Thyrsis" may have described the Oxford country, but that was by no means an inadequate alternative. So long as the setting in actuality has reasonable congruity with the shepherd theme then the convention may work perfectly well.

The degree of congruity of personal experience is harder to establish. Johnson insists overmuch that Milton and King had never driven a-field together or battened their flocks. That was hardly necessary. Nor was it literally necessary for Clough to have "piped" in the Oxford fields. But the personal relationship must have been such as not to make the reader acutely conscious of incongruity. The effect depends in part upon the tact with which the poet handles the matter. Take a somewhat parallel example. A. E. Housman, Latin scholar and eventually Professor at Cambridge, was not exactly a "Shropshire lad", nor, one suspects, had he ever been what one might expect a Shropshire "lad" to be. But he assumes that character for the purpose of the greater number of his poems. How do we feel about it? I think that it "comes off", often in a semi-dramatic fashion, for some of his early poems, but then reveals itself as rather limited. It is not the Shropshire poems that will stand little re-reading, for the Shropshire setting rings true ; but the Shropshire lad poems seem to become inadequate once the adolescent moment when they appeal has gone. In the poems that stress most the Shropshire lad and the English yeoman one feels a certain inner falsity. Housman's best poems are those in which this near-pose is forgotten or only hinted

at. This is very largely because Housman admires himself in the pose too much (or pities himself in it, which comes to the same thing).

Now in "Lycidas" there is no pose ; there is a fiction, which is quite different. Milton even keeps the setting ideal rather than particularising it. (Arnold, by contrast, particularises ; but he was entitled to do so, for we know that he had walked the fields and the banks of the Thames with Clough, and feel no falsity as he describes them in the poem). I do not believe that for most readers there should be any difficulty at all in accepting the convention used in Milton's poem. To write "Lycidas" was certainly not "easy". The last thing the poem is is "vulgar". Nor has any one but Johnson found the result "disgusting".

Nevertheless his instinct was not wrong. He knew that the capital problem in this sort of thing was congruity between the fiction and the actuality. There are two difficulties about "Lycidas", I think, one of which was perhaps inherent and one of which was not. The lesser difficulty is that the reader has to make a double "suspension of disbelief". He has to accept the convention that King and Milton had been shepherds together ; and that is not unduly difficult. And then he has to realise that the ascription of the poem to the memory of King is itself in some measure a surface convention and that the real feeling in the poem is about Milton. The alternatives to this would have had to be either a poem of insincere grief for King, which Milton would not have permitted himself; or one that was colder than the real poem we have. In other words one might almost reverse Johnson's verdict and say that the poem is not "artificial " enough. Now Milton does gain the advantage that he can comply with the request to honour the memory of King and at the same

time write a poem that has a real and strong current of feeling, though superficially this (like Alphæus) is for a while an undercurrent. But he does make a large demand upon the reader. A sense of this difficulty must surely be the explanation of Milton's hesitation to write the poem at all. The expression of this hesitation in the opening lines is certainly not affectation. Milton had to comply with the occasion and force to the surface, before he was ready, the poetry that was in him. This does not mean that he produces stereotypes of feeling, as Johnson supposed ; but, to change the metaphor, that he had to use the tools of others before those he was fashioning for himself were ready.

There is a second more serious difficulty, and Johnson here was at least on the right track. Johnson objected to the linking of the classical idea of the shepherd with the Christian (indeed, he went so far as to say that such equivocations were indecent, which seems rather absurd). Now the point here, it seems to me, is not that either of these is wrong in itself so much as that they are wrong together. On the one hand Milton would have us quite inflexibly transfer the Moschus situation to himself and King and Cambridgeshire ; on the other he allows himself to give the antique model a terrific wrench by introducing a most potent post-pagan Christian content.

One hesitates to call Arnold's "Thyrsis" a greater poem than "Lycidas", but it is in many respects a much happier one. It shows greater tact in the use of the pastoral convention, and so gives us no qualms in reading. In "Thyrsis" except for the title and the use in the poem of this name for Clough, there is no direct use of the pastoral convention until the "shepherd-pipes" of the fourth stanza. And when direct reference is made to the traditional literary model

it is pointed for contrast, not merely for similarity. It is different now :—

> But when Sicilian shepherds lost a mate,
> Some good survivor with his flute would go,
> Piping a ditty sad for Bion's fate,
> And cross the unpermitted ferry's flow.

He would go to the realm of Pluto and Proserpine and flute his friend back from the dead. But Proserpine had gathered her flowers in Enna, in Sicily.

> She loved the Dorian pipe, the Dorian strain.
> But ah, of our poor Thames she never heard !
> Her foot the Cumnor cowslips never stirred !
> And we should tease her with our plaint in vain.

The touch here, the sense of what fiction can give to fact without taking away, is perfect. Milton, by contrast, did insist that we accept the convention too automatically, and at the same time bent it imperiously to a use that, though certainly not indecent or bordering on impiety, did violence to the model.

"Lycidas" then is a great poem, a magnificent achievement ; but it is an achievement in the limiting, as well as in the positive sense of the word of Art. We admire it ; we come to value it highly (and certainly not from a mere traditional estimate) ; but we are not quite comfortable with it. The difficulty is not that it lacks vitality : that it has. It is not simply that it lacks congruity, in the manner that Dr. Johnson said. It is rather that it imposes a double standard of relation of fiction to fact, two standards that are not quite congruous between themselves.

This question of congruity might be studied further from what at first might seem a merely negative point of view. It is instructive to notice that when a literary convention

is deliberately "guyed", as for instance in mock-heroic writing, it is precisely on the incongruity between convention and actuality that the burlesquer plays. The eighteenth century writers, who may have been more in the grip of certain literary conventions than those of most periods, were at least pre-eminent in burlesque of conventions too. Two examples, both very well known, might be given to illustrate the point.

In "The Rape of the Lock" Pope's aim is to laugh a young lady into not taking too tragically the snipping off of a lock of her hair by a young gentleman, and his substitution of the spirits drawn from Rosicrucian mythology for the gods of Homer, of the "light militia of the lower sky" for the gods and goddesses that watch over their favourite heroes in the "Iliad", is entirely directed to this end. Pope's juxtapositions, by exaggerating the incongruity between the two orders of importance, suggest that the young lady might recover her own sense of proportion. The two orders of importance are, first, the heroic and really world-shaking events described in Homer, and secondly the rather trivial little rows that young ladies, if they are foolish, may choose to think world-shaking. Pope was indeed well advised (by himself) to retain the mock celestial mythology of the poem, although Addison (no doubt in good faith) is said to have advised him not to do so, for this basic incongruity sets the framework for his general raillery at disproportion. So, when he describes Belinda at her toilet table he can speak of it as if it were an altar, for she no doubt practised there the rites that to her were most important. Pope makes her worship there not the cosmic, but the cosmetic powers. Her maid is described as no mere maid, but as an inferior priestess. The game of juxtaposition goes on: there are ill omens

about, though no one is quite sure yet of their exact import :

> Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,
> Or some frail China jar receive a flaw ;
> Or stain her honour or her new brocade ;
> Forget her prayers, or miss a masquerade ;
> Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball.

Pope does not need to state the point openly. He has only to place the trivial fairly side by side with the tremendous, the contemporary actuality with the literary and heroic model, to know that the sense of incongruity stirred in the reader will do all that he requires.

There is perhaps an even more direct example in a famous passage in eighteenth century prose fiction. It will be remembered that in Fielding's "Tom Jones" the village girl Molly Seagrim has had to disguise her shape somewhat and that her mother has dressed her in a piece of fine sacking material that has been sent by Sophia Western, who, however, had hardly expected that it would be worn directly in that form. Molly, very pleased with her finery, flaunts it in church, but as soon as she is recognised people begin to titter. After the service they hustle her, she is spirited in her replies, and in almost no time a terrific battle has started in the churchyard. It is Molly versus the rest. And the weapons, apart from mere fists, are the bones hurriedly picked up from an open grave. Now this battle is described by Fielding, not in straightforward fashion, though he could have done that very well, but in mock-Homeric style, with an extended Homeric simile, Homeric turns of speech everywhere, lists of the great village heroes who fell that day, and so on :—

> Recount, O muse, the names of those who fell on this fatal day. First, Jemmy Tweedle felt on his hinder head

> the direful bone. Him the pleasant banks of sweetly winding Stour had nourished, where he first learned the vocal art, with which, wandering up and down at wakes and fairs, he cheered the rural nymphs and swains, when upon the green they interweaved the sprightly dance ; while he himself stood fiddling and jumping to his own music. How little now avails his fiddle ! He thumps the verdant floor with his carcass. Next old Echepole, the sowgelder, received a blow in his forehead from our Amazonian heroine, and immediately fell to the ground. . . .

It is fun if one has not turned the pages of a translation of Homer; rich fun if one has.

These writers in mock-heroic vein have simply exploited the commonest weakness of those who follow literary models. They ridicule so superbly because they know what may make a piece of imitative literary writing ridiculous. Now literary traditions are bound sooner or later to "go dead". If, although they have been used by writers with little to say but a trick of derivative dressing-up, they are still capable of vitality, then a good writer will have to show great skill and sensitiveness, as well as power, in expressing his feelings through the conventions. It can be done, of course, and without unwitting burlesque effect. Matthew Arnold uses the Homeric style, at which Fielding had laughed a century before, in "Sohrab and Rustum" and although there is perhaps a slightly "museum" quality about the poem it is undoubtedly a fine work, and the great sustained Homeric simile of the eagle is one of the finest things in it.

When a literary convention does "go dead" it may be laughed at, or there may be a brutal appeal to mere fact. A triumphant example is Shakespeare's sonnet, "My

Mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun". He is out of patience with the false "romantic" sonnets that rhymesters write to their mistresses. He will not write in this convention of dishonest flowery compliment. He is in love with a real woman, and as she is, no goddess:

> My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground;
> And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
> As any she belied with false compare.

A notable appeal to brutal fact against the pastoral convention itself was made, towards the end of Johnson's life, by Crabbe. Crabbe knew what the life of toil for ordinary country people was like. He was out of patience with the swains and shepherdesses of poetry and with their pains of love (if you are talking of real peasants, he said, you had better recognise that these are the only pains they never feel). So in "The Village" he gave the world a cold douche of the truth, and no doubt it was the better for it.

This process of using and rejecting literary models goes on all the time in a healthy literature. Everything that has been said above about literature of the past could be illustrated from contemporary poetry, with appropriate changes of convention. To Mr. T. S. Eliot, for instance, the literary tradition of high-romantic love seemed hardly to accord with life as it is lived in the modern city. Goldsmith had said:

> When lovely woman stoops to folly,
> And finds too late that men betray,
> What charm can soothe her melancholy?
> What art can wash her tears away?
> The only art her guilt to cover,
> To hide her shame from ev'ry eye,
> To give repentance to her lover,
> And wring his bosom is—to die.

Well, women have been betrayed and indeed they have died of unrequited love, but when one finds it expressed at this soulful level one is tempted to cry "fiddlesticks"—even Molly Seagrim knew better. Eliot (not necessarily speaking in his own person, but rendering semi-dramatically the sorry smartness of the machine-age city) says, in the appropriate place in "The Waste Land" :

> When lovely woman stoops to folly and
> Paces about her room again, alone,
> She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
> And puts a record on the gramophone.

Now Eliot, very deliberately turning his back on what the Victorians and indeed the Georgians found "poetic", has his own idiom, and it is not uninfluenced by other writers who, until his time, were somewhat neglected. No doubt his modern adaptation of the "Metaphysical" conceit will in time become a mere convention and there will be a revolt from it. But Eliot, like Milton in his time, is using such models as interest him ; he is not used by them. The point to be made against inferior poems that invoke models from the past, is not that they take inspiration from art or literature, but that they do not.

So far nothing has been said here about Milton's greatest work, "Paradise Lost". It is impossible to discuss what I have called the third characteristic of the poetry of art—its use of a special language—without doing so. But the poem is interesting also from the point of view of the two characteristics of the poetry of art that we have already discussed.

The first quality to which I drew attention was the creation of effects which were not 'in' nature but outside it, and were to be so understood by a competent reader.

The second was that, under certain conditions, a poet might certainly utilise his experience of previous literature as well as his direct experience of life. But it is true that experience of literature, the following of models, may lead the writer to move too uncertainly between the realms of nature and art ; and this, it should be said clearly, has happened in what is certainly the weakest part of "Paradise Lost".

Milton felt a strong desire to make his great poem inclusive of all human experience in relation to the divine plan. At the same time his instinct told him rightly to begin his poem, not with the rebellion of Satan in heaven but with the picture of the fallen angels, their council in Hell, and their resolve, at Satan's instigation, to avenge themselves on God by corrupting His new creation, Man. Milton was right to begin here, because this is the central theme and because he is thereby able to open at a most significant and dramatic point. But he has later to go back, to relate what happened before the angels were fallen, to describe how they fell. All the war in heaven between the rival hosts has to be told to the reader, later. So has the story of the creation. Now this constituted no apparent problem to Milton, for it had been the practice of the classical epic poets also to plunge "in medias res" and to recount the previous happenings later through the mouth of someone who had participated in them. This is how Virgil describes the fall of Troy and Æneas' escape. The poem actually begins with the arrival of Æneas in Carthage, and it is to Dido, the Queen of Carthage, that Æneas tells of the events previous to this. So Milton. The pattern of the story goes forward in time until part of the way through the Fifth Book, when Raphael is visiting Adam to warn him of the designs of Satan. He

then takes occasion to recount to Adam how Satan came to have these designs against the innocence of Man. Through the Sixth Book he relates the war in Heaven, through the Seventh the Creation. In the Eighth Book Adam, apparently still anxious to detain Raphael, tells of his own first meeting with Eve. And it is only in the Ninth Book that the story resumes from its former point in time.

Now there is no doubt that this device, in itself, was perfectly legitimate. It has indeed obvious advantages. But nearly every reader of the poem agrees that there is not merely a recession in time in these intervening books, but a recession in power. The first two books are universally admired. The next two come near to them in achievement. But the poet only reaches his height again in the Ninth Book (perhaps the finest of all) and he keeps very near to that level until the most moving end. It is of course vain to try to re-write great works, but it seems to me that there is no doubt that Milton "ought" to have forgone his desire for inclusiveness and to have gone straight on from the mid-point of Book Five to Book Nine.

Had these books been left out the poem would no doubt have lost irretrievably in Milton's eyes. It is clearly his ambition to create in verse an all-inclusive world-myth. He was hardly to know that the poem to-day would not be read as a world-myth, or if it were then with the emphasis so much on "myth" that he would have been greatly distressed. But it is by no means certain that by slight interpolations earlier in the poem he could not have conveyed all of the preceding events (the war in Heaven and the Creation) that was strictly necessary, and he would have gained immensely in concentration on his main theme, which was after all Paradise *Lost.*

The difficulties of these middle books are obvious.

But even if Milton had not wished so ardently to describe these events in full to comply with his inclusive purpose, he must have tended to overlook the difficulties because of the classical Heroic Poems that were present in his mind. In fact, however, what the subject matter of Homer permitted the subject-matter of Milton did not. In the description of the war in Heaven there is a fatal confusion, as Johnson put it, between spirit and matter ; or as we might put it, recalling the models that were present in Milton's mind, between nature and art. No doubt the gods and goddesses come into the war of Troy, but they are very humanised gods and goddesses. And the fight is, physically, not between themselves, but between their human favourites on either side. Milton's angels, fighting as if to kill one another, are immortal. Fighting with weapons that except for a few notoriously unfortunate up-to-date touches were much like those of Hector and Achilles, these armies fail to slaughter one another, as they must. And any way the result is a foregone conclusion, for we know that the good angels are bound to win ; and that being so we wonder why the decisive intervention of the Son was delayed so long. A word from God could have settled it at once.

These criticisms are familiar enough. The point I now wish to make is that this weakness in the middle books, due to a central error of conception, is connected with the false-over-emphasis of their language. Here, for instance, is Michael (whose sword is irresistible) fighting Satan (who cannot be put out of any fight by wounds) :

> The sword
> Of Michael from the Armorie of God
> Was giv'n him temper'd so, that neither keen
> Nor solid might resist the edge : it met
> The sword of Satan with steep force to smite

Descending, and in half cut sheere, nor staid,
But with swift wheele reverse, deep entring shar'd
All his right side ; then Satan first knew pain,
And writh'd him to and from convolv'd ; so sore
The griding sword with discontinuous wound
Pass'd through him, but th'Ethereal substance clos'd
Not long divisible, and from the gash,
A stream of Nectarous humor issuing flow'd
Sanguin, such as Celestial Spirits may bleed,
And all his Armour staind ere while so bright.

This passage deserves all that hostile critics like Dr. Leavis might say about it. The language has gone dead ; and the attempt to raise it is false. The rhythm is stilted and unconvincing. It is as if Milton knew there was an inner hollowness and was calling in a misapplied and merely external "art" to his aid. It offends both good-sense and nature. And it certainly does not please the ear.

One may ascribe this to a general waning of sensibility in Milton (as Dr. Leavis would). But in view of the quality of the verse through the greater part of the earlier and later books of the poem this does not seem to me the right explanation. The trouble comes rather from a central confusion, a cardinal error in conception. Milton wanted to make his world-story complete. On the other hand he knew that he must begin with the plot of the rebel angels against Man in the Garden of Eden. Therefore he had to relate the war in heaven, so to speak, after the event. This subject was really not possible of treatment without fatal incongruity. But he must have been confident that it could be treated, for was it more than Homer had done in the "Iliad", except that he had done it for pagan gods ? And structurally surely the device was entirely permissible, for had not Virgil had Æneas revert to events prior to the

opening of his poem, just as Raphael was to here ? It seems as likely as anything can be that Milton was misled, and failed strictly enough to meditate his thankless Muse, through the literary models that he had before him.

In discussing the third characteristic of the poetry of art —its use of a special language—one has inevitably to refer to the now famous attack on Milton made by Dr. F. R. Leavis in "Scrutiny". This was as long ago as September, 1933, and there have been many replies since ; and indeed the controversy still goes on. The tone of this article was, it must be said, unfortunate. Dr. Leavis began : "Milton's dislodgement, in the past decade, after his two centuries of predominance, was effected with remarkably little fuss. The irresistible argument was, of course, Mr. Eliot's creative achievement ; it gave his few critical asides—potent, it is true, by context—their finality, and made it unnecessary to elaborate a case." Since the article was written, Mr. Eliot has seemed a little uncertain whether he wished the credit for such a devastating " creative achievement",* and careful and substantiated replies have been made to Dr. Leavis, especially by Professor Douglas Bush of Harvard. However, the essay by Dr. Leavis did give the evidence on which his unfavourable estimate was based. There was a close examination of a passage from "Comus" which gave Dr. Leavis pleasure and whose language seemed to him to be alive in an almost Shakespearian way, as the language of most of " Paradise Lost" was not. And passages were cited from "Paradise Lost" to illustrate his hostile points. Some of the replies have been general, some have discussed passages of Milton's verse, as may properly be required. It certainly seems doubtful now whether Milton has been dislodged. It is quite

* See his British Academy Lecture (1947).

certain that there has been more than a little "fuss".

The essence of the replies to Dr. Leavis has been that he has misunderstood the conventions of language that Milton was employing. He really, it is said, wanted verse to be written with a use of language like that of Donne, or at least of Marvell, and failed to understand the function of the ritual effects in the verse of "Paradise Lost". It has been said also, especially by Professor Bush, that Milton's use of language must be related to his whole conception of the role of Reason in life, and this he feels that Dr. Leavis ignores.

These questions must be discussed. But my first test would be one of ear. It was highly interesting to hear the complete reading aloud of "Paradise Lost" on the Third Programme of the B.B.C. early in 1948. This convinced me (for my part) of two things. First, that Books Six, Seven and Eight were difficult to listen to with sustained attention, because of just that effect of "automatic ritual" of which Dr. Leavis speaks, though he feels it to be also generally pervasive. The reason for Milton's failure in these books is, however, as I have suggested, to be found less in a general waning of sensibility than in a cardinal structural defect. The blurring of the proper distinctions between nature and art leaves a void that Milton tries to fill with a language that is too often emptily stylised, as if he himself were conscious of an inner defect. The second thing of which the reading convinced me was that in the remainder of the poem, except for occasional lapses, the verse was magnificently vital, and that the manner to which Dr. Leavis takes exception was itself a contributory factor in its vitality.

Having admitted that there may be a wrong kind of art-ritual in verse, and having agreed that this is dominant

in one considerable section of the work, one may still maintain with reason that a ritual effect, rightly used, may be proper to Milton's purpose and may be a constituent element in the particular kind of vitality that he seeks. Here it seems to me that those who have replied to Dr. Leavis (and particularly Professor Bush) have a surer understanding and a surer ear than he.

In the first place what was said earlier about the essential unfairness of a piecemeal method, for poems whose effects are gained over long stretches or as wholes, must be repeated. How, for instance, would Byron's "Don Juan" fare under such treatment ? Take any stanza by itself and you can easily show it to be slapdash, insensitive, lacking in all the qualities that distinguish, say, Keats. But does this make it an inferior poem ? Certainly not. The slapdash air is of the essence of the aristocratic contempt that gives the poem its force. Even Chaucer, who certainly does not use language in a "Shakespearian" or a Keatsian way, would come badly out of such examination. This is particularly to be said when one is considering long poems. Just as in a Beethoven symphony or sonata one could isolate a few bars, when the bass is marking time in a plangent accompaniment and the treble is just shifting gradually up the scale, gathering power before moving into the next tremendous passage, so one can easily isolate passages of "Paradise Lost" that are transitional but that, in their place in the whole, are entirely right.

One should consider the poem as a whole from another point of view. Those who claim that Satan is the real hero of the story have been rebuked often enough for having, apparently, read the first two books and little more. They have not noticed what happens to Satan after he

becomes the Serpent. They have not seen magnificent evil become low, and false and mean. They have not taken the first two books in relation to the whole. It is like assuming that the magnificent speeches of Sir Epicure Mammon in Ben Jonson's "Alchemist" make him the hero of that play* or that the magnificent speeches of Comus indicate that Milton gives him his full sympathy at the expense of the theme as a whole. So in considering the language of "Paradise Lost" one must remember that language of one kind may be appropriate in one place, language of a different kind in another. This has been well demonstrated by Professor Bush, in his "Paradise Lost: Some Comments" when he takes the description of Eden singled out for attack by Dr. Leavis and points out that this is a description of Eden, not of an actual, English garden, such for instance as Marvell describes. To describe Eden as a mere natural garden would not be to describe Eden at all.

In some measure Milton's whole philosophy is involved in any discussion of his language. As Professor Bush points out, the universe, as Milton conceived it, was under the sway of Reason, and man must exercise his responsible free will to regulate his own life by the same principle. That involved order, selection, and arrangement. It is Comus, the spirit of evil and licentiousness, that asks, "Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth ?" It is the business of man to use his reason to impose an order and not to be at the mercy of every nervous stimulus. Professor Bush illustrates his general observations with examples and, it must be said, makes out the best case so far in reply to the strictures of Dr. Leavis.

The difficulty in discussing Dr. Leavis' essay—once

* See L. C. Knights': "Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson."

one has got over the tone—is to disentangle his just from his unjust observations. Even if one rejects his conclusion that Milton's verse is really far below the excellence commonly conceded to it, one must agree at the least that what he says indicates a very real danger in Milton's methods. Not that it is at all new to go that far: Keats, when giving up his "Hyperion" as too imitative of Milton explained his discontent with this medium by saying that after all "English ought to be kept up". And the main charge that Dr. Leavis makes is really that Milton mummifies English instead of keeping it in full native vigour. But even if the difference between Dr. Leavis and his opponents is one of emphasis, that difference of emphasis is so conspicuous that what it really comes to is a capacity for enjoying Milton or not. Those who are beginning serious study of Milton, or of literary criticism, must, like everyone else, make up their own minds. For my part, with such qualifications as I have indicated above, I enjoy Milton's verse and feel that Dr. Leavis has been seriously unfair to Milton because he really is looking and listening for something else. I can best indicate this, so far as detailed comment on short passages may go, by considering two passages cited by Dr. Leavis.

First, Dr. Leavis takes a well-known passage from one of Donne's satires:

> On a huge hill,
> Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will
> Reach her, about must, and about must goe;
> And what the hills suddennes resists, winne so;
> Yet strive so, that before age, deaths twilight,
> Thy Soule rest, for none can worke in that night.

For Dr. Leavis this illustrates the Shakespearian use of English, indeed the English use. The words really work;

they seem to do what they say. For contrast Dr. Leavis quotes a passage from "Lycidas" :

> For so to interpose a little ease,
> Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
> Ay me ! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding Seas
> Wash far away, where ere thy bones are hurld,
> Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
> Where, thou perhaps under the whelming tide
> Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world. . . .

and he says that here, although the words are doing much less work than in Donne, they seem to value themselves more highly. Although there is consummate art in "Lycidas" and certain feelings are expressed, there is no pressure behind the words, but chiefly a concern for mere mellifluousness.

