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Aesthetics

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Aesthetics

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". . . for there is no method except to be very intelligent. . . ."
T. S. Eliot

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Introduction

At the least, this Introduction can be expected to give the student some sense of what aesthetics is and tries to do, perhaps by a definition. Yes, but aesthetics is a cluster of many problems, not any single one, and as in any live field of study the problems keep expanding and changing. To decide which of them is the most important is, moreover, itself a strategic philosophical problem and one on which the philosophers disagree. Hence anything like a definition I might offer would be either arbitrary or else so general that it would be worthless. But there is something else. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy, and like philosophy generally it is, more than anything else, a competitive exchange of ideas. Like all philosophy, it is ideas thrusting against each other, making their claims upon the loyalty of the mind, changing each other. Conclusions are arrived at—conclusions often keen as a knife edge or so suggestive that they are unpacked by century after century. But aesthetics cannot be set out as a body of conclusions. Like all philosophy, aesthetics is a process, not an end product, an inquiry, not an almanac. Probably the best way to put it is as old Socrates thought—it is a conversation among earnest minds.

By looking ahead to the selections, I want in this Introduction to draw the outlines of the conversation, to see how the philosophers themselves define the issues they have thought it important to discuss with each other.

I

The *Poetics,* by Aristotle, is, beyond much reasonable doubt, the single most important book ever written in the theory of tragedy, literary criticism, and aesthetics.

The intelligent student will not be intimidated by this fact. But neither will he ignore it. He will want to see for himself whether this is just a fact of intellectual history or whether and how the *Poetics* lights up his own thinking and gives direction to it. Indeed, much of the intellectual history is more likely to arouse suspicion than awe. At various times the *Poetics* has been likened in infallibility to Euclid in geometry and to the Bible. And between the six-

teenth and eighteenth centuries its authority was held by many leading dramatists and critics to be beyond question.

It helps to restore perspective if we distinguish between this sort of thing and Aristotle, writing the *Poetics*. He was a philosopher and a teacher, not an oracle. Something less than a hundred years after the high noon of Greek tragedy—the age that had dramatized the legends of Oedipus and Medea—Aristotle looks back at the plays, taking them as the facts from which he starts. It is for him, as for his countrymen, a given that watching these plays is an experience of rare profundity and value. How do the plays create this experience, or, as Aristotle puts it, how do they achieve their purpose? This large, unwieldy question Aristotle breaks down into a number of questions. How is it that tragedy, which arouses "pity and fear" (Chapter 6), is pleasurable? What is the relative importance of the "plot" as opposed to the "character" of the tragic hero? What sort of man is the tragic figure and how does he engage our sympathies (Chapter 13)? The answers can only be found by the detached, analytic examination of the data which Aristotle had elsewhere turned upon biological processes and political constitutions. His answers were then transmitted to his students as a guide to their own efforts at playwriting. (The text of the *Poetics*, as we have it, may be based upon students' lecture notes, which might account for a certain lumpiness in its structure—at least, all teachers will think so.) So the *Poetics*—whatever later centuries, in need of a dictator, may have made of it—is the sustained intellectual effort of a man who was trying to get clear about questions arising naturally from the shared experience of his age.

The same is true of every other selection in this anthology. Each is a work, a work of the mind, a thinking-through, communicated to the reader to show that the problems are his also or can be his or—most likely—have been his, only formerly fairly mute and ill-defined. Each seeks to persuade, but none invites uncritical acceptance. The student will make up his own mind, but he will earn the right to do so only if he too makes the effort of a cautious analysis of the arguments and a catholic inspection of the pertinent evidence.

I have set Aristotle back into his age as a corrective for authoritarianism. But the opposite error to thinking him an infallible lawgiver for all drama is to consider the *Poetics* limited in its validity

to the drama of its own time. If it were, it would be of small interest to us. More important, we could not then explain why thoughtful men throughout the modern era have related their understanding of literature to Aristotle's. Even when, like the contemporary playwright, Arthur Miller,[1] they seek to reject him, they thereby pay tribute to his influence. This little book—severe, condensed, humorless—touches the nerve of serious reflection as no other has.

The *Poetics* is based upon an empirical examination of the plays. But the result is not simply a collection of inductive generalizations, though there are those. Throughout Aristotle is working