This seems to me quite unfair. The obvious contrast between these two passages arises from what they are trying to do. The imagery of the Donne passage is kinæsthetic : Donne is trying to make the reader feel in his muscles and nervous system the struggle to climb up to Truth on the top of that cragged hill. Obviously, if you want to show words "working" this is a good passage to take. Dr. Leavis is unconsciously capitalising on an ambiguity in his use of the word "work". Making the reader feel that he is working, in the sense of striving with his muscles and breath, is not the only way to write good verse. The imagery of Milton, by contrast, is auditory and to a lesser degree visual. He is not concerned to reproduce a sense of energetic exertion in this passage ; he is expressing what is essentially a sigh (though if it were just that "Ay me" would have been all he would need to write). So the comparison is prejudiced from the start.

But let us look at the Donne passage a little more closely.

The first four lines seem to me magnificent: they do what they were meant to do, and perfectly. But what of the last couplet? It may be my ear, or it may be the ear of Dr. Leavis, that is at fault: but I must say flatly that I am beaten by these lines every time I try to read them aloud. Ben Jonson said that "Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging". If by that Jonson implied condemnation of the first four lines here, and verse like them, he was no doubt much at fault. But the Donne who could write lines like the last two seems to me to deserve all that he said. There is no "work" in the words here—and one has a considerable feeling that "deaths twilight" is mere padding. In any case I don't think the passage, beginning or end, is Shakespearian at all. What it does show is both the virtue and the incapacity for sustained effect of Donne's sharp-edged, "naturalistic", speaking-voice style. (The number of poems in which Donne begins arrestingly and fails to sustain his poems is considerable.) Compared with almost anything Milton wrote, the satires of Donne, with the exception of occasional short passages like this, are work of a very inferior order.

In considering the speaking of verse from the stage it is often tempting to praise a "natural" style. Indeed, such a style may afford great relief after a tradition of declamation that has turned even speakers of talent into mannered spouters. But the idea that speech from the stage in a Shakespeare play should be merely "natural" is an illusion. If Shakespeare is played by actors (for instance those who have been trained in modern conversational pieces) who merely speak "naturally" the whole effect is flat. The effect must be acceptable to the audience, the words must really be allowed to do their work without the intrusion of a false style: that is true. But Shakespeare

has not merely used a language: he has created one. And the actor has to create a diction for it, or the authentic poetry of Shakespeare will not be there.

On the other hand, there are poets who use conversational effects. Edward Thomas conveys his subtleties of feeling through just such a stratum of plainness. And the reader's voice must vary with the kind of verse he is reading. Now it has often been said that a certain incantatory effect is inevitable in Milton, and Dr. Leavis takes this to be a defect, while some of those who have replied to him say that it is part of the essential Miltonic vigour and life. I think that it is. There is a very important sense in which poetry is ritual. And the question is whether Milton's ritual is good or not.

People can of course look ridiculous in uniform or in any ceremonial dress. So can words, and they do on occasion in Milton. But there are still occasions when ceremonial is right and indeed essential to what we wish to do and to express. Now in the passage from "Lycidas" condemned by Dr. Leavis Milton in fact imposes an order on his feelings, as the ceremonial of a dignified funeral service is intended to do. (Indeed in the passage immediately preceding this one in the poem Milton has pictured flowers being laid upon the hearse.) One will not, therefore, expect his words to "work" in the same manner as Donne's. But do they work in their own manner ?

One can only ask the reader to listen to

> "Whilst thee the shores, and sounding Seas
> Wash far away, where ere thy bones are hurld"

or to see and feel the strange mystery of

> Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
> Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world.

"Whelming" may be "artificial": it is certainly not a word used in familiar conversation, but it seems to me to express a great deal that no other word could—the sense of the helplessness of man, like Lycidas himself, against the power of Nature, the sense of immense weight that can crush physically but beneath and beyond which life may still go on—and it does not merely connote these things, it makes the reader feel them. The word "monstrous" again is chosen with a superb art, carrying a sense of all that is strange and at first horrifying but that, like the "monsters of the deep", has a life of its own beyond our ken.

The function of these passages, picturing Lycidas perhaps beyond the stormy Hebrides, perhaps southwards beyond St. Michael's Mount, is in one respect like the function of Keats' "magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn", to assuage a sorrow, to tranquillise by a vision that brings the sorrow to rest. That is why the rhythm is softly incantatory".*

It seems to me a pity to use Donne to damn Milton. The first four lines of Donne are indeed different from Milton in purpose and in their use of language. The last two lines are also different, and show the sort of failure from which Milton's style (with all its own dangers) at least saved him. That Donne in the first four of his lines and Milton in the whole of his passage have both created fine poetry, have both used language vitally, seems to me incontestable.

It is surely a mistake of the first order to suppose that there cannot be pressure of feeling through a form that is

* Since writing the above I have looked again at the masterly book of Professor Bush and see that he has defended a passage partly coincident with this passage—from the attack (this time) of Mr. Eliot.

one of conscious art. Listen to Milton again in "Lycidas" thinking of the way in which death comes to snatch away the reward for which a man may so self-denyingly have lived his laborious days, scorning all delights :

> But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,
> And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
> Comes the blind Fury with the abhorréd shears,
> And slits the thin spun life.

No pressure behind those words ? One wonders how any reader could possibly miss the pressure.

There are many passages that one might quote from "Paradise Lost" to show the distinctive methods of Milton with the language of poetry. I should like to quote one to show how a style of conscious artifice and conscious learning may nevertheless have vitality. In Book I Milton is describing the rebel host, and saying that they outdo any comparison that might be made with any host of which our stories tell :

> what resounds
> In Fable or Romance of Uthers Son
> Begirt with British and Armoric Knights ;
> And all who since, Baptiz'd or Infidel
> Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,
> Damasco, or Marocco, or Trebisond,
> Or whom Bizerta sent from Afric shore
> When Charlemain with all his Peerage fell
> By Fontarabbia.

This may be "made" verse : it is studded with names, every one of which will have an echo for the reader who knows his legends, and indeed also for those who do not know but receive an intimation from the verse itself. But what effects Milton gets ! "Begirt with British or Armoric Knights"—the line rings with the metallic clang

of armour. "When Charlemain with all his Peerage fell, By Fontarabbia " catches in one and a half lines the whole spell of that story that has inspired so many poets.

The most tremendous effects in Milton's verse come from their presence in a surrounding context. Just before this passage there is a description of the raising of Satan's standard and the assembling of the rebel host to strains of martial music. And then come the lines:

> At which the universal Host upsent
> A shout that tore Hells Concave, and beyond
> Frighted the reign of Chaos and old Night.

The great achievement of Milton is that he has created Hell and Heaven and the Earth for us. For such an achievement real architectonic power (if one dare use the word again) was needed. Within this structure such lines as those quoted above have their echoes and re-echoes, as they could not possibly have in some poetic "natural" void.

The style of conscious art in poetry requires initiation as perhaps other styles do not. But most of the poets who have written, and most of the people who have listened or read, have expected poetry to create, to be "artifice". The particular conventions of artifice, of course, have changed. And just as the latest fashion in women's clothes is accepted as naturally fitting, and the day before yesterday's looks outmoded, so every age intent upon its own conventions is apt to be unfair to certain of the conventions of the past. Milton in recent years has been under attack. It seems to me that the hostile criticism has been useful, and some of its points have been valid. But it also seems to me that Milton has by no means been "dislodged", and that indeed any canons of criticism are unduly limited that cannot allow for a deep enjoyment of his verse.

Three: Wordsworth and Natural Style

IF MILTON is the outstanding example in English poetry of a style of artifice, Wordsworth is the outstanding example of a poet who wished his style to be natural. Possibly Milton would not have been altogether pleased to have heard his poetry described as artificial, for the word is not quite happy and may, as we have seen, imply a false antithesis between nature and art. But Wordsworth would have been very well content to hear himself described as a poet of a natural style, for that is what he wished to be. We may find that it is no easy matter just to "be natural" in poetry and that there are as subtle conditions for success as there are in poetry of an artificial mode, but at least the word is fairly chosen to describe what Wordsworth desired to do. For he wrote in large measure in conscious reaction from a style that seemed to him to have become artificial in a wrong way.

This however was a style to which readers had long been accustomed and it was the thought of this that made him prefix an "Advertisement" to the volume of "Lyrical Ballads" that he published with Coleridge in 1798. This Advertisement contains a significant appeal. Wordsworth urges " readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers" not to let preconceived notions of poetry stand in their way, and he suggests that "while they are perusing this book, they should ask themselves if it contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents; and if the answer be favourable to the author's

wishes, that they should consent to be pleased in spite of that most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own pre-established codes of decision". In other words he appeals from the then established conventions of the poetry of art direct to nature and says that he proposes to take natural subjects and to write about them naturally. What he meant, and what we might mean, by those terms of course remains to be considered.

Although the question of what naturalness in poetry is, and of what are the conditions for good natural poetry, is more complicated than might at first appear, the broad force of Wordsworth's distinction is clear and apparent. No one could read the two passages from his work that we considered in the first chapter without feeling this. It is still more apparent, of course, if contrast is made with the poetry of works like "Paradise Lost". The first reaction of any reader would be to say—whatever he meant by it—that the style of Wordsworth was more natural than that of Milton or that of T. S. Eliot. It is simpler to follow and to understand. There is less preliminary learning to be mastered before one can really enter into poetry in this mode: neither the classical and Biblical lore that is necessary for Milton, nor the acquaintance with the poet's specialised reading and experience that is necessary for Eliot, is needed here.

Wordsworth, too, was consciously appealing to a general public away from the exclusive public that chiefly read poetry when he began to write. Indeed, he said explicitly to John Wilson, when the latter wrote to him asking to be enlightened about "The Idiot Boy", that "few ever consider books but with reference to their power of pleasing these persons and men of a higher rank; few descend

lower, among cottages and fields, and among children. A man must have done this habitually before his judgment upon 'The Idiot Boy' would be in any way decisive with me. I *know* I have done this myself habitually : I wrote the poem with exceeding delight and pleasure, and whenever I read it, I read it with pleasure." This may not be an adequate defence of "The Idiot Boy", but it shows that as part of his appeal from art to nature Wordsworth appealed from the coteries to the ordinary reader. This would have been vain had he not written in a language that they could understand. Now this is different from Milton. Milton knew the range of his scholarship and the austerity of his spirit ; he knew, too, that when he was writing "Paradise Lost" he was the spokesman of a cause that seemed to be lost, for the Puritan Commonwealth was overthrown and the king and the hated episcopacy were back in the land and the public had welcomed them. Milton's utmost hope was expressed in his words, "Fit audience let me find, though few". Wordsworth's appeal was also very different from Mr. Eliot's, for Mr. Eliot's poetry, in both its content and its manner, is an expression of his feeling that a man must be scrupulous in listening to the prompting of his own spirit and in speaking as sounds right to his private ear, without courting popularity in an age when the popular is so often the cheap. Milton, thanks to the strength of the Puritan tradition in England, has been more widely read than he might have expected, but there is still a sense in which the enjoyment of his poetry is the reward of scholarship. Mr. Eliot now enjoys high repute, but he is still not a poet that the ordinary man is likely to read very much. Wordsworth is free from these limitations upon his popular appeal, not merely because he wished to be read by ordinary men and women (Milton

and Mr. Eliot might have hoped for a wider audience too) but because he felt, as they could not, that poetry would sacrifice nothing that it should keep but would indeed gain vitality and strength from such a widening of its range and such a new simplicity in its style.

Naturalness in style seems to imply, then, for both ourselves and Wordsworth, a certain simplicity and immediate comprehensibility by ordinary readers. This, however, is fairly obvious. As a lead in to the examination of the idea of naturalness in poetry we might recall the characteristics of artificial style that we noted in the last chapter and see whether poetry in the natural mode involves the opposites of these. We observed that the poetry of artifice seemed to imply three qualities : invention of details or of structural machinery that would be understood as outside what was natural ; the invocation or imitation of literary models ; and a specialised diction. How far does Wordsworth's poetry, since we have taken him as our example, show the opposite of these three qualities ?

The quality of invention in literature implies either a desire to go out of nature for one's apparent subject-matter or to impose a structure of art or embellishments of artistic detail upon natural subject-matter. Wordsworth would certainly have denied any intention of going outside what was natural for his own subject-matter, though he would not have said that to do so was necessarily incompatible with good poetry. The account given by Coleridge of their division of labour for the "Lyrical Ballads" is well known. Coleridge was to throw the light of the imagination over supernatural or at least romantic subjects, Wordsworth over things of every day. This was obviously the right division, and each poet could command the other's admiration. For poetry of the supernatural or the

sensational without imagination (as he and Coleridge understood the term) Wordsworth had a certain contempt. In any case it was not the kind of poetry that he wished to write :

> The moving accident is not my trade ;
> To freeze the blood I have no ready arts.

He wished to write of the things and the people he saw around him, and to write of them simply. Although, as we shall see, he did not at first discover the limitations within which he could hope to do this well, in his essential choice he was, given his peculiar gifts, undoubtedly right.

He was right negatively as well as positively. He had little interest in the elaborations of art. There was a place for Fancy in poetry, of course ; but one far below that of the Imagination. Anything like the conceit, however, was not congenial to him. It was far from his own habit of mind. He was a solid North Country man, which is not at all incompatible with intense imagination, but does seem to encourage a felt antithesis between Fancy and Truth. As to the greatly contrived structure (like that of "Paradise Lost", for instance) he would no doubt admire it, but it was not the sort of thing that he was most concerned about. It was not necessary for a poem of short or moderate length, and fortunately his one great long poem, "The Prelude", has its structure there before he starts, in the chronological sequence of his life. "The Excursion" lacks such an automatic framework, and there is nothing adequate with which to replace it.

Oddly enough, Wordsworth did seem to be inventing quite often—and inventing badly—when he thought he was being natural ; and this raises a very interesting prob-

lem in literature. Wordsworth's claim, that we have seen stated in the Advertisement to the "Lyrical Ballads", should be read by the side of some of the criticisms of his early poetry. The complaint of some of the critics was not that these poems were "natural" but either that they were unnatural or that the invention in them was poor. Francis Jeffrey, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, has been condemned often enough for the way he treated Wordsworth. He did indeed entirely miss his greatness, and to say that is condemnation enough ; but some of the things he says are true, especially when they point to Wordsworth's faults. It has sometimes been supposed that because Jeffrey disliked the social tendency of Wordsworth's redirection of poetry he therefore disapproved of any poetry about people in humble ranks of life. This is not so. Jeffrey explicitly contrasts Wordsworth with Crabbe, whom he praises for delineating the poor country people with fidelity to truth. His complaint about Wordsworth is not that he visits the cottages but that his dalesmen and shepherds and pedlars aren't like dalesmen and shepherds and pedlars at all. Crabbe's people one can recognise at once, as real ; Wordsworth's are "formed upon certain fantastic and affected peculiarities in the mind of the author". Now this is put in a prejudiced way, but there is truth in it. Coleridge, with one important qualification—that what Jeffrey called "peculiarities in the mind of the author" he would often have called "the idealising imagination" would have agreed with this. He was especially unhappy about the pedlar !—I shall return to this question when discussing Wordsworth's attempts to write naturally about ordinary men and women, but at the moment we must note that to think one is writing naturally is not enough, for one may do it in such a way as

to make the effect seem very unnatural for a good many readers.

What contributed to the effect of unnaturalness was that Wordsworth did allow himself invention is some of these rural ballads, and seemed not very good at it. Had he taken the artist's task of invention seriously it might have been different, but he did not seem to think this kind of care necessary. And so when he aimed at the artless or the simple he often achieved only the naive and the silly. This was what Byron has in mind when in "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" he speaks of Wordsworth's "Christmas stories tortured into rhyme". He says that Wordsworth thinks these

> Contain the essence of the true sublime.
> Thus, when he tells the tale of Betty Foy,
> The idiot mother of "an idiot boy",
> A moon-struck, silly lad, who lost his way
> And, like his bard, confounded night with day ;
> So close on each pathetic part he dwells,
> And each adventure so sublimely tells,
> That all who view the "idiot in his glory",
> Conceive the bard the hero of the story.

Byron later wrote the word "unjust" against the whole passage in his satire that attacked Wordsworth, and it was unjust as a whole. But what he says about "The Idiot Boy" is hardly wide of the mark. And this is a poem that Wordsworth tells us he wrote "with glee" and that he told John Wilson he re-read with delight. It is obviously meant as an essay in a strange, northern style of humour. But who except Wordsworth ever read it with glee ? The story and the persons are too obviously silly. And the silliness is not in the occasional touches of imagination, such as

And, still and mute, in wonder lost,
All silent as a horseman-ghost,
He travels slowly down the vale

but in the telling of the "natural" story. If Wordsworth hadn't tried to invent a natural story, or had invented better, we might have had a poem.

Invention implies a conscious alteration and improvement upon nature. The equivalent to this faculty in Wordsworth's best poetry is something that takes place entirely in his sub-conscious mind. The most famous instance of this is in "The Daffodils". As we know from his sister's Journal he had seen these daffodils on the banks of Ullswater two years before he wrote the poem, and in those two years the whole experience was modified in his mind. He no longer saw them with Dorothy Wordsworth, but "wandered lonely as a cloud". The whole experience became something more solitary, more intense. Because the process equivalent to invention has gone on subconsciously the effect is of complete naturalness. The one touch of fancy, the likening of the daffodils to the stars in the milky way, is a metaphor of nature, and of common nature. There is nothing of the conceit in it. This poem shows that Wordsworth's greatness is not in invention, but in truth ; yet not in truth interpreted as mere fact, but as fact transfigured by the imagination.

As to the second characteristic of artificial style, the use of literary models, there is no doubt that Wordsworth's practice was almost to ignore them. Not quite, for he had the Miltonic sonnet much in mind when he composed many of his own. But the reader can come to Wordsworth's sonnets knowing much less of Milton's than he needs to know of the pastoral convention if he is to enjoy "Lycidas". Wordsworth was personally responsive to

much of the great literature of the past, though this may not have been as marked in him as in some other poets, but it did not very much influence his writing. One may indeed read him almost without any study of previous literature. He was consciously breaking with a recent tradition and he found his support less in other or opposite traditional modes than in his own strength and originality. The use of the word "ballad" in his revolutionary volume of 1798 does no doubt suggest a return to an older popular tradition, but any such influence was so diffuse for Wordsworth as to mean very little. It meant more for Coleridge. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is very different indeed from a mediæval ballad—its quality is not in objective impersonality but in the concentration of interest in what went on in the mind of the mariner himself—though the influence of the old ballads can be felt in it. There is hardly anything comparable in Wordsworth.

In a way it is idle to talk of what Wordsworth lost and gained by this absence of models: he had to make the break he did, and it was abundantly for the good of English poetry that he did so. But one general reflection may be in place. It is not difficult for a young writer of some mimetic skill, and bred to a tradition that on the whole he accepts, to write poems that will avoid apparent errors of taste: his difficulty will be rather to express his own original experience through a familiar convention. But those who feel that the time has come for a decisive shift, are bound, if only because they are experimenting (as Wordsworth said he was) to indulge in lapses that may make even not unfriendly critics wonder at moments if they will ever write well. When Wordsworth published the "Lyrical Ballads" the general tradition of Dryden and Pope, as it had been handed on and modified by Johnson,

Goldsmith and Crabbe, was still alive. To turn from it in some measure was not perhaps to be sensationally risky, for "as every schoolboy knows" the Romantic Movement had its precursors; but to turn from it as thoroughly as Coleridge and Wordsworth did must have seemed to many critics deliberately to invite the risk of sinking in verse. Even when they had something classical in mind the Lake Poets seemed able to sink: Canning's parody of Southey's sapphics, "The Friend of Humanity and the Needy Knife-Grinder" (printed in the "Anti-Jacobin") is a delightful example of the protest of men of good taste. And in the early work of Wordsworth there is plenty of material for those who wish to show that if you abandon tradition and good models you are bound to slide into bathos. Indeed you are. But if a poet does not risk bathos, in conception and in language, he will never give a major re-direction to his nation's poetry. And sometimes such a re-direction is necessary.

As to the third quality of artificial poetry, the use of a special diction, Wordsworth gave his own answer, even if it was not entirely adequate. The wider implications of his statements in the famous Preface of 1800, whether they expressed what he really meant or not, were of course thoroughly discussed by Coleridge in his "Biographia Literaria", and by and large the verdict of Coleridge still stands. There is no doubt that Wordsworth's formulations were faulty. The term, "the language really used by men", is of course equivocal. If the poet is then permitted to make a "selection" from this, Wordsworth's original contention about the purer speech of rustic life has little left to it. (According to the summary of Coleridge's seventeenth chapter he proposed to show that the language of Milton was as much the language of real

life, and indeed incomparably more so than the language of the cottager : it is most disappointing—although entirely Coleridgean—that when one turns to the chapter one finds nothing of this comparison at all.) Wordsworth, again, was quite wrong about metre, and quite wrong in maintaining that "there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition". But, without going over this familiar ground again, there are one or two things that need to be said before we come to Wordsworth's main achievement in "natural" poetry, which of course still stands irrespective of any doubtful propositions he may have advanced in prose or any lapses he may have made in verse.

There are very interesting changes between Wordsworth's aims as stated in the Advertisement to the "Lyrical Ballads" of 1798 and in the Preface to the edition of 1800. In the Advertisement Wordsworth said : " The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertaining how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure". The volume then was experimental, only some of the poems in it were part of the experiment, and the experiment in diction was directly related to the speech of the "lower orders".

The Preface formulates the aim much more generally. We hear a fair amount about the purity of country manners and country language, but less about the language of the lower classes. The proposal here was "to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of the imagination".

One may fairly suppose that even in the course of these two years Wordsworth had come to doubt whether he was a poet of the people in the sort of way that Burns was. After his first enthusiasm for the French Revolution and his reaction from its later course he had no doubt persuaded himself that while his own vocation was that of a poet he could carry over into literature what was right in the ideals he had learned in France and fuse them with his own origins and disposition. So he would write citizen's poetry. The aim did him great credit. But it was at first interpreted too crudely, and in a way that ran counter to his true genius. He lived among the "statesmen" or working owners of small estates in the Lake District, but he was not one of them as Burns was a Lowland peasant farmer. Nor did he have the geniality of temperament that would enable them to accept him as one of themselves (there is plenty of evidence of that in the "Reminiscences of Wordsworth" that Canon Rawnsley took down from those who had known Wordsworth there—they found him "a desolate-minded man" and "quite one to himself"). And, though it would have pained him to have been told so, he did not have an ear for their speech or any ability to write in it, as Burns wrote in Lowland Scots. After all, in spite of a northern burr, Wordsworth did not use their speech himself: Burns did use the speech of his neighbours, it was his as much as theirs.

It is not surprising then that this experiment in subject-matter and diction, as it was first defined in terms of a class, soon ran its course. Already in 1798 "Tintern Abbey" (one of the last poems to be included in the volume) had indicated where Wordsworth's true strength was to lie, and the language appropriate to it. This language might well be described as natural, but it could

not be described as the language of the lower and middle-classes of society. Editions of the "Lyrical Ballads" subsequent to 1800 contained a higher proportion of poems that could not be considered as coming within the original experiment. And in the edition of 1815 the Preface itself, with its wider formulation, was relegated to an Appendix. Really the experiment had been pretty well over by 1800. The masterpiece in this line was to have been "Peter Bell", and from the fact that Wordsworth kept this poem by him unpublished for twenty-one years it has been surmised that he had not been too happy about the experiment's success.

The widening of the formulation between 1798 and 1800 did not really get Wordsworth out of his difficulty so far as theory was concerned. For there was a class element in his original protest, and the fact that he did not prove very good at writing in the actual language of cottagers could not obscure this fact. When he went on to talk only of a "selection of language really used by men" he laid himself open to the retort that quite a number of poets of whom he thought little had indeed written in the language of men really used in their own circles.

Pope, for instance, is often set up as an "artificial", urban antithesis to the natural, rural Wordsworth. But consider this passage in which Pope, alluding to the author of a poor play called "The Virgin Queen" takes him as the type of scribblers who pester him for help:

> Bless me ! a packet. " 'Tis a stranger sues,
> A virgin tragedy, an orphan muse."
> If I dislike it, "Furies, death, and rage !"
> If I approve, "Commend it to the stage."
> There (thank my stars) my whole commission ends,
> The players and I are, luckily, no friends.

Fired that the house reject him, "'Sdeath, I'll print it,
And shame the fools—Your interest, sir, with Lintot !"
Lintot, dull rogue ! will think your price too much :
"Not, sir, if you revise it, and retouch."
All my demurs but double his attacks ;
At last he whispers, "Do ; and we go snacks."
Glad of a quarrel, straight I clap the door,
"Sir, let me see your works and you no more."

What language could be more natural, more like the language really used by men, than that ? The truth is, that just as in political theory the antithesis between natural man and political man is false (since, as Aristotle said, it is natural for men to be political), so in literature it is natural to express the mode of living of civilised societies. Wordsworth's real complaint against such a passage would have been that its appeal was limited to those who moved in more or less fashionable London, that it was trivial both in conception and diction, and that it did not go deep enough into our nature.

The important thing about Wordsworth is that his whole poetry was original and revolutionary in its effects, "Tintern Abbey" indeed more so than poems like "We Are Seven". This goes deeper than any question of diction. What Wordsworth did was to renew the life of the imagination in English poetry, to express a response to life in which he was profoundly original and yet potentially the spokesman for an immense number of people. The subject cannot be separated from diction, for the revolution had to be made through language, but it is not one of diction only.

Poor Gray, who comes in for such adverse criticism in Wordsworth's Preface (and not very discriminating criticism, as Coleridge pointed out) had tried to achieve a poetic revolution through language in another sense,

through a special diction that was almost an end in itself. Johnson was perfectly right in saying that Gray "thought this language more poetical as it was more remote from common use". Conscious of the flatness of poetry in his time, of its lack of imaginative vitality, Gray thought that, if he could only get away to subjects more exciting and language more striking, vitality would come back. The "Elegy" is of course incomparable. But Johnson again is right in making it an exception. It may be like Gray the person, but it is quite unlike Gray the poetic practitioner. In his typical poems Gray wanted to do from the outside what Wordsworth understood could be done only from the inside, from deep inside the human spirit. Gray's false remedy, however well-meant, made his example even more misleading than that which he tried to correct. Wordsworth, because he felt and saw things with a deep imaginative power which demanded its own mode of speech, was therefore right to attack Gray and all he stood for, though he did it uncommonly badly.

Now chronologically speaking Wordsworth discovered what was wrong with English poetry before he fully discovered where his own greatness lay. The poorer poems by Wordsworth in the "Lyrical Ballads" constituted what was, so to speak, a false start from the right place: they came from a desire to open a new vein of deeply imaginative poetry, far wider than the prevalent mode made possible, but this desire took a false turn outwards into a kind of poetic social democracy instead of its true turn inwards that Wordsworth began to discover with "Tintern Abbey" and the first drafts of the early books of the "Prelude".

These remarks can be supported, and some light perhaps be thrown on the connection between language

and subjects that are natural by looking at a poem that is neither very good nor very bad, and that represents Wordsworth in a transitional stage between what I have called his false start and his true development. Coleridge said that "Resolution and Independence" was inconstant in its style and was especially characteristic of its author, there being "scarcely a defect or excellence in his writings of which it would not present a specimen". The same is even more strikingly true of "Lucy Gray", a poem written in 1799 and published the year after. I once heard Professor Chauncey Tinker, of Yale, suggest that the poem could be read with the omission of the middle stanzas and would then make one of the finest short poems by Wordsworth. It might be interesting first to see it in this form. Oddly enough the whole runs on admirably, as if there were no break:

Oft had I heard of Lucy Gray:
And, when I crossed the wild,
I chanced to see at break of day
The solitary child.

No mate, no comrade Lucy knew;
She dwelt on a wide moor,
—The sweetest thing that ever grew
Beside a human door!

You yet may spy the fawn at play,
The hare upon the green;
But the sweet face of Lucy Gray
Will never more be seen.

—Yet some maintain that to this day
She is a living child;
That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
Upon the lonesome wild.

O'er rough and smooth she trips along,
And never looks behind ;
And sings a solitary song
That whistles in the wind.

The poem, as it stands here, would justify Wordsworth's note that it "might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative influences which I have endeavoured to throw over common life with Crabbe's matter of fact style of treating subjects of the same kind. This is not spoken to his disparagement, far from it ; but to direct the attention of thoughtful readers, into whose hands these notes may fall, to a comparison that may both enlarge the circle of their sensibilities, and tend to produce in them a catholic judgment".

Again, in the poem as written above, there is not a word that belongs to a specialised poetic diction. The two slight touches of art—the inversion in the second stanza and "o'er"—are hardly noticeable. The language, in the full Coleridgean sense, may indeed be the language of poetry, but the vocabulary and the construction are certainly those also of prose.

The really significant thing about this "natural" poem is the vantage-point from which Wordsworth speaks. This, throughout these five verses, is from within his own subjective imagination. We are told practically nothing of Lucy Gray ; and it does not matter in the least. All we know is that she is a child who for the poet is the image and symbol of solitary life, growing by the side of humanity but as seemingly independent of it as she is of the "touch of earthly years". (Like the "Lucy" poems, "Lucy Gray" was composed in Germany ; he recollected an experience there in tranquillity and reshaped it in the imagination under the stress of powerful feeling.) We feel that every-

thing in these verses is natural, in the sense that we accept its appropriateness without question and without consciousness of any intrusive touch of art.

Now if we look at the poem Wordsworth actually printed we experience a terrible sense of anticlimax after the third stanza. The poem goes on :

"To-night will be a stormy night—
You to the town must go ;
And take a lantern, Child, to light
Your mother through the snow."

"That, Father ! will I gladly do :
'Tis scarcely afternoon—
The minster-clock has just struck two,
And yonder is the moon !"

We feel at once that we are in the presence of something fantastic—not the fantastic we delight in, but the fantastic that worries us because it wishes to pass as sober truth. Why the surprising change ? Because Wordsworth has ceased to speak his own thoughts and is trying to show us an ordinary father and daughter speaking theirs. We don't believe him. This may be the "conversation of the middle and lower classes of society" as he conceives it, but it is not as we have heard it. The "real language of men" turns out to be no language at all—we very much prefer the real language of Wordsworth. "You to the town must go" may be plain prose in each isolated word, but the inversion of the normal order of words turns the simple into the silly. "That, Father! will I gladly do" takes us straight into the world of Sunday School namby-pamby with its versified anecdotes of unreal children who are too good for words. The poem has suddenly gone wrong

When Lucy and her father cease to speak it gets a little better. The plain narrative is just passable, but it never has the quality of mystery that one feels so finely at the beginning and at the end of the poem.

This middle section shows Wordsworth trying to be natural in accordance with his theory, but failing because he departs from the principles that gave power to the poem as we first read it. The language is not that of ordinary life, but a travesty ; the poet is not writing of his own mind set aglow by his imagination, but is attempting to portray other people dramatically ; and as these things do not come naturally to him they do not seem natural to the reader. In these circumstances the attempt to be natural only makes the poem sound artificial.

Now this suggests that one cannot write poetry that will convince the reader as natural simply by selecting subjects that for some social or philosophical reason one feels ought to be closer to the essential nature of life than others. Poetry, to be natural, must come out of the poet's own nature. In this famous experiment Wordsworth had the elements of his poetic greatness—imaginative power, freedom from gaudy diction, personal strength and responsible social interest—but he had them wrongly mixed. This did violence to his own nature, and the result was unnatural "natural" poetry.

The successful parts of "Lucy Gray" indicate what the right and happy combination of these elements was. When Wordsworth tried to see with other people's eyes and speak with their voices, he failed ; when they came into the field of his vision at a time when he was moved to more than ordinary imaginative excitement, so that he saw them in an ideal light, then he could succeed magnificently. This distinction between his lack of dramatic

imagination and his strong subjective imagination was observed by Shelley in his otherwise trivial poem "Peter Bell the Third". As to the first Shelley said roughly "he had no more imagination than a pint-pot" ; as to the second he paid inevitable tribute to his pre-eminence. Hazlitt said much the same. "Mr. Wordsworth's poems in general are the history of a refined and contemplative mind, conversant only with itself and nature. . . . However we may sympathise with Mr. Wordsworth in his attachment to groves and fields, we cannot extend the same admiration to their inhabitants or to the manners of country life in general. We go along with him, while he is the subject of his own narrative, but we take leave of him when he makes pedlars and ploughmen his heroes and the interpreters of his sentiments. It is, we think, getting into low company, and company, besides, that we do not like. We take Mr. Wordsworth himself for a great poet, a fine moralist, and a deep philosopher; but if he insists on introducing us to a friend of his, a parish clerk, or the barber of the village, who is as wise as himself, we must be excused if we draw back with some little want of cordial faith."

When Wordsworth does not force a particular introduction upon us, but invites us to look upon the figure of a man or woman from a distance, and seen in an ideal light, these objections vanish and we seem to be in a more natural world of poetry. Actually, although the apparent subject matter may be different, it is the same world that Wordsworth takes us into as in "Tintern Abbey" and other highly subjective poems : the world of his own inner imagination. Sometimes his imagination works upon his feelings about himself, sometimes on his feelings about men and women, sometimes on his feelings about the country

or the time he lives in. But in nearly all Wordsworth's great poetry the vantage-point is the same. In some the pressure of personal feeling demands a heightening of style, in others the style is rightly bare and plain. And both we accept as natural, and as distinct equally from a style of deliberate artifice and from a style of unintended bathos.

The "Prelude" is of assistance in realising how, for his poems about men and women, the discovery of the right point of view, the place where they come into focus for him, was all-important. Wordsworth grew up seeing men and women not sentimentally but yet in the ideal light of childhoood ; this culminated in his idealist experience (for it was certainly not a realistic one) of the French Revolution ; then came a recoil, then a false start on the track of poetic social democracy, then finally an ideal view again but fuller and richer than the first. Of the later hardening of his human attitudes (for they did harden, however much Professor de Selincourt and Professor Batho argue for the other side) there is no need to speak here.

Wordsworth tells in the "Prelude" how as a schoolboy he first became conscious of Man. (The link of feeling with a poem like "Michael" will be felt at once) :—

> A rambling schoolboy, thus
> I felt his presence in his own domain,
> As of a lord and master, or a power,
> Or genius, under Nature, under God,
> Presiding ; and severest solitude
> Had more commanding looks when he was there.
> When up the lonely brooks on rainy days
> Angling I went, or trod the trackless hills
> By mists bewildered, suddenly mine eyes
> Have glanced upon him distant a few steps,

In size a giant, stalking through thick fog,
His sheep like Greenland bears ; or, as he stepped
Beyond the boundary line of some hill shadow,
His form hath flashed upon me, glorified
By the deep radiance of the setting sun ;
Or him have I descried in distant sky,
A solitary object and sublime,
Above all height ! like an aerial cross,
Of the Chartreuse, for worship. Thus was man
Ennobled outwardly before mine eyes,
And thus my heart was early introduced
To an unconscious love and reverence
Of human nature ; hence the human form
To me became an index of delight,
Of grace and honour, power and worthiness.

Now this seeing Man in an ideal light did not at all preclude "keeping the eye upon the object". Wordsworth was not only right, but in conformity with his own practice, in insisting on that. He did that as those who had written of Corins and Phyllises in the fields never could (or intended to, one should add). That is where he is natural as distinct from artificial. On the other hand, he is not what is sometimes called "naturalistic", as his own proper distinction between himself and Crabbe shows. His capacity for combining exact observation with this faculty of seeing a man or a woman as a symbol, might be well illustrated from the picture of the leech-gatherer in "Resolution and Independence", or from this picture of a poverty-stricken girl he saw in France :

And when we chanced
One day to meet a hunger-bitten girl,
Who crept along fitting her languid gait
Unto a heifer's motion, by a cord

Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane
Its sustenance, while the girl with pallid hands
Was busy knitting in a heartless mood
Of solitude, and at the sight my friend
In agitation said, "'Tis against *that*
That we are fighting", I with him believed
That a benignant spirit was abroad
Which might not be withstood, that poverty
Abject as this would in a little time
Be found no more, that we should see the earth
Unthwarted in her wish to recompense
The meek, the lowly, patient child of toil.

This is poetry of reflective description suffused with feeling, not poetry of the highest imaginative pressure like "Tintern Abbey", but its effect of natural truth and genuineness contrasts immediately with many of the descriptions of scenes and people in the poorer early ballads. The unnamed girl with the heifer is much more natural and real to us than Harry Gill or Betty Foy and their like. She is not merely particularised: she is both particular and general.

This may be seen even more clearly in "Michael". In this poem Wordsworth took some particular details from a real occurrence, adapted them to his own purpose, and created in his imagination a story of a father and son which expressed most movingly the idea of paternal loyalty and affection. In the opening section Wordsworth explains how the tale, heard in his childhood, had wrought upon his own imagination and had widened his human sympathies. In recollection the figure of Michael, one might say, has flashed upon him, glorified, "as he stepped beyond the boundary line of some hill shadow," like the figure of Man described in the passage from the "Prelude"

quoted earlier. Being at ease with himself, in his own element, Wordsworth can write without any sense of strain.

His subject is such as he said in the Preface he had wished to choose. It fits every one of the particulars he enumerates :

"The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect ; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature." Now if a poet discovers that there is a way in which he can do this naturally (and Wordsworth could claim this with "Michael" though not with "The Idiot Boy") then he has it in him to achieve something very great and something that will communicate greatness naturally to a wide public. It will do so because his situations are from common life and are immediately recognisable by a wide range of readers ; because these situations may properly and fully be described in words that belong to the great common stock ; because the feelings described go deep into the nature of all of us ; and because the poet can himself see and portray them with imaginative power.

Not all poetry need be, or could be, of this kind. There may well have been poets who would have been happy had they lived in a society which permitted them this sense of unity with ordinary people, or who would have

written thus had they believed that it was the common rather than the uncommon things which spoke most profoundly to their own imagination. There have been many poets who have felt that they lived in the wrong time and place, and have cried with Matthew Arnold to his Scholar Gipsy:

> O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
> And life ran gaily as the sparking Thames;
> Before this strange disease of modern life,
> With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
> Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts, was rife.

It is no use lecturing poets that they "must" speak for the people, must convey a sense of the solidarity of society, must think always of the ordinary man. A poet, like anyone else if he is to do any good, must be true to himself. Otherwise what he writes will at most be slogans; it will not be worth much, it will not be literature. If he forces the pace, even of his own free will, as Wordsworth at first did, the poetry will "come out wrong", and the natural will turn into the artificial.

But if, like Wordsworth, he feels a genuine sense of community, finds himself moved much more by the great common things of life than by the unusual, the learned or the "precious", and can write of these things from his own deepest imaginative centre, then he is personally fortunate and literature is likely to be permanently enriched.

Even if one lives in a society in which such an achievement seems almost too much to be hoped for, it is of great importance that there should be such literature in our possession and that it should be widely read. For there is always a tendency for the arts to become a mere cult, for

people of cultivated tastes to thank God a shade too much that they are not as other men are, and for distinctions that are important for us all to be cultivated as if they added merely to the self-importance of a few. Wordsworth of course is not the only poet who has placed himself centrally to humanity and so provided a proof that those who think nothing popular can be good are wrong. Shakespeare, in spite of the greater difficulty of some of his language, might certainly be claimed on the same side. But Wordsworth did it more consciously than any other English poet. And he is doubly interesting, because if on this side of the argument Wordsworth (so to speak) is the short answer to Wilde, so on the other side he is the answer to those social propagandists who want to force all poets into one popular mould. For the paradox about Wordsworth is that this Social-minded Man was a Solitary, and the social poetry only worked when he wrote as a Solitary, not when he wrote as a crude propagandist. Every other poet has as much right as Wordsworth to demand that he be left free to find himself in his own way.

This combination of the social-minded man and the solitary in Wordsworth may be beautifully illustrated from another well-known poem, "The Solitary Reaper". (There is an excellent study of it in Professor Charlton's book "The Art of Literary Study" and nothing so lengthy will be attempted here.) It is again a sign of the strength that came to Wordsworth when he distanced himself from his subject, and lived it in his imagination, that this poem did not arise from any personal incident in Wordsworth's tour of Scotland at all. As is well known, it grew in his mind from a passage he read in Thomas Wilkinson's "Tour in Scotland". Professor de Selincourt and Miss Darbishire quote the passage in their edition of Words-

worth's Poetical Works :—"Passed by a Female who was reaping alone, she sung in Erse as she bended over her sickle, the sweetest human voice I ever heard. Her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious long after they were heard no more". This passage worked powerfully in Wordsworth's mind and the poem welled up in his imagination.

The poem is less about the girl than about the effect of her singing on Wordsworth. All that we are told of her is that she was alone in the field, that she was reaping, and that she sang as she reaped. She does and says nothing in her own right. But this is enough: Wordsworth is following the method of the opening and end of "Lucy Gray" and not that of the middle. He is being himself, not failing to be Crabbe. Because the poem is really about what happened to Wordsworth when he heard her song in his mind's ear we, like the poet, can feel at ease and the poem can become something that happens to us. So strong is the spell that although the word "I" occurs three times in the final stanza there is no sense of intrusive egotism.

Instead of feeling an obligation to tell a touching story or to set poor people moving and talking before us, Wordsworth feels free to write of this girl as an emanation of his own mind ; to intensify the impression that she makes upon him by that wonderful double comparison of the nightingale among the Arabian sands and of the cuckoo "breaking the silence of the seas among the farthest Hebrides" ; to wonder whether she is singing of "old, unhappy far-off things, and battles long ago" or of more familiar matter of to-day ; and, finally, as he imagines himself mounting up the hill to say, almost in the words of his original,

The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

That, we feel, is true, whether it "happened" or not. It was the kind of experience that did happen to Wordsworth and that becomes real when he writes of it.

The last couplet is interesting, in view of Wordsworth's apparent belief that there was no essential difference between the language of prose and the language of metrical composition. Compare it with Wilkinson's statement that the strains of her singing "felt delicious long after they were heard no more". Wordsworth has, in a way, kept very close. There was point in his famous statement, although it is wrong as it stands. The kind of point there is may be seen by comparing this verse rendering of Wilkinson with the verse rendering by Dr. Johnson (quoted by Wordsworth in the Appendix to his Preface) of "Go to the ant, thou sluggard" from the Book of Proverbs :

Turn on the prodent Ant thy heedless eyes,
Observe her labours, Sluggard, and be wise,

and so on. Wordsworth calls this Johnson rendering a "hubbub of words", fairly enough. Verse for Wordsworth does not gain its distinction by a false added dignity of big words. But why is his own version of Wilkinson great poetry and the original not ? One notes, first, the sure instinct which has prompted Wordsworth to leave out the word "delicious" : its associations are too trivial, too much those of a light sophistication, for the deep experience which this had now become. The addition "the music in my heart I bore" is no mere device to get a rhyme for the last line : it expresses the essence of Wordsworth's habit of mind, the remembering, and in part the transforming, of experiences brought to his inner mind through the eyes

and ears and giving him the sense of joy and the sense of mystery which he valued above everything else. (This cultivated habit of mind is commented on and illustrated admirably in Mr. J. C. Smith's "Wordsworth".)

But the essential difference between a Wilkinson and a Wordsworth is—or, perhaps it would be better to say, is indicated by—rhythm in the language. As we read Wilkinson's sentence we know that he very much enjoyed the girls' singing. As we read Wordsworth's lines we know that this had moved him to the heart. Rhythm, though it can be felt so much more easily than it can be described (and it cannot be measured, whatever we learn of "prosody") is, as Dr. Richards showed in his early favourable criticism of T. S. Eliot, a most authentic test of poetry. It is the rhythm in Wordsworth's great poetry that wins us at once ; it is the bad rhythms of "The Idiot Boy" and of the middle of "Lucy Gray" that give Wordsworth away. The rhythms of the opening and end of "Lucy Gray" and of the whole of "The Solitary Reaper" are assured. They flow with the experience that is taking place in Wordsworth's mind. There is nothing forced ; there is no feeling that the words and the tune have been born separately. Wordsworth, like the Solitary Reaper, is singing unself-consciously from himself.

His poetry is created in the same way when he is moved, not by thoughts of men and women who have come into his vision, but by his response to what he called "Nature", to the country in which he lived and to the universal frame of things beyond it. His apprehension of this is imaginative, not intellectual. Coleridge kept expressing the hope that Wordsworth would write a truly great philosophical poem—this indeed is what the "Prelude" was to have been a prelude to, and the "Excursion"

represents one part of the projected whole. But Wordsworth could never have written a great philosophical poem, if by that one understands a poem embodying an intellectually comprehended framework of thought, for Wordsworth was not in this sense of the word a philosopher. (Indeed he spoke of the "meddling" intellect.) This does not mean that he lacked intellectual power in the sense in which certain musicians (such as Beethoven) may be said to have it: he had strength of mind and the capacity to organise his experience. But of analytical power or the power to form and use general theoretical concepts he had little, and his poetry is best when it takes this form least. His strength is in his imagination, the harmonised subjective feeling of his response to life as he lived it.

Now in the poetry of this kind by Wordsworth we find the same kind of paradox that is applicable to his social poetry. Just as his social poetry is most convincing and seems most natural when he sees men and women from the point of view of a sympathetic and imaginative solitary, so his poetry about Nature is most convincing and most natural when we are caught up in the stream of his subjective feeling.

Here we approach again what we saw especially in the passage describing the dawn as he walked home over the hills, the distinctive Wordsworthian experience. Wordsworth was right in tracing the sources of his poetic power back to experiences of his childhood. It was only later (as we are told in "Tintern Abbey") that these deepened and included both a feeling for the "still, sad music of humanity" and "a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused", but the sense of mystery, felt in solitude, is there from the first. Wordsworth, so far

as we can judge, was no unsociable boy. He enjoyed the gang-life stage of boyhood quite normally, and in conditions of delightful freedom. But at moments he withdrew, and then the imagination began to work. Perhaps the finest of all his descriptions of this kind of experience is in the famous skating passage of the "Prelude". It is worth quoting again if only to emphasise this strength that comes from the imaginative response to the mystery of the universe felt in silent withdrawal.

> And in the frosty season, when the sun
> Was set, and visible for many a mile
> The cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom,
> I heeded not their summons : happy time
> It was indeed for all of us—for me
> It was a time of rapture ! Clear and loud
> The village clock tolled six,—I wheeled about,
> Proud and exulting like an untired horse
> That cares not for his home. All shod with steel,
> We hissed along the polished ice in games
> Confederate, imitative of the chase
> And woodland pleasures,—the resounding horn,
> The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.
> So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
> And not a voice was idle ; with the din
> Smitten, the precipices rang aloud ;
> The leafless trees and every icy crag
> Tinkled like iron : while far distant hills
> Into the tumult sent an alien sound
> Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars
> Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west
> The orange sky of evening died away.
> Not seldom from the uproar I retired
> Into a silent bay, or sportively
> Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,

To cut across the reflex of a star
That fled, and, flying still before me, gleamed
Upon the glassy plain ; and, oftentimes,
When we had given our bodies to the winds,
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion, then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short ; yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round !
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.

This is profoundly original poetry. It depends upon no tradition of art, upon no convention of attitude. But it is in no way an abnormal response, and it has been felt by most of us in some degree. It can be shared by those who would not describe themselves as mystics, and perhaps especially by those who—to adopt a distinction of Bertrand Russell's—value mysticism as a way of feeling though they reject it as a mode of "thought". Most powerful of all is the description of the way in which Wordsworth, suddenly stopping short, feels the whole frame of earth and the universe wheel round him while he is at the still centre of it and has an apprehension of its mystery without ever doing violence to fact.

Now the language in which this is expressed is not quite the barest Wordsworthian language, not quite like the line "And never lifted up a single stone". It could not be because the whole passage is charged with such powerful personal feeling. The slight turns of phrase that differentiate it from prose—apart from the all-important rhythm

—seem right. In the simile of the untired horse the inversion " cares not" is good, whereas (as we noted) a grammatical inversion in the middle part of "Lucy Gray" had seemed grotesque. "All shod with steel" expresses the excitement of the moment. The next three lines are the only ones in which the diction is doubtful: they seem a little "written up". But in the earlier version of the poem it must be admitted that they are the same, except that "bellowing" takes the place of "chiming", and the later "chiming" is undoubtedly better. The next few lines, which are tremendous in making the reader feel on his pulses what is being described, are, formally, just like prose except for the entirely justified inversion "with the din smitten" and perhaps the word "smitten" itself. At the end the word "diurnal" is not quite from ordinary speech. It is used again, of course, in that perfect epitaph, "A slumber did my spirit seal", in the second stanza of which there is exactly the same sense of the mystery of the revolving frame of things.

Poetry such as this clearly depends for its success upon one thing, and one thing only: the imaginative power behind it. When this "masterlight of all our seeing" wanes, there is very little else to put in its place. This is not to suggest, crudely, that "art" can ever take the place of "nature", that learning the supposed rules of poetry will ever make a man a poet who is not born so. Yet it is true that a sheer sense of style will sometimes save a writer or an artist in a bad place. If, however, your whole virtue, the principle upon which your self-expression has been built, is absence of conscious style, then when the master light is withdrawn there are hardly even candles to light at the tomb. Isadora Duncan, in her autobiography, made a comparison between her natural style of dancing, depend-

ing entirely on her power to express a personal inspiration, with that of the Russian ballet. She complained that the stylised movements of the latter checked the flow of inspiration, made for rigidity where there would have been free expression. The Russian dancers were taught that the spring of action was at the base of the spinal column, whereas she felt something in her solar plexus radiating outwards through her whole being. But, from all accounts, the later Isadora Duncan was rather a sad spectacle for those who had seen her in the days of her greatness. When the personal inspiration failed there was nothing else. No Russian ballerina could dance with routine alone, but sheer training and transmitted sense of style has saved many a corps de ballet, and perhaps many a ballerina, when the "inspiration" was not there in full power.

The style of the "Prelude" taken as a whole is of a very curious texture. It is certainly uneven. It is only at rare moments that the power of the poet rises to the heights of such passages as the one just quoted. But it is fair to take the style as a whole. One must give oneself a little time to get used to it. Many passages would have less than justice done to them if they were quoted in isolation, but if one reads them in sequence, under the spell of Wordsworth's whole flow of mind as he describes his own growth, they seem right. It is instructive to read the poem in Professor de Selincourt's edition, with the earlier and the later versions side by side ; but although sometimes there is a quality of simple freshness that wanes a little with revision most of the revisions are improvements. Some of the additions, too, are markedly fine. But it is a long poem that holds together, not because of any philosophical or structural power, but because of the interest of its subject

matter and because of a framework automatically supplied. The passages of reflective comment make a genuine part of the poetry, not necessarily because of their own poetic power, but because they comment interestingly on something that we have already felt in the poem itself. One suspects already, however, that were Wordsworth to get one step further away from the source of his imaginative power we should have verse of mere observation instead of genuine poetry. A passage in which Wordsworth explains why he values the kind of experience that made him a poet will illustrate this point :—

> For I would walk alone,
> Under the quiet stars, and at that time
> Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
> To breathe an elevated mood, by form
> Or image unprofaned ; and I would stand,
> If the night blackened with a coming storm,
> Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
> Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
> Thence did I drink the visionary power ;
> And deem not profitless those fleeting moods
> Of shadowy exultation : not for this,
> That they are kindred to our purer mind
> And intellectual life ; but that the soul,
> Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
> Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
> Of possible sublimity.

Now the observation in the concluding lines of this passage is obviously of extreme interest to anyone who is following Wordsworth's account of what gave him a sense of poetic power and of having an experience that was of real

value to express. It commends itself, also, as admirably just. There is no over-statement, here at least. If we had in plain prose to say why we thought the experience described in the skating passage was really important we could not put it better than Wordsworth has in these concluding lines.

But these lines are indeed perceptibly nearer prose than the earlier part of the passage where Wordsworth is not commenting on the experience, but experiencing it. In which lines here do we feel immediate poetry ? I would suggest, first, in the opening : "For I would walk alone under the quiet stars". Then there is a slight recession, for Wordsworth now is not feeling directly, but commenting. Then comes a superb passage in which we feel exactly as he must have felt, through the power of his words :

> and I would stand,
> If the night blackened with a coming storm,
> Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
> Or make their dim abodes in distant winds.

After that there is a slight, but real, falling-off. "Deem not profitless" is stilted. "Not for this, That they are kindred to our purer mind And intellectual life" is not really poetry at all. The intellect is meddling (Senor de Madariaga has a paradoxical essay to the effect that the trouble with Wordsworth is his determination to protest against the intellect in intellectual terms : there is something in the paradox). The passage picks up a little towards the very end as Wordsworth comes closer again to his living experience.

Now this mild example of the falling away of poetic power as the poet loses touch with his imaginative experi-

ence could be much extended, especially from Wordsworth's later works. Some of the poems of his great period (usually put as the ten years between 1797 and 1807) indeed show a most marked mixture of style and of powers. The famous Ode on the Intimations of Immortality (as we shall see in the chapter after next) contains both some of the most perfect poetry that Wordsworth wrote and at least one stanza that Coleridge rightly described as "mental bombast". Wordsworth survived till the year 1850 ; and went on writing. No doubt there has been until fairly recently too simple a view of the waning of his powers and the works of Professor de Selincourt and Professor Edith Batho have at least corrected this. But I think also that they have somewhat overstated the case on the other side. Though a fitful gleam of inspiration came to Wordsworth every now and then in his later years the traditional view of his later failure, if not held naively, is essentially right. Biographically, of course, the explanation of the reasons for this is a fascinating problem, though there is no space to go into this here.

We are concerned here with Wordsworth's poetry as an example of "natural" poetry, and some tentative conclusions seem to have emerged. In the first place English poetry owes a tremendous debt to Wordsworth for having renewed its imaginative power when this had waned owing either to the following of an exhausted convention or to wrongly conceived attempts to set this right. There must always be this appeal from art to nature. In the second place, we saw that Wordsworth himself at first failed to conceive in the right way the "nature" to which he was appealing. It is indeed as possible to be misled by wrong conceptions of what is natural as to be subdued to an inadequate convention of art. There must also always

be an appeal from nature to art. If poetry that attempts to be natural does so in the wrong way then the only result will be that it sounds artificial.

But what is the right way ? There is no one right way. The answer for every writer will be different. Wordsworth was entitled to try to make poetry about people in the lower and middle classes of society in the country, whatever the gibes of those who thought literature must be exclusive to a narrower circle. But he had to discover for himself that he could do this well only when he wrote from within his own imagination, not dramatically as if they were external to him, but subjectively as if they were part of his ideal vision of life. No application of a social formula in crude terms, even if it is self-applied, can produce great poetry.

Some poets in some periods will feel that they should write in the way of high-wrought art or of a specialised experience. But for some, as with Wordsworth, it may be possible to write of the great fundamental human experiences in language that, so far as vocabulary is concerned, is drawn from the broad common stock. This appeal from the coteries to humanity is an element of immense value in the tradition of a literature.

Poetry of this kind is likely to rest primarily on the strength and purity and harmony of the subjective feelings. When inspiration (which with different poets will have its different sources, but which originated for Wordsworth in experiences of a kind that he was fully indicated in the "Prelude") tends to fail, there may be a more sudden collapse than for a writer who is writing within a tradition that may sustain him. In any case, the achievement of a long poem of real excellence is much more difficult for a poet in this mode than it is for a poet writing in a tradition

of art. Wordsworth's one great long poem is sustained for reasons that are as it were accidental and that could not be repeated. The "Excursion", which may have fine passages but could hardly be described as a successful poem, emphasises this point.

That Wordsworth went on writing so long, and attempted so much where greatness could not really be his, helped in building up a "Wordsworthian" conception of life. What might be called Wordsworthianism drew not only from his great poetry but from his lesser reflective, or moralising or externally descriptive pieces. If Wordsworthianism gave him an added vogue in the later half of the nineteenth century it also assisted a certain reaction in the twentieth. But this reaction has never been against the great Wordsworth. He remains the greatest example in English poetry of a writer who writes directly, whose work is at once highly original and freely and widely available to anyone who will read him, and whose truth to human nature and human experience comes from a simple yet highly imaginative fidelity to his own. This, in his case, is what the natural mode of poetry means.

Four: T. S. Eliot and Impressionistic Style

To describe Mr. Eliot's way of writing as "impressionistic" is less adequate than to describe Milton as an "artificial" poet or Wordsworth as a "natural" one ; and neither of those terms, as we have seen, can be applied in a naive way. But perhaps the words impressionistic will serve to draw attention to one characteristic of Mr. Eliot's verse which differentiates it immediately from that of his predecessors. In quite an exceptional degree his poetry indicates where others state, and it indicates by means of a sequence of impressions (it may be of scenes, or of pregnant memories from life or literature, or of attitudes to life and systems of philosophy). As we saw from the short passage from "The Waste Land" analysed in the first chapter the reader has two tasks to which he may be unaccustomed, or to which he may think he is unaccustomed, from his normal reading of poetry: he has to go behind the hints given by the poet and build for himself such background of knowledge as may be necessary for understanding of the poem, and he has to make the links between the successive impressions in so far as he cannot feel the naturalness of the sequence without conscious effort.

Now this at once raises two serious problems. In the first place how can the reader be sure that the poem, apparently made in part by himself, is the poem the poet thought he had written, and how wide is the permissible range of variation ? In the second place, is this method of writing compatible with a reasonably satisfying structural unity,

and if so how does the poet achieve this when he is writing in such a way ?

There is of course a connection between the two questions. If the poet, by whatever appropriate means, is able to attain precision of feeling from impression to impression he may be able to build up a cumulative effect which will give unity to the whole. If, further, he can relate his successive impressions to one another in accordance with a conscious purpose he may lay down a pattern of response which is even compatible with the idea of formal structure. Now the particular style of which Mr. Eliot's poetry is the best contemporary example requires these qualities in a high degree, and Mr. Eliot, whose poetry and literary personality have now been before the public for many years, has persuaded the majority of serious readers of poetry that he does indeed possess these qualities. Much of the initial doubt about his poetry was due to the fact—not in itself surprising—that readers did not realise this, and they did not like an air of surface smartness about his early work which suggested very different qualities from the artistic patience and humility which he is now seen to have possessed over decades of careful perfecting of his way of writing. As he says in "East Coker" :

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating

In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate—but there is no competition—
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

The attitude to the problem of finding words for his thought that is expressed in this passage must win the respect of any fair-minded reader.

But it is also fair to say that this quality of deep seriousness about both life and the art of his poetry was not immediately evident in Mr. Eliot's earlier verse. It is possible, in the style in which he and some of his contemporaries have written, to gain smart effects without the depth and seriousness that alone can justify them. This style lends itself very easily to imitation by versifiers who really have nothing coherent to say, who have little learning behind their pregnant hints, and who employ this manner of writing for effect instead of for deep expression. The matter is complicated because it is not simply one of imitators. Apparently Mr. Eliot himself learned his early lessons in style from a writer, to whom he has paid high and indeed excessive tribute. This writer is Mr. Ezra Pound, to whom Mr. Eliot dedicated his "Waste Land" with the ascription "il miglior fabbro" (the better craftsman).

It is interesting at this passage of time to look back to what Dr. Leavis said of Ezra Pound's poetry in his "New Bearings in English Poetry" (1932) and to the reply of

Mr. John Sparrow in "Sense and Poetry" (1934). Dr. Leavis already had his doubts about Mr. Pound, as may be seen by his comments on the latter's "Cantos" and one suspects, if only from the argument from silence, that these have gone further since that time. But he was making a sort of loyal effort to follow Mr. Eliot's lead, and pronounced "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" a great poem. Mr. Sparrow may have been unresponsive to the need for a new development in English verse but his comments on this poem of Mr. Pound's seem to be nearer the mark now than Dr. Leavis' rather forced attempts to reveal his genius. There is one fine short poem in the "Mauberley" sequence, the one beginning "These fought in any case", and, as Dr. Leavis recognised, this has a depth (far beyond mere cleverness) that comes from the full experience of the misery and hypocrisy of the years of the first World War. But elsewhere there is too much mere staccato smartness. What excited Dr. Leavis was the attempt in style to combine the conversational, even the flippant, with the serious. It was the manner of Ezra Pound, much more than the matter, that interested Mr. Eliot, as he has made clear. Not that Mr. Eliot has acquired from Mr. Pound a manner, as one might acquire a suit of clothes. The "Four Quartets", in surface style apart from any other qualities, is vastly different from "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". But from Mr. Pound undoubtedly came an important stylistic impetus, an indication that something could be done in another way. This phenomenon, of a poet of real merit gaining an impetus in style from one much his inferior, is not unparalleled. Blake, who at the end of the eighteenth century found English poetry almost dead ("The sound is forced, the notes are few") got away from the paralysing

conventions of the time largely under the influence, as Dr. Tillyard has pointed out, of the hymns of the Evangelical Sunday School. That does not prevent one from considering even Dr. Johnson a more impressive poet than Isaac Watts. In the same way those who, fifteen and twenty years ago, refused to accept Pound as well as Eliot, although the "modernist" critics insisted, were quite right.

The difference of quality in the use of these new methods was first observable very early in Mr. Eliot's career, in his "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". In this poem there is a certain cleverness, but there is something else too. The cleverness expresses a mood, a mood which primarily no doubt is that of disillusionment with the futility of city life, but which cannot be neatly formulated "on a pin". One of Mr. Eliot's teachers at Harvard, Professor Irving Babbitt, quotes a remark made by Flaubert in a letter to Georges Sand: "I had in my youth a very complete presentiment of life. It was like a sickly kitchen smell escaping from a basement window". Professor Babbitt explains how romantic longing often takes the form of a realism that breaks with decorum, of satiric disillusion. The early Eliot, whose presentiment of life was not unlike Flaubert's, wrote very much under this kind of inspiration. But this deepened into a mood of emotional starvation, feeding itself bitterly and without satisfaction on the futilities of decadent-civilised society. As if perhaps protecting himself from seeming to make too final what was an attitude held passingly and experimentally, Eliot made such poems as "Prufrock" and "Gerontion" dramatic. One cannot quite say (a point that Professor Matthiessen emphasises) that this is Eliot speaking. One may if one likes put the name in inverted commas, to indicate a half-assumed

character, and speak of the character behind them as "Eliot".

The opening of "Prufrock" is certainly too mannered:

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table.

(A much finer "metaphysical" use of the figure of an operating room is to be found in the "Four Quartets", in Section IV of "East Coker"). But the next two sections of the poem, framed between

> In the room the women come and go
> Talking of Michelangelo

and the same couplet (not unlike Pound) at the end, a shorthand indication of art-chatter at tea-parties, should convince anyone that here is a genuine poetic gift. After the first use of the couplet the poem goes on:

> The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
> The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
> Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
> Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
> Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys
> Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
> And seeing that it was a soft October night,
> Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

The comparison—nowhere directly stated—between the fog and a cat, is amazing. It is the sort of thing that was bound to break out of the confines of a Georgian sonnet. It has brought into the purview of poetry a whole area of experience that before was bound to be left outside. And there is no doubt at all that it "comes off", and without

forcing. That it could not have been written in the mode either of Milton or of Wordsworth is obvious.

The next paragraph, before the second use of the Michelangelo couplet, shows the use of the trivial for a serious purpose that Dr. Leavis saw (I think wrongly) in Pound:

> And indeed there will be time
> For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
> Rubbing its back upon the window-panes ;
> There will be time, there will be time
> To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet ;
> There will be time to murder and create,
> And time for all the works and days of hands
> That lift and drop a question on your plate ;
> Time for you and time for me,
> And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
> And for a hundred visions and revisions,
> Before the taking of a toast and tea.

The juxtaposition of the great and sensational, murdering and creating, works and days (with perhaps an echo of Hesiod), with the triviality of hands "that lift and drop a question on your plate"—mere talk—is ironical. So is the juxtaposition of the great visions and decisions (that may be postponed) with the immediate business of the moment, "toast and tea". All this builds up, as the poem continues, into a picture of a man (his very name, "J. Alfred Prufrock", is ridiculous) who is too semi-civilised to trust his instincts, who hesitates but is no Hamlet (merely an attendant lord or so, at whom the eternal Footman snickers), who dares not risk the emotional upheaval of love (for after all she might say that was not what she had meant at all), who, in short, is afraid. It is a portrait of a type, not unlike what the seventeenth century called a

"character", but it is brought to life, made to speak and move, not analysed statically.

And what is the virtue of the impressionistic method ? Let us take two examples that follow one another immediately in the poem. Prufrock knows the arms "braceleted and white and bare", arms that "lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl", of the women to whom he would say something of love : but how should he begin ?

> Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
> And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
> Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows ?

That is all : merely a single impression, but particularised and vivid, so that it loses almost all its effect by translation into generalised prose. It is as if Prufrock were to say that he had been through the streets of this sprawling city, at dusk when work is over and men want the comfort of home, working men rather different from those who talk of art-fashions in this drawing-room, but part of our common humanity. He has seen them, not looking inwards where they are contented, but sitting at the windows, lonely, getting what comfort they can from their pipes. Should he explain that he has seen life like this, and feels the poorness of it, and fears it for himself ?

> I should have been a pair of ragged claws
> Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

This is superb image-making. Again, put in mere generalised prose, it is as if Prufrock had broken off angrily with himself, and said he wished he were not civilised, not even human, so that there would have been no need to speak. He wishes he could have gone right back in the scale of evolution and taken what he wanted, ragged claws in

front, going quickly and instinctively about his business, with no need to speak, back in the silent sea from which all life once came.

From this slight early example it can be seen that it is possible to use images only and yet to have sequence, almost sequence of argument. When one reads these two short passages in sequence one may feel the need to rationalise them for oneself by providing the formal argument as a background, but if so then one must assume it and re-read the passages as poetry. Or the transition may be acceptable without any such rationalisation at all. Either seems to me permissible. That is one example of the way in which readings of a poem may legitimately differ for different readers. Some think more conceptually, some more visually. (I once asked a number of people what happened in their minds when they heard the line, "My love is like a red, red rose". Some had pictures at once, of one kind or another. Some even had no picture at all, the words did their work without visual intermediary. The latter were not necessarily less good readers of poetry than the former). What the reader is entitled to ask of the poet is that the impressionistic images be really evocative in accordance with his purpose and that the response set up in the reader shall form itself into a real pattern, so that the poem is a whole. This so early a work as "Prufrock" shows that Mr. Eliot can do. He appears to give us a world of nuclear fission. But it is in fact one world.

Now poetry that does this is not a new thing at all, though it is true to say, I think, that Mr. Eliot has developed this technique consciously so that it can be used at moments of comparatively low tension. Many poets have used the technique of the quickly shifting image at

moments of intense feeling. Their poetry at such moments may win complete acceptance from the reader though he would be hard put to it to give a paraphrase. Take for instance the lament of Cleopatra at the moment of the death of Antony :

> The crown o' the earth doth melt.—My lord !—
> O, wither'd is the garland of the war,
> The soldier's pole is fallen : young boys and girls
> Are level now with men : the odds is gone,
> And there is nothing left remarkable
> Beneath the visiting moon.

As Mr. Middleton Murray finely said, in this passage metaphor becomes itself a "mode of apprehension".

What Mr. Eliot has done, it seems to me, is to take this method of the quickly shifting image and to use it, not only when a current of deep feeling sweeps away the normal "substratum of prose", but almost throughout : at the level of meditation and reflection, at the level of apparently trivial conversation, as well as at times of high tension. "Prufrock" was at least a remarkable exercise in this manner, and it undoubtedly "comes off". But how far was it a *tour de force* ? Could such a method of writing be used successfully for a more serious and more sustained poem, the sort of comprehensive statement that would have taken the form of a long poem in earlier periods of literature ? This question was first answered by Mr. Eliot in "The Waste Land" and more recently in the "Four Quartets".

If one judges by the number of lines or of pages these are not very long poems. But they have been accepted as long poems in effect. And rightly so, for although the mode in which they are written involves a conciseness not to be found in the traditional long poem yet they do

attempt a comprehensive expression of the poet's experience of life and his age. "The Waste Land" was very soon recognised as a really significant comment on the experience of our times ; the "Four Quartets" have at once been accepted as the expression of a deep personal response to life extending over many years and not easily to be formulated, indeed perhaps not to be "formulated" at all. The critical and elucidatory literature about these poems is already large, and some of it is almost indispensable to the reader who wants to grasp these poems as well as to have a general satisfaction in reading them.* In this chapter I shall avoid as far as possible going over again the ground that has been covered already by critics and commentators on these two poems and shall do so only in so far as it is inevitable in making the points of contrast I wish to bring out between Mr. Eliot's mode of writing the long poem and more traditional ones.

In the long poems of the past unity has been given to the whole, sometimes by a factitious device (as in the "Canterbury Tales"), sometimes by a structure of allegory (as in the "Faerie Queen"), sometimes by the use of a subject matter which is accepted by the poet and presumably by his first readers as virtual truth, whether historical (as in the "Æneid") or religious (as in "Paradise Lost"). "The Waste Land" is in effect a long and inclusive poem, but without the customary supporting structure of either narrative or matter. This constitutes an initial difficulty for

* In my own reading of Mr. Eliot's poetry during the last twenty years I have been especially indebted to the early lectures of Mr. Leavis, heard at Cambridge, and to his reviews in "Scrutiny", to Mr. Edmund Wilson's "Axel's Castle", and to Professor Matthiessen's "The Achievement of T. S. Eliot". For comprehension of the "Four Quartets" Mr. Raymond Preston's "Four Quartets Rehearsed" and Miss Helen Gardner's essay in "Penguin New Writing", Number 29, are indispensable.

the reader; but it may not unreasonably be argued that this very feature makes a long poem acceptable at the present time as it could not otherwise have been, and that the poet's instinct was therefore right in prompting him here to break with tradition.

It is probably the rise of the novel that has brought to an end the possibilities of the long narrative poem for serious writing. These specialisings of function continually occur and there is as little point in regretting them as there is in continuing to write as if they had not happened. A drama can never be in twentieth century England or America what it was inclusively in fifth century Athens: a religious service, a civic festival, great poetry and great play-writing, and entertainment. No modern ballad can combine the qualities that were combined successfully in the mediæval ballads: lyric and epic, historical and dramatic, popular and poetic. The elements have separated themselves out. So with the narrative constituent of long poems. These may still be written at a certain level of interest, but no more. It seems impossible for works of this kind any longer to be major expressions of the consciousness of our time.

Now one of the interesting features of "The Waste Land" is that it does use material that has long been a favourite source of narrative poetry in English, the legends of King Arthur and the Round Table and the Holy Grail. Direct narrative use of this material has continued into our own day. Numerous nineteenth century poets turned to one or other of the Arthur stories—Tennyson, Arnold, Swinburne are the best known—and it has gone on to Edwin Arlington Robinson in the present century. But whatever the merits of the poets, these attempts do not really succeed. The vehicle is no longer suitable for expres-

sing the experience of our times. We may still enjoy the stories just as stories, but we do not see them with the simplicity that would enable us to use them satisfactorily for the expression of our own experience. And if a modern poet adopts them, using a narrative framework for his poem, the framework will not really fit the poetic content and will crush it. Mr. Eliot's instinct was right in prompting him not to use these legends in any direct narrative way, but, so to speak, to invoke them impressionistically as they contributed to the consciousness of a twentieth century writer aware of the studies that had given these legends their distinctive interest for our own time.

The factitious device for imposing a unity on a long poem might in theory still be used. Chaucer, of course, found a very happy device in his very probable assumption of a company of pilgrims assembling in Southwark and planning to tell each other stories on their way to Canterbury. And by adopting this device he gave his poem or collection of poems a satisfying coherence and at the same time allowed full play for the expression of his wide-ranging humanist philosophy of life. But such devices, centuries later, look rather thin. William Morris invented one for his "Earthly Paradise," and its unreality contributed to the result that that poem contained hardly anything of the real and full William Morris.

Even more out of court in these days is the use of a framework of allegory. In an age when what were once taken to be truths vouched for by religion are more and more being interpreted as allegories, avowed allegory can hardly be expected to retain that vestigial stamp of truth without which it cannot be accepted. The problems of behaviour are felt now to be too complex to be dealt with in such naive traditional categories. It is open to a poet to

make his own allegories, but little is available to him now of allegory with such an assured social base that he could use it as the framework for a serious long poem. He is as much concerned with symbols as poets ever were, but he must not risk their appearing pre-frozen and "processed".

A more difficult question to decide, for a poet who has deep and strong beliefs (whether religious or political), is how far they should be allowed to constitute the framework of his poem. There are of course still systems of belief that give great energising power to those who hold them, whether they be Catholic, Communist, Democratic Socialist, Humanitarian or what you will. But however strongly a writer may hold to his beliefs he cannot live publicly within their closed circle, for he must be conscious that they are much questioned by others, and for himself and for his readers must again and again be brought into juxtaposition with other systems. One consequence of this is that any writer who is not merely fanatical will have to ask himself the question how far it seems right to him to embody in his poem matter of argument. He may hold certain beliefs deeply, as Mr. Eliot does. But for Mr. Eliot the distinction between theology and the poetry of religious experience is, quite naturally and properly, a clearer one than it was for Dante or Milton. Perhaps it would be an exaggeration to say that Milton made the formulation of a religious system his first object in "Paradise Lost", but he at least came very near to thinking that was his first object. For a contemporary poet of any width of mind the expression of religious experience is almost bound to be more direct, using symbols of course, but not falling back on a framework of belief outside the immediate experience. His poetry may well imply a theology, but the theology will not be used to do the poet's work.

Just as a narrative framework or an allegorical framework for a long poem now would be likely to kill the poetry, so would a framework of argumentative exposition. The most that can be expected in this way is to be seen in Bridges' "Testament of Beauty", and here there is reflective and not very stimulating reasonableness rather than anything properly to be described as argumentative. "Burnt Norton", the first of Mr. Eliot's "Four Quartets", is really an example (and an excellent one) of something quite different: not of theological or philosophical argument set out in verse but of religious meditation becoming poetry.

This does not mean that a modern poet is driven to deny himself the use of symbols especially associated with his system of beliefs; nor does it mean that he has to cut himself off from his beliefs when writing poetry (that would be impossible in a serious long poem). But it does mean that those responses to his experiences which, outside the poem, would be formulated as beliefs must, inside the poem, form themselves as significant experiences directly. This is what happens in "The Waste Land" and in the "Four Quartets".

In prose terms "The Waste Land" is about the sordid horror of life where there are no sustaining values, where there is no satisfying belief that can find its vent in action. The predominant symbol of the waste land is the modern city, and especially London. But new birth—if there is to be a new birth—is painful. The plants of spring have to force their way through the soil; salvation always entails sacrifice. So there is an agony of indecision between belief and unbelief. There is horror of life without sustaining faith; horror of the sacrifice, the death, that finding true life would mean. Throughout the poem the meaning is expressed in paradoxical terms of doubleness. Tiresias,

whom Eliot describes in a note as the most important personage of the poem, is of both sexes, united man and woman. As in Blake's "Book of Thel", death is life and life is death, because being born into a new state does mean the death of the old. There is a double symbolism of fire: the fire of lust, and of purgatory. There is a double symbolism of water: water is life-giving and will bring relief to the desert land, and we also fear death by water. In this state of clear-seeing indecision the tensions set up between these opposites, that though opposites yet seem to be the same, are a great liberating force. Though in a sense lost, the poet can express himself. It is true, as the first commentators on the poem saw, that it expresses a sense of loss of the traditional values that enabled us "to know where we were". In this too there is no doubt social significance (the one good piece of Marxist criticism of the poem, amid much nonsense, is Mr. Alick West's in "Crisis and Criticism"). What has the individual left in this situation? Two things: the sense of the thunder coming, a voice that is ominous, but that precedes the rain; and some fragments of concentrated experience that he can shore against the ruins.

There is in this little doctrine, little of argument; though to summarise the "matter" of the poem so probably does more injustice than to summarise the "matter" of a Book or of the whole of "Paradise Lost" (indeed, Milton himself made such summaries and printed them with the poem). The symbols by which the poem works are wider than any formulation. What, for instance, is "the waste land"? It may be modern cosmopolitan civilisation, it may be our period of life as a whole, it may be a stage in the poet's personal development. It may for a moment be localised in London or in Paris or in Dante's Hell.

Such symbols, of which the waste land, fire and water are the most powerful, bind the poem together. In a poem whose general mode is impressionist they provide the unifying element equivalent to Chaucer's device in making the pilgrims tell stories on the way to Canterbury or Milton's Christian doctrine. They must be symbols of great energising power, and they must be capable of many-sided use : reflectors of many sides of life, with many facets.

There is of course a formal structure to the poem. The first section, "The Burial of the Dead", indicates at once the pain of spring, the pain that must accompany the stirrings of new life. It brings before us the death-in-life of the unreal city. The second section, "The Game of Chess", emphasises by illustration the deadness of first wealth and then poverty in the waste city, dead with a kind of dreary vitality. The third section, "The Fire Sermon", brings a picture of the city's vanished splendour and beauty, contrasts it with its present state (the water dirty, the fire of lust dirty), widens the themes by invocation of St. Augustine and Carthage and his conversion, and has the first hint of a redeeming conception of an Eternal City. The very short fourth section, "Death by Water", reminds us that the water that brings life also brings death. The last section, "What the Thunder Said", recalls what happens after the agony in the garden. Christian symbols are fused with Arthurian to mark the end of the waste time, the beginning perhaps of a new life after a sacrificial death. Meanwhile the old is dying, the thunder is muttering, storm—but with it water—is coming to the waste land.

This formal structure is coherent, and indicates a sequence, though the externally imposed pattern here is neither so complex nor so meaningful as that of the "Four

Quartets". The real qualities of structure in the poem are best studied in the shift from image to image, impression to impression, and scene to scene. The broad structural effect of this kind is easily seen in the second section of the poem, "A Game of Chess". This is in two main parts, the first indicating, with ironic overtones of a less sordid luxury, the dreariness of the too ornate life of the wealthy cosmopolitan ; the second the more vital though hardly more vulgar dreariness of the drab life of a group in a London pub. Here the broad effect, as so often in Eliot, is one of unity and contrast at the same time. The two scenes are simply juxtaposed with no linking passage. But none is necessary, for the point is obvious.

Within each part further effects of structural strengthening may be observed. The section opens with an echo of Shakespeare's description of Cleopatra when she first met Antony upon the Cydnus, so clear an echo that it must be obvious to anyone who has ever read or heard that most famous passage. The contrast, the mood in which the reader is expected to follow the description that comes next, is pointed at once and with an economy that saves any "prose" explanation. There are other literary echoes in the passage, to which Mr. Eliot draws attention in his notes. Here in this oppressively ornate room is "love" as they know it in these circles now. (It would be an entertaining exercise in socio-literary criticism to compare this description of a vulgarly bejewelled and over-perfumed woman in front of her dressing table not only with Shakespeare's description of the gloriously sensuous Cleopatra but with Pope's description, already quoted, of Belinda performing her cosmetic rites). There is something wrong here ("My nerves are bad to-night") just as there is something wrong with Albert's wife in the pub. scene

that follows. There is a sense of frightening change to come, as there was among the wealthy but not quite secure figures of the opening of the first section. Again, the feeling that love has gone dirty and vulgar, even though in an ornate way, links up with the opening of the next section, "The Fire Sermon", where the ironic literary echoes are even more forceful. In both, something is apprehended, something that one can hear or that one expects to hear.

> "What is that noise ?"
> The wind under the door.
> "What is that noise now? What is the wind doing ?"
> Nothing again nothing.

Tomorrow she will play a game of chess, but she will be "waiting for a knock upon the door". The noise of the wind presages the thunder that mutters at last in the final section of the poem. The knock on the door presages the later

> But at my back in a cold blast I hear
> The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

This foreboding sense of the urgency of time is taken up in the most astonishing manner in the second part of this second section of the poem. One of the remarkable things about the poetry of Mr. Eliot is its range of harmonised experience. No other poet in English at this time (1922) dared have made the transition from Marvell's

> But at my back I always hear
> Time's winged chariot hurrying near

to that insistent plebeian call we all (except teetotallers) know so well, "Hurry up, please, it's time". This is the sort of daring broadening of effect that, in a different kind of context, Shakespeare used when he made Charmian say

of the dead Cleopatra, the greatest of all queens in her love,

> Now boast thee, Death, in thy possession lies
> A *lass* unparalleled.*

Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, is indeed now "no more but e'en a woman". Her royalty, and her common humanity with "the maid that does the meanest chares", are co-present in our minds. This is the sort of effect that a Dryden dare not have risked: it would have ruined his play. So Eliot's ability to move suddenly from the richly vulgar (with its ironic echoes of the purely sensuous) to the miserably vulgar goes with his emancipation from a previous too "poetic" technique. For the East End as well as the West End, each of them part of a waste land by the Thames (where, at the beginning of the next section, the wind will cross the brown land, unheard), it is Time.

The sense of structure that the poem has on the small scale has perhaps already been indicated by our study of the short passage, in the first chapter, of dawn over London Bridge. We found there that, suddenly as some of the impressions seemed to be imposed upon one another, yet they did build up into a unity that it was possible clearly to apprehend.

We may perhaps, then, sum up this discussion of "The Waste Land" as follows.—A long poem written in this way will be shorter, more concise, than the traditional long poem, because it will rely not on a framework of narrative but on a sequence of highly concentrated impressions. It will not contain the passages of poetically half-assimilated history, doctrine, or reflection that long poems such as "Paradise Lost" or "The Excursion" do. Its ordering will depend upon a sequence of experiences, not upon the

* Mr. Middleton Murray has also made this point about the effect of the word "lass" here.

logical formulations of a system of thought. These experiences will interpenetrate and this interpenetration will be made effective for the reader, partly by the internal echoes of the themes at different places in the poem, partly by the strength and wide-ranging evocativeness of the symbols employed. Finally we may say that a sustained and serious poem in this general mode offers great advantages to the contemporary poet and frees him from disabilities in the continued use of previous modes which he would have great difficulty in overcoming. It might not be going too far to say that Mr. Eliot's technical originality and skill, combined of course with his insight and native power as a poet, have rescued the sustained and comprehensive poem for English literature at a time when it seemed that the lyric and the short satire were all that were left to us.

This achievement, it is safe to say, will make "The Waste Land" one of the enduring landmarks of English literature. But it should not, any more than those other famous experiments, "The Shepherd's Calendar" and the "Lyrical Ballads", be accepted uncritically. Indeed, Mr. Eliot's own later development as a technician of poetry indicates, at least by silence, that he cannot have been completely satisfied with some of the features of "The Waste Land". The methods he employed have their obvious dangers, even when full allowance has been made for the fact that the reader was at first bound to find such poetry strange and difficult. Time enough has now gone by for this factor to be of small importance for many readers. For myself, I still feel unhappy about some of the attempted effects in the poem and feel that it is technically considerably inferior to the later "Four Quartets".

The general criticism I should make of the earlier poem

in contrast to the later is that it relies too exclusively on its prevailing symbols for its unity. There is of course a danger, especially in literature which seems to follow the "flow of consciousness", in imposing a merely external pattern. That is a criticism that may certainly be made of James Joyce's "Ulysses", a work which first struck the public as crazily formless and then was revealed as a crazily exact parallel between a day of wanderings in Dublin and the wanderings of Ulysses in the "Odyssey". But that danger may be avoided, and in the "Four Quartets" Mr. Eliot has elaborated an external pattern which adds greatly to the sense of unity of the whole. To complete the argument here it would be necessary to explain and comment on the pattern of that poem, or those poems. But to do so would be redundant, as it has been done most admirably by Miss Gardner in the criticism I have already referred to. She shows how each of the four poems has its part to play in the whole, how the formal structure of each in its different sections follows that of the others, how variety is attained with unity, how themes are stated, echoed, developed and recapitulated, as indeed in the movements of a quartet.

Whether the "Four Quartets" is a greater poem than "The Waste Land" would be a matter for dispute, no doubt. But personally I do find it more satisfying, more acceptable without reserve (and this, perhaps I ought to add, without any personal sharing of Mr. Eliot's religious position). Some might say that it cannot be considered as major a poem as "The Waste Land" because its theme is less comprehensive. It is true, in one sense, that its theme is more personal, less concerned with "the plight of a civilisation" or anything like that. But this would be rather a shallow comment, for the concern of Mr. Eliot in the

"Four Quartets" is the most important concern of all thinking and feeling men: how to find an order in the flux of things, how (in religious terminology) to discipline oneself to feel the Eternal through and beyond Time.

The immediate reason for my preference is that the "Four Quartets" seem to me to have a more perfect fusion of thought and feeling than "The Waste Land" and a purer technique. The technique is less "appliqué", less obtrusive, less wilful, with a great flexibility and a more skilled control in variation within a more strongly felt unity. This all helps to make the later poem more "natural" than the earlier. It is artistically more mature.

In spite of very many readings over a long period of time I still find that there are passages in "The Waste Land" which I cannot assimilate as poetry, where I am too conscious that I have had to make a construct and to try to persuade myself that it is alive. The two passages that seem to me outstandingly difficult in this respect are the very beginning and the very end. The fragments in each of these simply will not fuse, as for instance they soon do in the superb opening of "The Fire Sermon" or in the passage already quoted from the end of the first section, "The Burial of the Dead". The first few lines of the poem are acceptable as soon as one understands the poet's general use of the vegetation ceremonies from Frazer:

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain.
> Winter kept us warm, covering
> Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
> A little life with dried tubers.

But then:

> Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
> With a shower of rain ; we stopped in the colonnade,
> And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
> And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
> Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
> And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,
> My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
> And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
> Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
> In the mountains, there you feel free.
> I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

The reader can see in a general way that here are echoes of conversation from the "lost" near-fashionables who went from hotel to hotel, from house to house, from resort to resort, in the Austria, the Switzerland, the Italy of the years before the first World War and the years immediately after it. But poetically that is hardly enough, and—though it may be bad reading on my part—I must confess that there I stop. As soon as we get into the next passage ("What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow Out of this stony rubbish ? ") with its echoes of Ezekiel and Ecclesiastes, conviction returns.

The very last lines of the poem make a passage whose intention at least one can understand better. It is the moment of waiting. The thunder is muttering, and it seems to the poet to be muttering the words it is made to mutter in an Upanishad to which he refers us in a note, meaning "Give, sympathise, control". Meanwhile, the decadent city civilisation is falling around him, and he can but wait, clinging to certain fragments of experience crystallised in phrases from his reading, shoring these against his ruins. One can here understand the elements of the pas-

sage, and the intention of the whole. One can understand, too, that the poet here (as commentators have pointed out) is recapitulating his themes to make an end. But, when all this is said and done, I must admit that the passage will not come to life for me as poetry : its demands on the reader are too great.

> I sat upon the shore
> Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
> Shall I at least set my lands in order ?
> London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
> *Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*
> *Quando fiam ceu chelidon*—O swallow swallow
> *Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*
> These fragments I have shored against my ruins
> Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
> Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
> Shantih shantih shantih.

Mr. Eliot gives the references : Miss Weston's chapter on the Fisher King, Dante's "Purgatorio", the "Pervigilium Veneris", a sonnet by Gerard de Nerval, Kyd's "Spanish Tragedy", and the "Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad", 5, I, with a reference to a translation into German. But five languages in eleven lines is too much. If Milton sometimes relied a little on doctrinal approval to do the poet's work Mr. Eliot here may fairly be charged with leaving the librarian to do his.

The danger ofimpressionist poetry is that it may become not merely personal (it has to be that to have force at all) but private. That was perhaps the commonest charge levelled at "The Waste Land" on its first appearance. But now the poem has had time to grow into the consciousness of readers we see how widely public as well as deep the dominant symbols are. But in these two passages,

at least, a technique which was really a triumph does seem to me to have overreached itself. I find no passages poetically unassimilable like this in the "Four Quartets", which may be a more personal but is a much less idiosyncratic poem.

This poem may with confidence be called the one indisputably major achievement in English poetry during the past decade. It is a religious poem: its experience is religious, its symbolism is largely religious, its frame of reference is specifically Christian. But it has been acclaimed as a fine poem by critics who do not share the author's religious views, and that in itself raises interesting questions as to the relations between beliefs and poetry, for both writers and readers. (These will be discussed in the next chapter, with more specific reference to a section of "Ash Wednesday", a poem in which Mr. Eliot was feeling his way towards the position he takes up in the "Four Quartets").

The poem is also a metaphysical poem in both the senses described by Professor Grierson in his Introduction to his anthology of "Metaphysical Verse": that is to say, it gives earnest consideration to the significance of the deepest experience of man in the cosmos (Dante and Milton are metaphysical poets in this sense), and it also uses imagery from science and philosophy as part of its poetic material, attempts to fuse wit and feeling, and has a version of the conceit typical of Donne and those influenced by him who were labelled by Dryden "Metaphysical" poets.

The whole cycle of poems illustrates the first of these two senses of the word metaphysical, though the first poem, "Burnt Norton" illustrates most clearly the use of metaphysical and religious concepts in poetry. One will

not get very far with the poem unless one understands the general purport of the religious experience and, in so far as there is discussion, of the discussion. This, or a simulacrum of it, may be stated in prose ; though in the real sense the poem itself is of course the only statement of what it is concerned with. The general theme is the struggle to attain serenity and a sense of enduring values amidst the flux of time. This is expressed by Eliot in terms of attaining to a consciousness of the "eternal" that is pure of the disillusionment that must come from trusting mere appearances and that is also pure of any self-deception or insincerity.

The first poem indicates the main theme : that the mere process of time seems a ridiculous and sad waste unless one has a sense of moments of experience that seem "timeless" in their intensity and their value. If one has this, then past and future are alike present in the present, and the sense of time, with its tyranny over the spirit, seems to dissolve. This poem presents these matters in terms of concepts and is more overtly "philosophic" than the other three, and is perhaps for that reason more difficult, especially as the poet is not easily satisfied but moves to the crystallisation of his experience through paradoxes and negatives much more than by anything like a positive formulation.

The second poem, which we are told takes its name from the Somersetshire village from which Mr. Eliot's ancestors went to America, has as its key phrase the sentence that Mary, Queen of Scots, embroidered while she was awaiting her death in prison: "En ma fin est mon commencement" (in my end is my beginning). This poem contrasts with the first, being full of images rather than concepts, being personal rather than philosophical, and

particular rather than general. But in one sense the setting and the scope widen: from the concepts and symbolic memories of one person to the experience of his family, of his "house" over three centuries. And the major theme develops: life should become not merely a memory of isolated intense moments but a "lifetime burning in every moment". The sense that the beginning is co-present with the end, and the end with the beginning, that the eternal is always shining through the particular moment, should be with one always. Otherwise, to any man not merely subjugated by time and routine, all must seem chaos; there will be no scale of values, no meaning in life. But the struggle to experience the eternal is painful—and even to express this in poetry is a painful and discouraging struggle, for the techniques of poetry seem utterly inadequate and one is always struggling "to get the better of words". It seems that one must go through a darkness, not of disillusionment but of Gethsemane, a "darkness of God", in which the eye is turned away from the lower light and is waiting patiently for the greater. One must struggle to another intensity through what is otherwise a waste of waters.

This leads to the third poem, in which the waste of waters is the great symbol. Water is the symbol of birth; but the river of the individual life is frighteningly uncontrollable, and the sea of all life drowns one and has no final limits. Even the bell on the buoy seems to menace as it measures, for it measures a time older than our time, the time of mere chronometers. Unless one gains a sense of order one is lost. Only so can the bell of the buoy in the waste of waters take on the quality of the Angelus. Our time goes; we must listen for eternity.

Appropriately, the fourth poem takes its title from Little

Gidding, to which in the seventeenth century Nicholas Ferrar retired to lead a life of religious meditation and devotion based on the family. The four elements of air, earth, water and fire that (as has been pointed out by Mr. Henry Reed and Mr. Raymond Preston) seem to dominate the four poems in turn, dissolve and die, and so does all that is composed of them. One must accept this death, or remain bitter and frustrated. One must be conscious of the eternal in time, one must accept life while remaining indifferent to it, so that the moments in the past that convey this sense and reconcile such earthly divergences as those between the seventeenth century Cavaliers and Roundheads are more present and operative in one's spirit than the mere current drift of things. All this is symbolised by Little Gidding. When one has attained this state of acceptance and detachment, of serene simplicity, one has passed through the fire of Purgatory and has seen the Rose of Redemption in Paradise.

This bare summary of what the poem is "about" (much fuller accounts, with careful detail, will be found in the essays of Mr. Preston and Miss Gardner to which I have referred) will indicate that in this poem Mr. Eliot does not need to have recourse to an external correlative for his experience in the slightly deliberate way in which he had to use the material from Frazer and Miss Weston in "The Waste Land".

Like "The Waste Land" the poem is not an argument: there is no logical progression of statements. What there is is a movement of experience, with countless subtle and powerful interrelationships between the different parts of the whole. The value of the poem, through which one feels its sincerity, its beauty and its power to move, is in

the poetry itself: the use of words, the images, the rhythms. Every part of the poem is most highly organised, every line is significant in its context, and the context is not even one of the separate poems but the whole cycle. That is why any analysis of a short passage must be taken in conjunction with the sense of the structure of the whole, as described by Miss Gardner and to some extent by others. But as an illustration of the statement that it is the poetry, not the bare concept, that gives value we might consider the third section of the first poem, "Burnt Norton" :

> Here is a place of disaffection
> Time before and time after
> In a dim light: neither daylight
> Investing form with lucid stillness
> Turning shadow into transient beauty
> With slow rotation suggesting permanence
> Nor darkness to purify the soul
> Emptying the sensual with deprivation
> Cleansing affection from the temporal.
> Neither plenitude nor vacancy

This marks what one might call the first movement in the section. The "thought" into which the passage might be translated, were this a prose work, is presumably something like: "There is a transitional stage between a full and serene life of the senses and a full and serene life of the spirit, and this transitional state is unsatisfying, being neither full nor empty of experience." But from this all the poetry has gone. Mr. Eliot's "thought" is in images: here is a *place* of disaffection, and between, not two states of mind, but daylight and darkness. The description of daylight seems to fuse the poetry of statement with the poetry of image, and it has in it intimations of both

concepts and images that occur in many places in the poem. The idea that stillness may be eloquent, that the stillness of beautiful form can speak through its silence, is caught up again in the fifth section:

> Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach
> The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
> Moves perpetually in its stillness.

(The thought is not unlike that expressed by Keats in the "Ode on the Grecian Urn".) Daylight that turns shadow into transient beauty is finely conceived and described, and it would be easy to formulate ideas for which it might legitimately be supposed to stand; but there is no need to do so, and to do so would only limit the effect.

The line "With slow rotation suggesting permanence" is also a fine one, and touches on one of the key images of the poem. The poem urges that one must try to feel oneself "at the still point of the turning world" and one can have an intimation of this spiritual state while in the daylight world of the senses, for daylight and darkness alternate and one feels the physical universe turning about one. (The image reminds one at once of the passage from the "Prelude" where Wordsworth describes such a feeling, and also of his "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course" in the epitaph for Lucy.)

In this first movement of the section, then, where the poem is very near to reflective thought, there is no mere formulation of concepts, but expression of experience through images and symbols. What might be called the second movement of the section is one sustained image, a very remarkable one, evoking (as Miss Gardner was, I believe, the first to observe) the emergence of men with

"strained time-ridden faces" from a London Tube Station. This is made to illustrate, or to symbolise, the unhealthy "place of disaffection" between the daylight and the darkness. It provides another example of the way in which Mr. Eliot seems able to assimilate into his poetry so much more of contemporary experience than other writers. There is nothing forced at all. The image is most apt and has great local vividness and rhythmic conviction:

> Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
> That blows before and after time,
> Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
> Time before and time after.

And with a touch reminiscent of Blake they emerge into the faded air of the gloomy hills of London, "Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Camden and Putney, Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate". Then with an almost angry shudder comes the comment that closes the paragraph:

> Not here
> Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.

The third movement returns to reflection and explores the idea of the kind of darkness, the complete evacuation of the world of sense and fancy, which the poet seeks. But, as in the first movement, the thought is expressed in images. The poet does not consider states of mind or soul, he describes a movement, a descent into a world of perpetual solitude. And yet, paradoxically, it is not movement, for it involves stillness. It is the world that moves

> In appetency, on its metalled ways
> Of time past and time future.

The word "metalled" alone shows that this is neither philosophy nor theology, but a poet's writing.

Were this chapter attempting a full appraisal of Mr.

Eliot's work there would be much more to be written about the "Four Quartets" and many more passages that I should wish to quote and comment on. Among them would certainly be that remarkable Good Friday poem, the fourth section of "East Coker", which I have already mentioned as an example of the contemporary equivalent of the "Metaphysical" manner; and certainly the first section of "The Dry Salvages", which seems to me the finest and most satisfying poem that Mr. Eliot has written. But here I have been concerned chiefly with a contrast between this mode of poetry and the others that were discussed earlier in this book, and I hope that I have been able to indicate the distinctive way in which, through Eliot's technical development of the possibilities of English poetry, he has made possible in our time the writing of sustained and comprehensive poetry that does what the long poem of earlier periods of literature did for readers then. In discussing "The Waste Land" I suggested that in places the new techniques did seem pressed too far. I should like to conclude this discussion by quoting one passage from the last poem in the "Four Quartets" to illustrate the quieter but much greater technical assurance of the later work.

In the third section of "Little Gidding" the poet thinks of that religious retreat, and of the turbulent times during which Nicholas Ferrar was there, and of the visit of Charles the First to it after Naseby. And he asks why he thus summons up memories of this moment of time and this place:

> If I think of a king at nightfall,
> Of three men, and more, on the scaffold
> And a few who died forgotten
> In other places, here and abroad,

And of one who died blind and quiet,
Why should we celebrate
These dead men more than the dying ?

There is here a tact in the allusions which contributes greatly to the effect. The poet is not idealising, not sentimentalising. He is thinking of people "not wholly commendable" and " of no immediate kin or kindness". But as he thinks of that retreat he thinks of the king, Charles, who came there in defeat ; of Laud and Strafford and Charles himself, and others, who died on the scaffold; and of those who were exiled, and died in exile. And on the other side, though "united in the strife which divided them", he thinks of John Milton, who, as we know, died patiently and quietly. The degree of particularisation here seems to me just right, as contrasted for instance with the opening of "The Waste Land" where the figures were at once too near and too vague. Here they are not named, and this (as Mr. Preston observes) has the effect of distancing them rightly, since they are now felt to be part of a larger pattern. But they are clear ; and the very suggestion of the memories of such men on both sides of so tremendous a struggle, and in such a context, sets up many reverberations in the mind. "Why should we celebrate these dead men more than the dying ?" (i.e. the living). " It is not to ring the bell backward"—a superb single-line example of the way the poet thinks in images :

We cannot revive old factions,
We cannot restore old policies,
Or follow an antique drum.
These men, and those who opposed them,
And those whom they opposed,
Accept the constitution of silence
And are folded in a single party.

The plain statement—that we cannot revive old factions or restore old policies now—is "clinched" by the metaphor "Or follow an antique drum". In the next quatrain one observes the restrained use of ambiguity in words, amounting almost to punning, which is one element in "Metaphysical" wit. The quarrel was about the constitution; what is constituted now is the silence of the grave ; and they accept it, as they must. They are "folded" in a single party—not merely smoothed gently over to one another's side (as one folds paper), but brought to shelter together (as one folds sheep). (There is a similar restrained use of the two meanings of the word "still" and of the two meanings of the word "moves" in the lines about the Chinese jar quoted earlier.) Yet this is in no way extravagant: we accept the effect before we are conscious of the cause, and that is the triumph of mature technique.

Why then do we remember this place and these men ? They are dead now and their quarrels resolved. But

> Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
> We have taken from the defeated
> What they had to leave us—a symbol :
> A symbol perfected in death.

And the lines that follow these, and end the section, frame these reflections about Little Gidding in the general pattern of thought with which the section opened.

In conclusion, then, it may be said that Mr. Eliot has developed a way of writing, a mode of poetry, which is as original and as acceptable as that of Milton or that of Wordsworth. Great poetry may be written, and has been written, in each of these modes. What is important to understand is the distinctive internal implications—one

might almost say "laws", though that is perhaps too strong a word—of each. And though any reader may legitimately have his personal preferences, there is no reason why in a reasonably catholic taste enjoyment of any one of these modes should inhibit enjoyment of the others.

Five: Three Further Passages and Three Problems in Criticism

We began our study of these three modes of poetry by looking at short passages from Milton, Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot, and we went on to discuss the mode of each poet more fully in separate chapters. I should like now to look at three more passages, one from each poet, which have wider implications than the first set and lead on to three problems in literary criticism that are currently much discussed. The three problems, to which these passages may afford a localised introduction, are the relation of criticism to biography, the relation of beliefs to poetry, and difficulty in poetry. Before going into these I should like briefly to look at the three passages in much the way that we looked at the passages in Chapter I. What the passages have in common, at least on the surface, is their response to the experience of loss of sight, either physically (as with Milton) or metaphorically (as with Wordsworth and Eliot).

The Milton passage is the end of his famous invocation to Light at the opening of Book III of "Paradise Lost":

> Thus with the Year
> Seasons return, but not to me returns
> Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn,
> Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summers Rose,
> Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
> But cloud instead, and ever-during dark

Surrounds me, from the cheerful waies of men
Cut off, and for the Book of knowledge fair
Presented with a Universal blanc
Of Natures works to mee expung'd and ras'd,
And wisdome at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou Celestial light
Shine inward, the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

In this passage, one of the few directly personal passages in the poem, Milton refers poignantly to the loss of sight he had deliberately incurred in the pursuance of his duty. He had been warned that his sight would be lost if he persisted in his work as Latin Secretary to Cromwell's government. These tasks were not those he had elected for himself as the ones he might most worthily fulfil. In them he was doomed to use prose, his "left hand". But he held his duty as a citizen clear. He did go blind in the Commonwealth's service. There is no doubt that he was content with his choice, in the sense that he thought it right and would have done the same had the opportunity of choice recurred.

There is no regret of this kind, none such as comes in " Paradise Lost" to Adam and in "Samson Agonistes" to Samson from having made a fatally wrong choice. Milton's moral basis is assured. But there is none the less the most intense regret. Milton loved the face of the earth and the face of his fellow men, and the more keenly because he had the sensibilities of a poet. The mood of regret with which the passage opens becomes one almost (but, significantly, not quite) of anger as his sense of deprivation rises. It is not merely the sensuous eye that

has gone, though that alone is much : it is that now wisdom is "at one entrance quite shut out".

Milton is often described as a "Puritan". So he was. But this must not be allowed to imply that he rejected the life of the senses. Far from it indeed. It was Milton who said that poetry in comparison with logic and rhetoric, should be "simple, sensuous and passionate". He believed that the life of the senses should be ordered by Reason, but that is a different thing from rejecting the senses. Indeed, his senses were strongly endowed and, subject to this one important qualification, he delighted in them. That helps to give this passage its grandeur. Milton is not resigned to his loss : he accepts it as necessary, but not in itself as good. He is still, as one might say, strong to see. But cannot.

This gives the turn with the last five lines a tremendous accumulated force : " So much the rather thou Celestial light Shine inward". Let eyes be planted in his spirit, so that he may see and tell "Of things invisible to mortal sight". (This positive attitude, this strength of both the first and the second part of the passage, contrasts interestingly, as we shall see, with the attitudes of Wordsworth and Eliot.) The loss has not been willed by him; nothing can take the place of what has been lost ; but something greater than physical sight may be his, and so much the rather let it be since physical sight is gone. The solution to Milton's desperately difficult problem of personal adjustment is confident and strong, and we believe it to be in his power to make it a real solution for himself.

The style of the passage, as we should expect from Milton, is organic and is wrought together with a high and conscious art. It does not read in a natural straightforward way like Wordsworth, nor does it dispense with the normal

structural sequences of prose like so much of Eliot. What poetic function does artifice serve in this passage ?

One notes first the inversion "not to me", which gives exactly the emphasis of contrast that Milton needs. Then the word "vernal", which may not be as "natural" as "of Spring", but is immensely effective here. Spring was to Milton not only what he saw, but what he saw coloured by what he had read, above all in the classics, which this Latin word suggests. And he had used his eyes not only to see the English countryside, but to read. He could do neither now. In the next line there is a superb artificial inversion (on which Professor Bush comments in his answer to Dr. Leavis) : "human face *divine*". Milton learned from Virgil perhaps above all the immense importance of word-order. What Milton says here could not have been said with the words in any other order. To place "human face" first gives the loss of sight of humanity its full value. To add "divine" afterwards gives a sudden irradiation : man has divinity in him and the faces of men and women, that Milton now can no longer see, often bear witness to this and show it shining through the human texture. Again, how magnificent is "ever-during" dark. "Everlasting" would have been light, almost trivial, in comparison. But "during" suggests durability, hardness, something weighty and not merely continuing in time.

Lest it be supposed that Milton's latinity made him always prefer the long and scholarly word to the short and sharp one, one might consider the word "blank" (as we should spell it). It hits one, and brings one to a full stop, as Milton intended it to do, for his blindness had brought him up against something tremendous and "ever-during". The thought here is of course the familiar seventeenth century one (commented on by Professor Willey in his

"Seventeenth Century Background") that God reveals Himself and His ways in two books, the Bible and the Book of Nature. One of these books for Milton now is "expung'd and ras'd", and "wisdome at one entrance quite shut out". It is sometimes said that Milton wrote neither English nor Latin grammar, but invented his own: to what good purpose may be seen in these lines. The irregular grammar seems to bear with it the torrent of feeling that is surging up from below.

Then comes the closing section of the passage, the affirmation. Again, the slightly "unnatural" order of the words in

> So much the rather thou Celestial light
> Shine inward

seems incontestably the right order. Every word tells because of its placing. The very pause at the end of the line seems incorporated into the total rhythmic effect. And the ensuing rhythm is so expertly handled that one comes with immense and yet simple emphasis on the affirmation that shows the final triumph of Milton's will not to be subdued: " There plant eyes". And the passage comes to a full and, in spite of the sense of loss, a triumphant close with

> that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.

Here indeed it is true, if anywhere, that the style is the man himself.

The passage from Wordsworth that I would set beside this is in one respect not quite fairly chosen, for it is really two passages run on one after the other: the first two stanzas of the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" followed by the later part of the tenth stanza. But the

sequence is coherent and the selection has been made to afford a parallel with the expression of a sense of loss and the affirmation of an adjustment that we saw in the passage from Milton :

> There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth, and every common sight,
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream.
> It is not now as it hath been of yore ;—
> Turn wheresoe'er I may,
> By night or day
> The things which I have seen I now can see no more.
>
> The Rainbow comes and goes,
> And lovely is the Rose,
> The Moon doth with delight
> Look round her when the heavens are bare ;
> Waters on a starry night
> Are beautiful and fair ;
> The sunshine is a glorious birth ;
> But yet I know, where'er I go,
> That there hath past away a glory from the earth. . . .
>
> What though the radiance which was once so bright
> Be now for ever taken from my sight,
> Though nothing can bring back the hour
> Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower ;
> We will grieve not, rather find
> Strength in what remains behind ;
> In the primal sympathy
> Which having been must ever be ;
> In the soothing thoughts that spring
> Out of human suffering ;
> In the faith that looks through death,
> In years that bring the philosophic mind.

Wordsworth is here regretting not the loss of physical eyesight but his failure to see something that he could see when younger and that was glorious. Perhaps the first thing that strikes one in reading this passage after the one from Milton is that the phrase "celestial light" occurs in it too, but in a different part of the passage. The celestial light was what gave Milton his confidence when he had lost his earthly sight ; in Wordsworth this is reversed. It was the earth as he used to see it that was apparelled in celestial light, and this light has now gone. And yet what kind of celestial light had this been ? Not one, as Milton's was, whose reality was certain beyond a moment's doubt, but one that had had the glory and the freshness of a *dream*. Dream or reality, it was this that had given life its splendour for Wordsworth. And now that it has passed away what is left ? At least, not nothing. With an unrejoicing steadiness Wordsworth sets himself to find strength in "what remains behind", in the primal sympathies, in the quieting experience of human suffering, in faith that can help him to look beyond death, in the philosophic mind of maturity.

Yet how deep does this consolation go ? What is this "primal sympathy" ? Why, having been, must it ever be ? Is "soothing" quite the right word to describe the effects of human suffering on the mind that observes and feels it ? What is the faith that looks through death, and how strongly does the poet feel it ? The second part of this passage, contrasted with Milton's, has a note less of affirmation than of resignation followed by an almost inert act of mere will. And the rhythms and the language bear out our doubts about this second part compared with the first.

The first two stanzas are among the greatest Words-

worth ever wrote, and they are very "Wordsworthian". The style flows freely, instead of being knit together as Milton's was. The rhythms are absolutely assured and unforced. The language, so far as external structure is concerned, is much more like ordinary prose than Milton's and it does not abandon normal prose sequences for a series of superimposed impressions as Eliot's often does. The vocabulary, almost without exception, is that of ordinary conversation, though the rhythms make it something very different, make it great poetry. "Every common sight" is above all Wordsworthian, a most simple phrase made into poetry by the strength and purity of the feeling behind it. "The things which I have seen I now can see no more" has absolute simplicity, as it has absolute finality. The examples that follow are of simple, universal things, and virtually unelaborated. The images do their own work.

The first four lines of the second section maintain the style, for Wordsworth is still in touch with what had given him strength. With "We will grieve not" we have the first slight stirring of doubt, for this inversion works against the effect of truth whereas Milton's had worked with it. It is as if Wordsworth were forcing the imagination just a little. And in the final lines our doubts of the intellectual validity of Wordsworth's statements (validity for him) are confirmed by a sense of inertness in the rhythm compared with the magnificent natural confidence of the earlier part.

One returns to the description of the celestial light as giving the glory of a *dream*. Milton's day, that he had formerly seen with his physical eyes, had been real day. But Wordsworth is not sure. We recall the stanza in the "Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a picture of Peele Castle"

where he had said that "the consecration, and the poet's dream," had been a "light that never was, on sea or land". So Wordsworth seems not quite sure of the reality of what he has lost, of what he now cannot see ; and not quite sure of the reality for himself of what remains behind. Yet he is sure that the first, however it is to be described, was his "consecration" as a poet, for when his mind is moved by it, as it is in the first part of this passage, he writes poetry that is among the finest and purest in the language.

An extension of the discussion to the poem as a whole would bear out this observation. It is a very uneven poem. Indeed it was not written all at one time. The first four stanzas were written at least two years before Wordsworth took the poem up again and finished it. Their theme is that of the first two stanzas I have quoted, coupled with a desire to renew the former feeling of delight at a moment when all the earth seems given over to joy. But in spite of the desire to do this, to feel the old feeling once again, the poet as it were sinks back, for the magic is gone. And the fourth stanza ends with the lines :

> Whither is fled the visionary gleam ?
> Where is it now, the glory and the dream ?

Now in these four stanzas, it will be noted, there is nothing of the "theory" that gives the poem its title and that caused a little confusion among some of Wordsworth's more pious readers and led him to write a note explaining his poetic use of it. This "theory", that the joy of our earliest years and our inability then to admit the thought of death are presumptive evidence of an existence before birth, comes in only with the part of the poem written later. And it certainly comes in magnificently with the lines beginning, "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting". But then the

inspiration of the fancy is exhausted. Unfortunately, however, Wordsworth cannot leave it alone, and the next three stanzas, which elaborate it, are inferior verse. In the sixth stanza, where reflection takes the place of poetry of immediacy, we feel the magic going. The seventh stanza, in which a six-year old boy (supposedly Hartley Coleridge —who got his revenge later by one of the best parodies of Wordsworth ever written) is apostrophised in the absurd words

> Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
> A six years' Darling of a pigmy size !

The opening of the eighth stanza has the worst writing in the poem. The six-year old boy is now

> Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
> Thy Soul's immensity ;
> Thou blest Philosopher, who yet dost keep
> Thy Heritage, thou Eye among the blind,

and so on. This is what Coleridge called "mental bombast". It is only in the very last lines of this stanza that the poem comes back to natural life, and that is as Wordsworth returns to the theme that was his original inspiration. He thinks of the way the freshness of life goes as we get older, and custom lies upon us with a weight "Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life".

In the next stanza the full change is felt, for its theme is that something yet lives of this glory, that nature yet remembers what was so fugitive. And this stanza contains the best known of Wordsworth's indications of the nature of those experiences, first felt in his childhood (though not merely feelings of childhood freedom), which have been the "master light" of all his seeing. In the tenth

stanza, feeling himself no longer a participant, so to speak, but still a sympathetic spectator, he urges everything to feel the gladness of May-time. For himself, something has gone that cannot be brought back. As we saw in the passage I quoted, the very thought of what has gone helps him to recover his poetic power, though the effort there to find assurance does not come quite from the depths of him. But in the last stanza, wisely, he comes back to the "primal sympathy", saying nothing more of the faith and the philosophic mind. He has lost the first glory, but he can still feel the might of Nature in his heart of hearts ; he lives with her beauty habitually and that beauty is mingled now with human sympathies.

If one reads through the whole poem in this way, with an eye to note the variation of poetic power with the variation of theme, one discovers what is almost invariably true of Wordsworth : that when he is speaking out of the spring of his own deepest subjective feelings the style is instinctively right, but that when he ventures outside this —into philosophical matter, or into social situations—the style almost always "goes wrong". It may go into bathos, or into bombast, or from the profound to the pretentious. There is no reason why philosophical matter should not be involved in poetry, and no reason why it should be : everything depends on the theme and the poet's powers. Wordsworth may be described as philosophical, in the sense that he had experienced deeply and had a deeply felt attitude to life; but in no stricter sense. Milton, by contrast, had philosophical power. Broadly speaking, in Milton the philosophic and religious experience are poetically integrated with the personal. In Wordsworth there is hardly ever such complete integration. What gives him his greatness is the quality of experience and

expression—so distinctive as to deserve the epithet "unique"—illustrated in the opening stanzas of the poem.

The poem by Mr. Eliot that I should like to contrast with the passages of Milton and Wordsworth is the sixth in his sequence, "Ash Wednesday". As the title indicates, these are poems for the first day of Lent. The theme of the final poem is also in a sense the loss of sight, the subduing of the life of the eye in a period of fasting and contemplation when the poet strives to live better the life of the spirit. The setting of the passage from Milton was willed acceptance of loss, of the passage from Wordsworth regret for the loss and hope that in the embers something might still live, of this poem a putting away of the sight of sense, in spite of its appeal, so as to be freed from the distraction that would otherwise separate the poet from God.

Although I do not hope to turn again
Although I do not hope
Although I do not hope to turn

Wavering between the profit and the loss
In this brief transit where the dreams cross
The dream-crossed twilight between birth and dying
(Bless me father) though I do not wish to wish these things
From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices,
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell ;
Quickens to recover
The cry of quail and the whirling plover

And the blind eye creates
The empty forms between the ivory gates
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth

This is the time of tension between dying and birth
The place of solitude where three dreams cross
Between blue rocks
But when the voices shaken from the yew-tree drift away
Let the other yew be shaken and reply.

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of
the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

The blindness here is seen as good—not that the natural sight was not good in a way but that spiritual insight could not be attained without a closing of the eye. So here sight is rejected, not desired, except with a desire that is put away ; though, as in Milton, spiritual insight is affirmed or at least awaited.

The language and the methods of the poem are unusual after the poetry to which we have been used. The opening might appear mannered had not the spiritual sincerity and depth of the preceding poems in the sequence given a setting. It seems to me justified, expressing slight movement (not decisive turning, for that has been rejected

now) in a willed stillness which corresponds to the poet's state of mind. Or, putting it another way, it expresses a slight stirring of the spirit in a context of vacancy of spirit. The profit and the loss of the next line echo the Bible and indicate that the world may have to be lost for the poet to save his soul. Both these opposing states (the tension between which produces the poem) are real, though they both seem dream-like in the twilight transition in which the poet finds himself as he speaks. It is the twilight between the birth of the redeemed man and the death of the natural man, a theme appropriate to Lent. The words in brackets remind the reader that it is on Ash Wednesday that penitents are received. A sincere confession, however, will not pretend that renunciation is easy, and there is a sudden rush of most powerful images summoning up the whole sweep and delightfulness of the life of the natural world. Here Eliot, as so often, makes a single selected image of a part evoke the whole, and the selected image is realised in clear, significant detail.

In the next section there are hints of ambiguity in the key words, appropriate to the state of transition between the two worlds. Is the heart lost *through* its being with the world after all, or is it lost *to* the world, as the deeper impulse of the poem would have it be ? Does "stiffens" imply "hardens" and perhaps carry an echo of "stiff-necked generation" ? Are the lilac and the sea voices lost, or now rather rediscovered ? Does "quickens" mean only "hurries" or does it mean also "returns to life" ? Does the "blind" eye imply that although the poet has put aside these things, has made himself blind to them, yet that same eye of sense is active still in his imagination and can re-create these things that have such beauty and power, can re-people the ruins of the mighty past ? And not only

the eye: the strongest of the senses is that of smell and, although it is the first day of Lent, the hold of the world is so strong that "smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth".

With the next two lines the poem turns inwards again. We are in a place of solitude where the dreams cross (I do not know why *three* dreams). The scene is that of an Italian picture of the Garden of Gethsemane. I am not quite sure what the two yew-trees stand for, but one might be the voice of death, as the yew is a tree of the churchyard, and one the voice of life, as the yew is one of the oldest of trees. The voices of the one drift away, as the sea mist drifts away from the trees of the New England coast (an association in my mind, and one that would not be surprising in Mr. Eliot's, though it is not necessarily there), and the voices of the other are heard. This is the voice of the spirit now, not of the world of sense.

The last section is an invocation, one feels to the Virgin Mary, though she is not too closely identified and is addressed also as the spirit of the fountain, with its life-giving water, and of the garden, carrying associations of solemn beauty, of Eden, but also (though here subordinated) of Gethsemane. "Teach us to care and not to care" is no mere paradox ; it is to be in the world but not of it. For attainment of perfection complete receptiveness of mind, vacant of all desire and striving, must be felt: "Teach us to sit still". The river of the individual life, the sea of life as a whole, are familiar images that are used again, and superbly, in "The Dry Salvages". The final line, appropriately, is from the Commination Service for the first day of Lent.

This poem has features which we should expect from other readings in Eliot's verse. It neither sets out an argu-

ment nor has an apparent sequence of argument, as Milton and Wordsworth have. Like their verse, of course, it expresses an experience, but it does this by a sequence of direct images, ordered and given strength not merely by the vividness of their conception and expression but by their place in a predominating passion. The language is more like that of ordinary speech than Milton's and in this is nearer to Wordsworth. But there are characteristic uses of language, such as the near word-play of the opening and the controlled use of double meanings, which are not Wordsworthian at all but if anything are nearer to the characteristic interests of the late Elizabethans. There are also invocations of experiences and the use as symbols of particular things which seem more personal to the poet and less part of a publicly available tradition than would have seemed right to Milton or Wordsworth or most English poets before the present century. These characteristics must mean that the poem is still a strange and a rather difficult one for most readers who might attempt it. But Mr. Eliot's strangeness has by now worn off for many readers who have let his poetry grow with them for a number of years, and it would be hard to see how any reader who had given himself a reasonable chance to become familiar with his mode of writing could fail to feel in this poem the genuine, sincere and highly skilled work of a distinguished poet.

These passages from three different poets obviously raise further questions. So far in this book we have confined ourselves to the study of particular passages of verse or to the contrasting modes of three writers. We have not discussed general problems of criticism at all. But a critic of literature will inevitably have certain general ideas and they are, as in every other study, likely to be better ideas

if he has brought them into open discussion and considered them rationally. What it is proposed to do in the remaining part of this chapter is not to embark on a comprehensive discussion of the general ideas that are involved in the whole activity of criticism, but to select three such general problems—and three very much in controversial discussion at the present time—and to say something of them in relation to the passages of verse we have just been considering. It is hoped that this may serve as an introduction—it can be no more—to the study of general ideas in relation to literary criticism, a study that must follow quickly upon the necessarily prior understanding of how to read particular passages. The first of these problems I should like to discuss is the relation of literary to biographical studies.

(*a*) *Criticism and Biography*

Suppose that some reader of the three passages we have just considered were altogether ignorant of the biographies of the poets who wrote them. He would undoubtedly ask how it was that Milton went blind and how he bore his misfortune in real life. He would be interested in the feeling of Wordsworth that his imaginative power was waning and would wonder if this was a general change in him or something that he felt in a passing mood ; and he would want to know whether "what remained" proved strong enough in fact to sustain Wordsworth either as a contented man or as a creative poet. He might well ask why for Mr. Eliot the attainment of spiritual serenity had apparently to involve a renunciation of the beauty of the world to which he was so responsive. To give an answer to these questions would satisfy a legitimate interest in the workings of human nature. But what would be the bearing

of such biographical information on the reader's understanding of the poems ?

The question is pertinent because there is a tendency sometimes to substitute a judgment of the man for a criticism of the poet. Mr. Eliot, for instance, seems to me to have allowed his criticism of Shelley's poetry to have been considerably coloured by his dislike of the man ; though it is fair to say that he recognises this danger and at the conscious level has tried to guard against it. (The essay is in "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism".) I am inclined to think that Matthew Arnold suffered a little from the same failing in his essay on Shelley in his "Essays in Criticism". One is indeed surprised to find in that essay hardly any serious comment upon the poetry of Shelley. The official reason is that Arnold's essay was a review of Dowden's "Life of Shelley", and Arnold agreed that he had had no time to speak of his poetry and he had intended to write a further essay. But the essay stands in a volume called "Essays in *Criticism*" and it has been extremely influential for more than fifty years (and in my opinion unfortunately influential) in forming people's conception of Shelley as a poet.

At a lower level, in popular journalism and popular teaching, it is only too true that those who should be engaging in critical studies often take refuge in biography, and sometimes in mere gossip. Yet it should be obvious that, although biography has its own interest and although it may in some ways throw light upon a poet's development or upon a particular poem, it can never be a substitute for criticism. The life of a man like Byron is interesting in itself, apart from his poetry, and he is justly remembered not only as a poet but as a great figure in Europe. An intelligent correlation of his personal development with

the quality of his poetry might have a genuine literary interest. But the long controversy as to whether he did or did not love his half-sister criminally has simply grown tiresome and become a distraction to the study of his real greatness. Most poets have led lives much quieter and of less general interest than Byron's. What they are remembered for is their poetry, and mere gossip about them becomes in time even a little impertinent.

Mr. Walter De La Mare has a delightful fantasy called "A Revenant". In this he describes how a lecturer to a popular audience had taken as his subject "The Writings of Edgar Allan Poe". This lecturer had persuaded himself that he did not debase his work for popular consumption: he had indeed re-read much of Poe for the purpose of the lecture and was scrupulous as to facts. Yet he had to say something of Poe's life, and found it not very savoury. As he came near the end of his lecture he felt vaguely uneasy ; and he noticed a stranger in a black cloak standing, as if in a niche, by a doorway at the back of the hall. The lecturer's distress grew, and it seemed associated with the eyes of this strange figure, that were fixed upon him. He just managed to finish, was thanked by the chairman in a way that showed his lecture had conveyed nothing worth conveying to him, and somehow got into the waiting-room. A girl came in to ask for his autograph, and went ; and then, there was the figure in the black cloak with the black stock. The stranger took up with him the tone of his lecture about Poe. Was not its prevailing note, for all the soft assuagements, one of scorn ? And what was that to do with Poe's work, into which the best of him had gone and which alone made him memorable now ? The lecturer tried to defend himself, but somehow all his spirit had gone. He felt empty and defeated and convicted. When he

passed the caretaker and asked about the stranger the former said no one but the little girl had been there.

This story is the perfect protest of a poet against the denigration of another poet, not because of what he wrote, but because of what ungenerous gossipers chose to suppose, without any real inner knowledge, that he was. Anyone who has read books about poets published in the last couple of decades could name at once quite a number that are essentially like this lecture imagined by Mr. De La Mare. They cause their ripple—especially if there is a little "psycho-analysis" in them (what psycho-analyst, it may be asked, would think of giving an opinion about a patient's personality until he had seen him and treated him many times, as no writer can see and treat a dead poet ?). And they do much more harm than good.

Stirred no doubt by such examples as this, some poets and critics have been tempted to cry out that a poem is self-existent and self-sufficient and that any biographical treatment is either an intrusion or a sign that the poem is inadequate. They say that real poetry is universal in its appeal and should be independent of time and place. Now there are some poems of which this is true, or very nearly so. Here, for instance, is a short and very moving poem written by a soldier to his wife as he is leaving for the war :

Since our hair was plaited and we became man and wife
The love between us was never broken by doubt.
So let us be merry this night together,
Feasting and playing while the good time lasts.
I suddenly remember the distance that I must travel ;
I spring from bed and look out to see the time.
The stars and planets are all grown dim in the sky ;
Long, long is the road ; I cannot stay.

I am going on service, away to the battle-ground,
And I do not know when I shall come back.
I hold your hand with only a deep sigh ;
Afterwards, tears—in the days when we are parted.
With all your might enjoy the spring flowers,
But do not forget the time of our love and pride.
Know that if I live, I will come back again,
And if I die, we will go on thinking of each other.

That poem (translated by Mr. Arthur Waley in his "170 Chinese Poems") was written by a Chinese general to his wife over 2000 years ago. It might have been written ten years ago by an English private going to France. If it does not quite transcend time and place at least it touches something that, unfortunately, is common to human experience here in England in the twentieth century and in China over two thousand years back. And it does not matter whether the author is a general or a private: it is a soldier writing to his wife as he leaves, knowing he may not return. For the purposes of reading the poem and enjoying it to the full we need to know nothing of the author except this, and this is in the poem itself.

But all poetry is not like this. Indeed, in the nature of things very little can be. Poetry with such a universal appeal must be limited to the expression of experiences that are known to all men irrespective of when and where they live. Such poems are usually short lyrics on common themes. There are, of course, longer poems which are among the world's greatest and most enjoyed, written by men of whom we know little or nothing. The "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" are the most obvious examples. But even for these it is useful to know a little about the civilisation they describe, and if that is relevant to understanding even a narrative poem why should not biographical comment

be helpful in reading a poem whose matter is more personal than Homer's ?

It clearly can be, if it is not mere gossip but is rightly related to the poetry we are reading. There may be biographical matter which is virtually necessary for the full enjoyment of some poetry, and the study of the development of poets may increase our grasp of poetry in general and give us insight into the conditions in which it may flourish or decline. And beyond this, relevant and not merely intrusive biographical knowledge may add to a poem's proper effect as a jewel is enhanced by its setting.

D. H. Lawrence said that "even the best poetry, when it is at all personal, needs the penumbra of its own time and place and circumstances to make it full and whole." The Chinese poem quoted above may make this seem an overstatement, but it is true of the great majority of poems. The poem from which our first passage in this chapter came, "Paradise Lost", is one of the least personal poems we have, in the sense of least directly autobiographical. But its depth and range, its characteristic intellectual and emotional interests, the quality that gives it greatness, arise out of Milton's personality, made impersonal though this may be in the poem's art. To know something of his own force of character, his resolution never to submit or yield, his belief in right reason, his contempt for the "sons of Belial flown with insolence and wine" all give the poem a setting of biography that is relevant and proper. The poem is a poem of heroic temper, and that temper is Milton's. It cannot be altogether idle to wish to learn more of it.

If we knew nothing biographically of Milton, what would an editor say of the passage from Book Three that we have studied ? He would be reduced to adding a dreary

note to the effect that "Presumably the author of this poem had himself lost his sight". The knowledge that he in fact lost it through deliberate adherence to duty, not in pursuance of his most cherished personal aim but in pursuance of the public cause that he believed to be right, adds overtones of great resonance to the passage. Had Milton been no poet, but simply scrivener to the Commonwealth, his story would merely have been another instance of the devotion to duty that is in many men. But when his personal loss and his triumph over it become part of "Paradise Lost" biography and poetry become indissolubly joined in greatness.

The relevance of biography to criticism becomes more difficult when we begin to study Wordsworth. The parts of the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" that were quoted earlier are no doubt intelligible without any biographical notes. Yet Wordsworth himself thought it fitting to dictate to Miss Fenwick a note (largely biographical) about it. His statement that "two years at least passed between the writing of the first four stanzas and the remaining part" is, as we have seen, alone sufficient to start a train of relevant critical speculation about the poem and its illustration of Wordsworth's greatness and shortcomings as a poet. But, more particularly, he says in this note that as a child he had hardly been able to admit the idea of death as applicable to himself and that, with a feeling congenial to this, he had often been unable to think of external things as having external existence, and that he had communed with all he saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, his own immaterial nature. In his childhood, he says, he had been afraid of such experiences. But since then he has deplored "a subjugation of an opposite character" and has looked back

with regret to the "dream-like vividness and splendour which invest objects of sight in childhood".

An understanding of the nature of these experiences of his childhood and of the way in which they developed into his full imaginative response to life seem to me the key to the understanding of Wordsworth's poetry and of his poetic development. But the study is not simple. For his own accounts of what happened differ. They differ not in the surface facts—in the "fair seed-time" that he enjoyed in the free and delightful surroundings in which he was brought up—but in the relation of these childhood experiences to his growth as a poet. From the Ode one would suppose (as indeed the theory behind it, or imposed upon it, dictates) that the "master light" of his inspiration was felt most strongly when he was a child ; that then the shades of the prison house began to close upon the growing boy ; and that now he was a mature man it seemed, except for intermittent glimpses, to have gone forever. But in "Tintern Abbey" the sequence is different. The glad animal movements of boyhood are described there as concomitants of "coarser pleasures". Then comes a time of greater imaginative power, in adolescence, when Nature is to him an all-absorbing passion. And lastly comes the time when, as a man, though still young, he has "a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused". The last stage marks the culmination of his imaginative life up to that time, not the beginnings of a decline.

So far as we can judge from tests of innate reasonableness the "Prelude" seems to present events in something more like a true perspective. There we are told of these trance-like experiences that Wordsworth had in boyhood and he makes it clear that though they came to him then their full significance was not understood till later. But

when he wrote the "Prelude" Wordsworth still recognised in this kind of experience the source of his poetic power. It was as a young man, on vacation from Cambridge, that he had that experience of the dawn from whose description I quoted in the first chapter, the experience that first brought home to him the fact that this capacity in him made him "a dedicated spirit". Then as he grew older still this imaginative apprehension of life through Nature broadened so that it came to include an ideal sympathy with ordinary men and women, and deepened so that it might be described, in the general though not the specific sense of the word, as philosophic. Then undoubtedly as he passed through middle age this faculty in him lost its power and visited him more rarely. He tried to put in its place morality and religious faith and a kind of willed sympathy.

Now the controversy among the critics has turned on two questions, in which biography and literary criticism have inevitably been interrelated. The first is how far in fact the later poet does mark a sad decline from the earlier. The second is in what ways the decline (which did take place, in whatever degree) is to be related to decisions in his personal life, or to changes in his opinions and social sympathies, or to a simple hardening of the arteries as he grew older. These are not idle questions.

But there may be idle answers. In the first excitement of the discovery that Wordsworth had had an illegitimate daughter when he was in France as a young man there was a tendency to make this fact the key to his whole development, personal and poetical. His sense of guilt, it was argued, caused him to become repressed, to lose his generous sympathies, and to withdraw too much. No one would deny that for a man of Wordsworth's stamp such

an experience was important, but the stress upon it really became quite extravagant. Wordsworth never strove to hide the fact from his intimates, who were entitled to know ; the fact itself was less shocking at the end of the eighteenth century than it would have been in the Victorian period ; and Wordsworth cannot fairly be said to have abandoned the mother and daughter. In any case his great period of poetry began some years after his return from France, by which time the sense of guilt should have made a difference to his character if it was ever going to. Biographical psycho-analyses of this amateur kind are more likely to warp our judgment of a poet's work than to assist it, and even though the victims are dead, and though no doubt the truth should prevail, they seem more like impertinences than serious criticism.

A careful reading of Wordsworth's work taken in conjunction with more balanced biographical study can be most helpful in leading to a just appreciation of his genius. That may be shown by the "Prelude" itself, and by the excellent commentary on it called "The Young Wordsworth" by Professor Legouis (one of the two discoverers of the daughter). It was Professor de Selincourt, who did not believe that Wordsworth suddenly changed in the year 1807 or thereabouts from a liberal-minded man and a great poet to a mediocre versifier and a crusted Tory, who pointed out those fine passages in the "Prelude" that were the work of later years. Nevertheless there is a basic truth in the "apostasy" theory of Wordsworth's development. This is not the place to argue this particular question out : my only concern at the moment is to show that though much writing about Wordsworth as a person has been of little relevance to appreciation of his poetry yet a discriminating use of biographical material may illuminate

both particular poems and the general process of poetic development.

One must not confuse biography with criticism, and one must not, under the spell of a biographical enthusiasm, confuse bad poetry with good. But there is a sense in which biography can fill out our understanding of great poetry just as the less good verse of a serious poet may assist us in reading his best work. Thomas Hardy provides an excellent illustration of this. It is true that he wrote only a few poems of the first order, though these are very good indeed. But one cannot study Hardy, nor can one properly study even these few poems, without a sense of the corpus of his whole work behind one, his novels no doubt as well as his voluminous occasional and mediocre verse. These make the "Hardy of Wessex" whose culminating self-expression comes in a few great poems. The same is true though in lesser degree, of Wordsworth. Wordsworth wrote many more great poems, but he wrote much not very inspired verse, some of it relating to his daily life and all of it to be taken in conjunction with relevant biographical knowledge to build up our total picture of him and give something of the setting in which his greatest poems can best be seen. This is the case—and I think it is a powerful one—against study of poetry through mere anthologies. (The pamphlet by Mr. Robert Graves and Miss Laura Riding "Against Anthologies"—whatever one thinks of Mr. Graves on Milton's private life—ought to be read by every student of literature.)

Biographical study, like the reading of a poet's inferior work, cannot of course make good poems bad or bad poems good. A negative example might illustrate this point. Shakespeare's sonnets are among the world's greatest poems. There has been much speculation about their

relation to his direct personal experience. Some of this speculation has no doubt been silly. But as a whole it is not pointless. If we had the right kind of biographical information, for a certainty, we might at least know whether there were two sequences in the sonnets or only one, we might know whether the normal order in which they are printed is the right order, we might know whether the language of some of them is to be taken as the language of high-flown Elizabethan compliment or as a direct outpouring of personal feeling ; and these things would be of direct literary relevance. They would assist our reading and add somewhat to our understanding. But they could not possibly do more.

Some twenty years or so ago Professor John Livingstone Lowes wrote a book called "The Road to Xanadu". It was a most remarkable study of the reading that Coleridge had done just prior to writing "The Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan". And as Coleridge read everything, and was one of the rare readers who, if he sees in one book a footnote reference to another book, gets hold of the second book too, Professor Lowes had a tremendous amount of reading to get through. And he had to hold it all in his memory so that he might tell what had gone into the crucible of Coleridge's imagination for the purposes of his two poems. Professor Lowes did all this with amazing pertinacity and skill. But when he had done it all, as he very modestly said himself, he could only tell us what had gone into the crucible, not what happened there or how what was formed in the crucible were these two poems.

Sometimes the biographical material that one needs as an auxiliary in reading poetry is general, as on the whole it is with Milton and Wordsworth. Sometimes it is particular. This is the case, I think, with the poetry of

Mr. Eliot. The poem from "Ash Wednesday" expresses an experience that, in prose terms, is familiar ; and broadly speaking the poet has given his personal experience the "impersonality of art", so that there is no need for writers of theses to intrude on Mr. Eliot and menace him with questions concerning what is, after all, his personal and private life.

There are, however, some questions that it would be fair to ask him about his personal associations of ideas, since these do concern his poetry and without the clue we may on occasion feel a little lost. When Mr. Eliot published "The Waste Land" he added some notes that helped the reader to understand the private associations between phrases in the poem and experiences, in reading or in living, to which the reader could not have access without help. But he has not followed this practice of annotation later (although he has been willing to help elucidators such as Mr. Preston), and this seems to me a pity. There is a certain virtue sometimes in keeping an image floating in the mind of the reader, not tied down too precisely to an event, for the reader may feel through his own somewhat different personal experiences the way in which it ought to function in the poem. But sometimes, it seems to me, the reader needs a greater sureness than the poem itself can give or than he can give from his own personal background. No doubt some readers will "jump" to an association that others may miss, and the pooling of ideas in discussion may itself promote an added interest in the poetry. But such a "crossword" interest is surely not quite the kind that a poet would want. I have confessed my own failure to understand the point of the "three" dreams in the poem I have quoted, and at least a partial uncertainty about the two yew trees. I will further admit now some-

thing very like a sense of frustration with those children in the rose garden that appear and reappear in Mr. Eliot's poems of recent years. For me at least the image does not do its own work. One is a little uncomfortable at seeming to overhear a significant privacy in what has become a public room. A very brief biographical note would surely be in order.

The kind of help, then, that biographical study may lend to the adequate reading of poetry will vary with the poem and the poet. Such help may be real, and in the case both of some poets of the past and of some poets of the present there is work of this kind still to be done. But, let me emphasise again, it is subsidiary work. Poets are men, but their real significance is that they are men who were poets.

(*b*) *Beliefs and Poetry*

One important aspect of a man is his beliefs, the crystallising of his experience of life into general statements capable of formulation as propositions. In our time when, even more than in Donne's, "the new philosophy calls all in doubt", there has been much discussion as to the relation between a writer's beliefs and his writings, and as to the conditions upon which beliefs may properly enter into poetry. And there is a very difficult problem for the reader also: how far ought our response to a work to be modified by the fact that we agree or disagree, or at least sympathise with or fail to sympathise with, the opinions and views of the writer whose work we are criticising?

One thing is obvious: not all the writers we enjoy share our own prejudices. We may consider this unfortunate, though reading would in fact be very dull if they did. We rightly regard any man as narrow if he will not read any books but those he agrees with in advance. If he

extends his narrowness in religious or political doctrine to his reading in imaginative literature we consider him incapable of liberal education. Now it is easy for any one to recognise that there must be some solvent of disputatiousness at work when he reads the literature of the past. It is much more difficult to see this and to act upon it when he reads literature of the present with the mark of active controversies thick upon it. Shakespeare is very popular in Soviet Russia—which ought to be shocking, for the man was really a deplorable bourgeois. But Mr. T. S. Eliot, to judge by the expression of one of their exponents of liberal intellect at a recent conference for intellectual and cultural "freedom", is a "Fascist hyena". More seriously, it must have been very difficult, say in 1665, for a reader with any strength of political or religious conviction to enjoy both Milton and the "mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease". It must have been very difficult for Tories like Canning to have enjoyed Wordsworth when he first appeared in print as a young leveller. And to-day it is a genuine problem for the reader who is not a "royalist" in politics or an Anglo-Catholic in religion to be sure that his adjustment to the poetry of Mr. Eliot is fair both to Eliot the poet and to himself as a reader with principles of his own.

A lead into the subject may be found if we consider literature attached to systems of belief which are now completely dead, which have force upon our imaginations not as dogma but only through their imaginative expression of the human spirit. What have the countless Christian admirers of Homer or the great Greek dramatists lost because they are Christians ? Be it noted that there was a time when this, too, was an active problem. The Christian religion in its earlier days, so long as there was any pos-

sibility of the renewed sway of ancient paganism, was strong in its condemnation of pagan literature. For a long time, indeed, Virgil was the one classical writer who was allowed, on the accidental ground that his Fourth Eclogue might be construed by the pious, willing to deceive themselves into good reading, as containing a prophecy of the coming of Christ. But in time all this changed, and by the nineteenth century in England it was the commonest thing for schoolmasters in holy orders to insist that thorough knowledge of these once banned works was the only proper basis of a liberal education (one sometimes wonders just what they did make in class of certain features of ancient civilisation and its literature, but presumably to those who had swallowed whole the morals and beliefs of the Old Testament all things were possible). Some of the modern scholars and poets who have enjoyed and written well of Latin and Greek poetry have been earnest Christians, others have been more detached, yet others have been agnostics. None of them, however, has shared the beliefs of the writers of the poems they extol. They do not believe, in any sense, naive or sophisticated, in the existence of the pagan pantheon. How much, then, do they lose when reading the work of poets who did ? If we could answer this question with some assurance we might feel ourselves on firmer ground when asking how agnostics should approach Christian literature or Christians agnostic literature.

To the poets themselves the beliefs matter, and matter profoundly. If they stated their beliefs theologically readers of a different persuasion would have to express their dissent. But does something different happen when they write not theology, but poetry ? Most of us (and this includes some of the poets who have written religious

poetry) feel that something different does happen, and happens so as to give the possibility of a far wider sympathetic response than would be possible if sympathy were confined to co-believers. There is a school of thought that follows the view of Dr. I. A. Richards that although much poetry may appear to be about beliefs, these are only a symbolic indication of an attitude that may conceivably be shared by many who would choose different symbols for themselves and who hold different beliefs. What takes the form in poetry of a statement of belief is meant there not as a dogma, but as the imaginative indication of a more universally shared attitude to life, and this is called by Dr. Richards "pseudo-statement". This seems to me a very illuminating explanation of what happens, even though I do not find it quite satisfactory.

Take a familiar example, the wide appeal of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress". It is not surprising to find Baptists and Congregationalists who value this book, for Bunyan was one of themselves and was an ardent propagandist for their views. It is not very surprising to find members of the Church of England who value it, for Bunyan was a Protestant and the old quarrels between Anglicans and Dissenters have lost their bitter edge. It is not even surprising to find some Roman Catholics who value it, for Bunyan at least was a Christian, even though officially still a heretic to them. But in fact thorough-going sceptics in religion enjoy the book too, and would probably not be embarrassed at all if, for instance, they were asked to teach it in school. Now why is this ? It is presumably because Bunyan, in the broadest possible sense, expresses an attitude to life that we all feel to be good. Putting this in religiously neutral terms we could say that he gives us, not a narrow tract for a sect, but an allegory of human

life, which is seen as a journey, a journey in which man must fight and struggle and beware of forces that would make him betray what is good, a journey in which he must take much individual responsibility but in which there is true as well as false companionship to be found, a journey that even for the fearful can come to a joyful end if he keep resolutely to the right way. In short, Bunyan believes that life is a constant struggle, but that it is worth it. Now the Baptist may enjoy Bunyan simply because he shares his religion. That is legitimate enough, though not as literary criticism. But if what I have said is true, the book should be enjoyed as imaginative literature rooted in human experience by the non-Christian as much as the Christian, just as a rationalist or Christian professor of Greek would put Homer the poet (though not Homer the truth-teller) as high as would any pagan Greek.

I think some such process of transmutation does take place for the sympathetic reader who is confronted in a poem with beliefs that formally he would not accept. But there are two cautions that I would add to the theory. One is that it must not be applied so freely that the reader always has to take the responsibility; sometimes the poet may have failed to make it possible for the reader to exercise this power of sympathetic transmutation. This must happen when in a poem one finds poetically unassimilated doctrine. Even a great poet may occasionally fail to make this transmutation possible for a thinking reader. A very interesting controversial example is the famous phrase of Keats in his Ode on a Grecian Urn:

> " 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

Some readers feel this to be what Keats meant it to be,

the crown of the poem. Others find it most inadequate, since it sums up in the form of a statement something that patently demands further thought and more serious analysis. Dr. Richards throws the burden on the reader. The lines are not a statement, but a pseudo-statement, and the reader should recognise this and read the poem properly.* For me, I confess, this will not do. There is no obligation on a poet to make philosophic statements, but if he does so those statements should be philosophically respectable. The general concept behind Keats' words may be and often has been satisfactorily expressed in poetry. The poetry of this Platonic view is extensive and much of it is very fine. But it apprehends imaginatively, it does not produce a neat summation that, to adapt one of Dr. Richards' terms, is certainly a "premature ultimate." With the best will in the world I can never read these lines without an intrusive, "But is that really so—at that simple level of statement?" and that inevitably diminishes the effect of an otherwise great poem.

There is a second cautionary note that it would seem wise to add to the pseudo-statement theory. It must not lead the reader to the conclusion that beliefs do not matter. It obviously matters in general, and outside poetry, that our beliefs should be as near to the truth as our most honest efforts can make them. And it follows from this that we are bound to consider beliefs that are opposite to those we hold to be harmful and deserving of opposition. The general problem of toleration in society is one for politics, not primarily for literary criticism. But the two meet, for if we consider that a poet of great power and influence is by his very distinction as a poet adding to the adherents

* See the discussion of these views in Mr. Middleton Murry's "Studies in Keats".

of beliefs that we think harmful, what should we do? We must obviously be free to oppose the beliefs and in a sense to oppose the man who holds them. But if he is in fact a great writer he will be expressing something more widely human than perhaps even he supposes and we must not condemn the poet because we disagree with the man. The right attack to make is not on the poet but on the uncritical reader. In the kind of case I have posited the reader should be told there is no more case for accepting a poet's beliefs now because he is a good poet than there is for returning to paganism because Homer and Sophocles were good poets.

Although admittedly some very odd beliefs have sometimes been the apparent stimulus to great poetry (Yeats is an obvious example), the quality of the beliefs a poet holds does seem generally to matter for his poetry. If a poet moves from short lyric to sustained poetry about human life he must feel the need of a cosmic myth, of an imaginative framework of powerful symbols with which he may express his experience and share it. Now to invent myths of this kind for oneself is virtually impossible. If one tries, at the very least effective communication with the reader will be jeopardised. The most striking example in English literature of the tragic waste that this can entail is in Blake's longer Prophetic Books.

One of the functions of the great religions (and one might add of some systems of politics) has been to give men such an imaginative framework for the symbolic expression and sharing of their experience. I said great religions (let me add) because of the importance of a broad basis in human acceptance. It is unlikely that a very "odd" religion will have a base that is broad enough or be rooted deeply enough in common experience. Swedenborgianism

was of little poetic use to Blake. One may doubt whether a major American poet will ever write in terms of the Mormon religion. But the great religions are, among other things more open to dispute, great imaginative renderings of the experience of civilisations as well as of individuals. In one aspect they go back into the great nature myths, access to which is certainly a poet's birthright. Poets may write of the changes of the season directly, or if they choose in terms of a personified Winter and Spring, or in terms of Demeter and Persophone. The rituals described by Frazer have, as we have seen, so widespread an appeal in one form or another that they may legitimately be invoked by poets who are Christians or who are not.

Now for the reader who does not share the formal beliefs attached to such an imaginative rendering of human experience it is not only likely that he will distinguish between the myth and belief, it is almost certainly essential that he should. For the poet, by contrast, it is often essential that he should not. An exception comes when he is quite sure (and makes this clear to the reader) that he is consciously engaging in fantasy or pure make-believe himself (as Pope was, for instance, with his Rosicrucian spirits in "The Rape of the Lock"). Tennyson, writing of the changes of the seasons in terms of Demeter and Persephone, was only half-convincing, whereas writing directly of the coming of spring in "Now fades the last long streak of snow" he is at his best.

Wordsworth fell into this trap in the "Immortality Ode". The force of what he genuinely had to say saved the poem, but it certainly endangered whole passages in it and compelled him to that awkward explanation that he did not mean his theory to be taken literally. One might

say that a good reader would have realised this, and maybe he would. But that there should be serious risk of mistaking the poem in this respect was due in real part to a fumbling between belief and what was not believed on the part of the poet himself. In other places where Wordsworth uses the form of statement, but is really expressing an experience, misunderstanding may be the fault of the reader. Mr. Aldous Huxley once explained in an essay that if Wordsworth had lived on the edge of an alligator swamp he would not have thought Nature so beneficent, and no doubt that is true. But it is irrelevant. For most readers of Wordsworth do not live on the edge of an alligator swamp, and when he speaks of Nature and personifies it they understand well enough to what he refers. Mr. Eliot also, in "The Waste Land", has invoked for the purposes of his poetry myths that one no doubt understands better if one has read Frazer or Miss Weston, but that are so close to the experience of most of his readers in the generalised way in which he uses them that they have a very high degree of poetic validity.

The myth must be one that has an internal coherence and adequacy for the poet himself. It matters much less whether it would have such a coherence and adequacy for the reader. The cosmic myth of Dante, for instance, would not be adequate for his non-Catholic readers ; but it was incontestably adequate for himself. The cosmic myth of Milton would hardly be adequate for a Roman Catholic or an agnostic ; but again it was adequate for himself. Such a myth, which we must expect commonly to be associated in the poet with belief, may well help him to order his own experience. A man may of course be imprisoned in his myth, and he may then have to deny

something in him that might have gone to make a finer poet and perhaps a fuller man. Few readers now would assert that the beliefs of Tennyson in "In Memoriam" were really adequate, not to us (that is a different question) but to him. A reader who is not a Christian is much more likely to find Milton's religion acceptable in his poetry than Tennyson's, not because Milton's religion is less firm but because it is more firm and really comes out of the whole man.

Sometimes the acceptance of a religious faith prevents the expression of the whole man, or shall we say what might have been the whole man. Then in the poet himself a conflict may be set up between the believer and the poet. Such a conflict may be resolved at a level which the man and the poet accepts as the best ordering he can make of his life. Sometimes it may not really be resolved, and there may be war. Although I know that some critics take an opposite view I feel that this clearly happened with Hopkins. The Jesuit and the poet were fighting. For many years the poet was repressed, and with what eager joy he rushed away to compose "The Wreck of the Deutschland" when his Father Superior told him that the loss of the lives of the nuns deserved commemoration in verse ! But in Hopkins there was potentially a great poet who should have written without ceasing of the glory of "dappled things". Instead there was a tortured spirit, who wrote of pure beauty on all too few occasions and who made a few fine but terrible poems out of the tensions of his torture itself.

Religion in one of its aspects may be poetry ; but in its totality it is much more than poetry. It is belief, belief that certain things are. And that is where conflict between the believer and the poet may occur if he is a free-thinking

man. It is also attached very closely, indeed is often virtually identified with, an imposed moral code. And conflict may occur there too. But the adherents of a religion find the dogma and morality not only right and essential for their lives, but, if it comes to a choice, much more important than the poetry in the religion. The believer in a different religion may be able to feel some sympathy for its dogmas and moral code ; or on the other hand the very differences among so much that is similar may exacerbate him. Much the same is true for those who accept no religion at all. But both of these ought to be able to respond to the poetry in the religion, just as Wordsworth in a world where getting and spending lay waste our powers would respond to the imaginative vitality of a creed outworn rather than deny the imagination altogether. What is common to the man of imagination who is religious and the man of imagination who is not, is the poetry that both should seek through the form of the beliefs.

(*c*) *Difficulty in Poetry*

The lack of a cosmic myth that may be shared is no doubt one of the difficulties of the contemporary poet, and of his readers. It is the personal attempt to find a myth that has resulted in that increased degree of privacy which has so often been noted as characteristic of modern verse. There are social reasons also that have been adduced for the sense of isolation from the community that many poets have felt and that has encouraged them to write for coteries in the language of coteries. One can blame society, or the poets, or both, according to one's views. The question is important indeed, but there is hardly space to discuss it here. What I should like to discuss is the nature

of different kinds of difficulty in modern verse and whether, given such circumstances of society or belief as there may be, these conduce to better or poorer poetry.

It is merely naive to sigh for a poetry that is simple, that the man in the street will be able to understand without effort. There is some great poetry simple in this way, but its experience of life, though it may be deep cannot in the nature of things be subtle or wide. There never has been an age with any high degree of civilisation in which much of the greatest poetry was not difficult. That is true even when, as with much of Shakespeare's, a true response may be made to it, so far as it goes, before it is comprehended and before even it is apprehended fully. There are things that one cannot say in basic English, and if one tries to say them so one only finds that one has not said them. Some of these things are among those most worth saying. The value and complexity of experience may justify a complexity of language.

Now in poetry of this kind the difficulty may usually be resolved if the reader, often with virtually nothing in front of him but the unannotated poem itself, is willing to do the necessary work. There are other causes of the difficulty of much modern poetry, but this is the cause of the difficulty of some of the finest of it. As an illustration I should like to take a well-known sonnet by Hopkins, for Hopkins, although he wrote at the end of the nineteenth century is for all practical purposes a discovery of our time and in effect is a near-contemporary poet. The sonnet is called "Carrion Comfort" and was said by Hopkins to have been "written in blood" :

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

Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.
But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock ? lay a lionlimb against me ? scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruisèd bones ? and fan
O in turns of tempest, me heaped there ; me frantic to avoid thee and flee ?
Why ? That my chaff might fly ; my grain lie, sheer and clear.
Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
Hand rather, my heart lo ! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, cheer.
Cheer whom though ? the hero whose heaven-handling flung me, foot trod
Me ? or me that fought him ? O which one ? is it each one ? That night, that year
Of now done darkness. I wretch lay wrestling with (my God !) my God.

There is an astonishing amount packed into this sonnet and the sheer volume as well as the complexity of the experience behind it justify its remarkable language. The poem begins in the middle of a sentence but this ejaculatory effect is appropriate and no confusion or perplexity results. In the third line there is the slight archaism of "I can no more", but this is not altogether unfamiliar (one remembers Luther's phrase, as rendered traditionally, "I can no other"). Difficulty begins only when the mood of the opening movement—that of determination not to cultivate the feeling of despair—is seen not to be the stuff of the whole poem. The first turning point of the poem comes with the fifth line. To complete the formal sense here the word "One" is perhaps required after "terrible", but this would almost certainly weaken the effect: Hopkins is also saying "But oh thou art terrible". "Rude",

in the same line, is used half adverbially, half adjectively, a not unprecedented thing in English. The compression of the rest of the sentence does make for initial difficulty. Expanded, presumably this would read : why wouldst thou so rudely rock on me thy right foot that can wring out the whole world beneath it? But the sense of intolerable pressure beneath this squeezing foot, half-divine and half brute, is felt through the very compression of the language, and the sheer muscular power of the alliteration is tremendous. The "lionlimb" is comprehensible as it stands, but it may carry an echo of the lion that devoured men in the Book of Ezekiel, which seems confirmed by the association of "bruisèd bones" in the next phrase, echoing the valley of dry bones later in the same book. The significance of these echoes is that the lion that devoured men and made the land desolate was captured, so that "his voice was heard no more upon the mountains of Israel" and that though it seemed that the dry bones in the valley could not live yet they did so when the spirit of God breathed through the voice of the prophet. In the next line there must certainly be an echo from the Bible, of the reluctant prophet Jonah. It was he who would not go to Nineveh as he had been commanded and fled to sea. But there God pursued him and the boat was taken in turns of tempest, while Jonah lay heaped at the bottom of the boat frantic to avoid God and flee. And when he had been cast into the belly of the whale Jonah prayed and God brought up his life "from corruption".

These references to the Bible, recognition of which adds something to the fullness of the poem, are not unduly difficult for a reader who is tolerably familiar with what after all is one of the greatest books in English literature. The difficulty comes at first in adjusting oneself to the

realisation that the poet, in the very act of turning from the despair on which he knows he must not feast his mind nevertheless protests most bitterly against whoever it is who has caused this terrible suffering to him (he dares not name him—even his identity is uncertain, and if it is God he is too terrible in this aspect to name yet).

With the next line comes a new movement in which the poet's perplexity seems to have been resolved. What was the reason for all this almost ununderstandable suffering ? There is a beautiful lightening of the touch, expressed through the light vowels and the clear easy rhythm: "Why ? That my chaff might fly ; my grain lie, sheer and clear". In the next line this is developed. "Coil " is used in the Elizabethan sense of "trouble" and gives a repetition of the image in "turns" two lines earlier. There is a difficulty of expression in the next phrase, for "hand rather" must be taken as modifying "rod", whereas the alliteration seems to drive it towards "heart". The general sense is clear: that when once the poet had realised that the chastisement was to separate the grain from the chaff in him and had blessed the hand that chastised he had gradually lapped up strength, even felt joy, even felt the desire to cheer.

But then comes another turn. The poet remembers his uncertainty in his trouble as to who it was that was making him suffer. And, as he is about to cheer, the sudden dismaying thought comes : cheer whom ? Was it God, or the Adversary ? Was it the hero who had flung him, as God threw Mulciber, out of heaven ? Or was it the spirit in himself that had fought him, and fought through to joy (though perhaps stolen joy) out of the suffering ? The echo of Milton is clear. Hopkins, we know, was a great reader

of Milton. And many have thought that subconsciously Milton was not quite sure whether in those early books of "Paradise Lost" God or Satan was the real hero. And the poet asks in renewed distress, "O which one ? is it each one ? " But then comes the final resolution, as he remembers that Jacob, the most favoured of God, had wrestled all night with God and been blessed by Him afterwards. This echo of the Old Testament, which is crucial to the full understanding of the poem, is again one that it is reasonable to expect the reader to hear.

The difficulties of this poem are then of three kinds, two of them very easily overcome. They are, first, slight difficulties of syntax and language due to the compression of thought in the poem ; and this does seem justified for nothing like the same effect could have been obtained with a looser or more flowing structure. The whole poem is muscular, kinaesthetic: one feels the struggle through one's body as one reads. Then secondly, there are a few implied references to stories in the Bible, one of which is really important and most of which should be within the general reader's range. There is also one implied reference to Milton, which is not crucial but which might very reasonably be considered within range.

The third difficulty is the important one: that here we have a most desperate conflict, stated, given a first resolution, stated again, and finally resolved, all in the space of fourteen lines. Hopkins, not theologically but out of his own terrible experience, is trying to reconcile the God of Love with the God of Power, and power that has caused the poet agony. The states of mind that he is trying to harmonise go far beyond the experience of naive religious faith, and they must have language that in its total effect is far from simple. Poetry such as this makes

demands on the reader. He has to be vigilant, both in his sympathies and in his thinking. But the demands that the poem makes are fair demands. For any reader who will read actively, here is a great poem.

If this poem may be taken as representative of the poetry of our times that is complex because the experience behind it is complex, it is yet a fairly simple example. Hopkins, being a Roman Catholic, had his symbols very much at his command. The symbolism of Catholic Christianity was a very part of him. But, as was said earlier, one of the difficulties that many modern poets feel is that they do not have such a framework of symbols. Symbols they must have, for they are trying to express what can be communicated so, but not in mere imageless prose. They have therefore to try to find symbols which are at once adequate for their own distinctive experience and reasonably valid for their readers as well. One of the great poets of this century, W. B. Yeats, offers a most interesting study in the attempts to find fitting symbols. He tried many sources of symbols in his time : those of folk-lore and the Celtic twilight, those of the Connemara fisherman and the Irish daylight. Towards the end of his life especially he felt a great and continuing desire to find what was permanent above the flux of daily life, and to express it. I should like to take one of his finest poems as an example of the kind of difficulty (as inevitable as it is at first perplexing) that this may bring to the reader. The poem I wish to quote is called "Byzantium", and it is linked with another poem called "Sailing to Byzantium" on which Yeats has a note that he has read somewhere that in the Emperor's palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang. The poem is as follows :—

The unpurged images of day recede ;
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed ;
Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song
After great cathedral gong ;
A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade ;
For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
May unwind the winding path ;
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon ;
I hail the superhuman ;
I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood.

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
Where blood-begotten spirits come
And all complexities of fury leave,
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
Spirit after spirit ! The smithies break the flood,
The golden smithies of the Emperor !
Marbles of the dancing floor
Break bitter furies of complexity,
Those images that yet
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

A reading of the first four lines of this poem alone must persuade any reader that here is true poetry. Whether he knows what it is "about" or not he must feel that here is a poet of great evocative power, who in four lines can summon up a scene in its essential graphic details and make it the vehicle for a clearly felt mood. As he reads the poem through he will feel this more and more. And he will feel that, whether its purport is intelligible or not, this poet has something real and important to say. He will feel this from the images, from the rhythm, from the tone. But if he is a serious reader he will want to come closer than this to what the poet is saying. He will realise that this will depend in great measure on his responding to the symbols used in the poem in the way that the poet intended. Now this will present him with a different kind of difficulty, and a much greater one, than anything in the poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins we have just considered. It is indeed possible that three or four reasonably sensitive and skilled readers, and readers familiar with the poetry of Yeats, might elucidate the poem in different ways. The variations might of course be permissible variations, so long as they were about a recognisable norm. I shall attempt, not a full appreciation of the poem, but an elucidation of these difficulties ; and I can only say that although this preliminary work enables the poem to come

to life magnificently for me it still may not be exactly the poem that Yeats wrote. One cannot be completely sure because the symbols, though not entirely private, were so much his own.

It seems to me that throughout the poem there is a triple structure. This is felt on the physical level in the first stanza when the day that has ended is contrasted first with the noises of the night, and then as these fade away with the perfect peace of full night under the dome of moon and stars. This third state seems in its silent majesty almost to scorn the sound and the fury of the human day and its after-echoes in the streets at night.

In the second stanza the elements of this triple structure are man, shade and image, in that order, corresponding to the noises of the day, the noises of the evening, and perfect night. The poet sees floating before him what seems like a man, but is more a shade of a man than a real man, and more an ideal image than a shade. And he welcomes this apparition

> For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
> May unwind the winding path.

These lines, so extremely difficult to comprehend at a first reading, are a magnificent example of the controlled fusing of images. Hades is of course the home of the shades of the dead. To travel down into Hades was a most difficult adventure and only one or two have made it and returned. A bobbin is, in its primary sense, any piece of wood round which thread is wound ; in its secondary sense it is a piece of wood with a latch-string round it that will open a door. In ancient Egypt the bodies of the dead were wound round with the cloth for mummies, and to come to the dead one would have to unwind the cloth, going through

the same movement as one would use in unwinding the thread from a bobbin. It was by unwinding a thread, and winding it up again as he returned, that Theseus penetrated the Maze in Crete. So by communion with the men who have gone, or rather with their shades, or still more with the spirits of ideal creation, one may penetrate to the mystery of perfect being, corresponding to the night of moon and stars in the first stanza. If one can only put oneself into a similar transcorporeal state, become pure spirit oneself, one may summon other breathless mouths, other spirits. To achieve this is to transcend the merely human. It is to undergo a kind of dying while one lives, and to find eternal life in that unliving state.

In the third stanza the triple structure has as its elements the bird on the tree, the bird as the handiwork of the artificer, the miracle that the bird has become. Such a bird of gold

> Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
> Can like the cocks of Hades crow.

I take the "cocks of Hades" to carry a twofold force. In the first place it means an image-bird, not a mere bird from the daytime world. In the second place, the cock has power over the shades of men to summon them back to Hades when it crows at dawn. "Golden bough" is also to be taken first literally, as the bough of the tree that the artificer wrought, and secondly with a reference to the Golden Bough of legend, for it was in the grove of the Golden Bough that Æneas began his descent into Hades. Such a bird of the world of the imagination, created through art, seems to have the same effortless and almost disdainful superiority to the birds of common life that the

night of the moon and the stars had for the evening's noises and the day.

The fourth stanza returns to the moment of the opening of the poem. It is midnight. To the Emperor's palace, where there is felt what in "Sailing to Byzantium" Yeats called the "artifice of eternity", the pure spirits come and all the furies of human complexity are left behind for those human beings who are rightly prepared.

They come there "astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood". What does this mean ? It was the dolphin that bore Arion the musician safely to shore in the Greek legend, through the sea that in this poem (as the word "flood" in the next line shows) is the familiar symbol of natural life. In other words, through the imaginative life of the great arts man can find the timeless and the pure and ride safely through the mire and blood of daily existence. The smithies break the flood : art imposes an order and control. And then the poet moves from the artificer who imposed this order through his smithy to the marble of the dancing floor, which is also a symbol of order, not mire but a firm floor of beautiful pattern where the spirit may move. And this communion with the world of spirit is perpetually creative, for the images beget ever-fresh images. The last line sums up the poem. The sea of human life is "dolphin-torn", cloven by the dolphin that symbolises art bearing man to security, but "torn" also because the struggle to create is a painful one and must be disturbing to the flow of ordinary life. It is "gong-tormented" because the great cathedral gong, which imposes measure and solemnity on the noises of the streets at night, symbolises religion, the struggle to attain which is also painful and must disturb the flow of the merely sensual world.

As I said earlier, there may well be other elucidations of the difficulties in this poem, and just as legitimate. But I do not think the one I have given above is strained at any point. Some broadly similar content to the poem I think must be understood if one is to comprehend it at all. But one cannot be quite certain. The reader has had to construct much more himself than is usual in reading a poem and he must wonder if he has read into the poem something not intended to be there and something perhaps not really legitimate. Slightly too high a premium is placed on what may be a reader's mere ingenuity. His difficulty in this poem is in knowing what really the symbols stand for. About the central symbol, of the artificer's tree with the golden birds that sang, there is no great doubt, for Yeats has given us his own note. And the recurring triple structure which groups the symbols in each stanza in an ascending order greatly helps. But is the dolphin, or is the gong, what I have suggested above? Is the interpretation of the Hades' bobbin passage quite what Yeats had in mind ? To a certain extent one is, to quote Wordsworth out of context, "moving about in worlds half-realised".

If, then, the poem by Hopkins illustrated one kind of difficulty in the poetry of our time this poem by Yeats illustrates another and more perplexing one. A third kind, that we have noted already in the poetry of Mr. Eliot, is that of the raising into symbolic status of a reference to reading or to a personal experience that must by the nature of things be much more private than public. Sometimes this may be inevitable, and that no doubt is for the poet to judge. But even if it seems inevitable to him, if the poem is to write itself at all, it still must mean imperfect communication. And anything like a cultivation of

this kind of mysterious referring to private experience, especially if the tone suggests that the more private it is the more prestige is conferred, cannot be for the health of poetry.

This leads me to the question that I have mentioned before as being in the minds of many people now who are anxious that poetry shall become widely available in our democratic society, at least so far as the natural endowments of different men and women make that possible. The examples of difficult poetry that we have considered have shown that there is some poetry that cannot be easy, from the very complexity of the experiences that it brings together in a harmonious whole. And here it is quite wrong to ask the poet to meet the public. To do so is to wish that Shakespeare had written nothing except stuff to tickle the ears of the groundlings. The only possible course is to encourage the public to meet the poet. And this is the task of education.

Have we yet a coherent policy for liberal education in a democracy ? Our conceptions are still formed very much on the model of what may have been suitable for the education of a minority in a pre-democratic age. The classics, which made an excellent basis for the education of a privileged and leisured minority, cannot possibly be dominant and virtually compulsory in a society where every one is to have a secondary schooling. The one alternative available to everybody as a civilising, liberalising influence like that of the classics is the literature of our own language, with attendant studies (as with the classical regime) in history and languages. The argument against classics from time alone is overwhelming, for we must in the modern world also know more of science than is possible for a boy or a girl who devotes almost all his

school time for seven or eight years to the study of Latin and Greek. And less will not take him to a command of their literatures.

Yet in spite of this very plain fact, and in spite of much excellent personal teaching, the general purposes and appropriate methods of the teaching of English literature are not very well thought out. That is true of our teaching of literature in schools, true to some considerable extent of the teaching of literature in universities, and unfortunately truest of all in adult education. There are of course some people who are thinking out their teaching problems, and there are many excellent teachers whatever their theories or lack of them. But there seems nothing like a general understanding of principles which would lead to coherent (I do not mean uniform) practice. I am convinced that unless we move in this matter, not merely in some official way, but through the many voluntary bodies from universities to educational associations that help to make our public policy in this country, we shall be neglecting our best chance of making our democracy also a civilisation. We should surely not be content until the number of people who read poetry for their personal pleasure and satisfaction is immensely greater than it is now. Can we imagine, in some war between England and America (that fortunately is not in the least likely to happen), a general of one side sparing the lives of some troops from the other because they could speak some passages from a contemporary poet whose work they wished to hear ? Yet Plutarch* recounts that the Greeks of Syracuse freed some Athenian prisoners because they could recite passages from Euripides, then at his height in Athens. When such could happen to English or Ameri-

* Life of Nicias (I am indebted to Prof. Gilbert Murray for the reference).

can soldiers then perhaps we may begin to believe in our progress in the arts as well as in the techniques of living.

Till then the poets are right not to concede too much. They are in a quite special sense the guardians of our sensibilities and these should not be blunted for the sake of a merely false or commercialised democracy. On the other hand it is a pity if a poet, or any other artist, seems to will a withdrawal. Sometimes a deliberate effort, or an external event, may bring the poet nearer to the mainstream of popular life without his compromising where he should not do so. One might say that something of the kind happened to some of our painters who were far beyond the public comprehension until the last war. But this common experience with the rest of us, and perhaps the commissioning of some of them as official war artists, caused them to modify their techniques and become more approachable by the average man. It may reasonably be said that they did not lose, but gained by it.

One wonders if some of the difficulty of modern poets is not over-cultivated. It is extremely difficult, in the present mixed state of our civilisation, to make a move that is not a false one. But a sense of what Milton gained by speaking for England (even if in the end England failed him), or of what Wordsworth gained by describing a poet as "a man speaking to men", would be a good thing for poetry now. Good poetry can only come out of a man's self. But has not the time come when the poet can seek moral and critical support less from coteries and more from his people ?

Six: Conclusion: Criticism and Taste

If the hope expressed at the end of the last chapter is to be realised there must obviously be a much wider critical reading public and more widespread good taste. These two things are connected, of course ; but they are not quite the same. If there is a reasonably influential minority capable of criticism—that is to say of understanding the ground for its tastes—then there will be a much greater number of people whose taste has in fact been well formed and that perpetuates itself. As an illustration of this I might recur to the state of the fine arts and many of the arts of use in the eighteenth century when the minority that was critical was in fact small but when standards of good taste in building and in the design of all sorts of things permeated English society.

In adult education, for instance, if we thought about the specific problems of the teaching of literature and secured a minority of really critical readers the effect would very soon permeate outwards. It would affect many things, from the prospects of financial success for serious poetic drama to the circulations of popular newspapers. Taste is something that is formed by continuous familiarity with the best. And when people ask, "What is the best ?" they will usually concede at least a hearing to those who know what they have found to be the best and who can give reasonable grounds for their preferences. And if the process begins young enough, before bad taste has taken real root, it becomes instinctive. A woman who has been brought up in surroundings of good taste may know little of aesthetics

and its theories but she will know instinctively what is vulgar in dress or what is distasteful in the furnishing of a room.

Good taste, however, is something that can very largely be formed. It is not irrevocably instinctive in the sense that one is born with it or without it. Most of us have developed our taste in one direction, perhaps in literature, but have never considered questions of taste in another, say, in the visual arts. We may perhaps write quite good poems in rooms that we have furnished pretentiously and falsely. Then some accident, probably the exposure to people of tastes so different that we have to stop and look and reflect, may be the beginning of a development of good taste there also.

Now in literature the first sign of awakening sensitiveness to style is often a delight in the cliché with a slight stylistic flavour. We feel that it is a little finer to "wend our way" than simply to go. If we write verse it is probably a sonnet. We may think we are aiming at Shakespeare, though we only achieve Ella Wheeler Wilcox. But if our eyes and ears and minds are open we soon discover that these reach-me-downs are not very good garments and do not fit us personally at all. We cease to believe that Galsworthy's description of the death of Old Jolyon is the greatest death scene ever penned, and we do so because we have discovered Plato's account of the death of Socrates or Shakespeare's description of the death of Falstaff or of Cleopatra. In poetry we cease to be bemused by the rhythms of Swinburne and Poe and begin to have an ear for Shakespeare and Milton. In short, simply by "turning the eye toward the light" we begin to see what is good.

Now, fortunately, this can take place without any very conscious formulation of ideas of criticism. Its develop-

ment depends chiefly on the habit of comparing things and discovering for ourselves what gives us most satisfaction. But sooner or later we meet friends who have different tastes from ourselves, and in practice we never take the shallow line that there is no disputing about tastes. We have to find reasons for our preferences ; we act on the assumption that if we can explain ourselves and show what we like and why we like it there will be enough in common between ourselves and most of our friends to make them like it too.

Some differences will very properly remain, and they can be expressed by the word "taste" also, though used in a different sense. It is reasonable for a Scot to take a special pride in Burns, for a man of Wessex to take a special pride in Hardy, for a man who has been at Oxford or Cambridge to enjoy novels that describe those universities, for a man who has travelled in some foreign country to take a special interest in books about it. These are grounds for personal preference, not for the assertion of superiority by the standards of criticism, which must be more universal. These are matters of personal tastes, and it would be a dull world if we all had the same ones.

But how far may we extend this ? Is it reasonable for Catholics to make special play with the poets that have been of their persuasion, or for critics on the political Left to praise the poets of the Left and decry those of the Right ? The short answer would seem to be that it is natural and legitimate for all of us to take a special interest in writers who express our way of life. But what the man who considers he is a critic of literature must not do, is to claim that for these adventitious reasons such writers are better writers than they are.

The truth is that we are compounded of many attitudes

and many interests, and in the art of literary criticism there is no objective measuring rod that one may use scientifically. Even critics who think they confine themselves to strictly relevant criteria will almost certainly over-praise the writers who write in the mode they wish to encourage at the time and dispraise those who have written in a different way. Incidentally, they will commonly be found to have written best about the writers whose merits they have discovered rather than about the writers, hitherto enjoyed, whose faults they have now revealed. This does not mean that destructive criticism should not be written: it is sometimes very necessary. But one must remember that there are many modes of good writing.

To sum up what I have been saying in these pages: to achieve magnanimity without blunting the edge of discrimination must be the aim of the good critic. If he achieves it he will be an authority, not only on literature, but also perhaps on life.

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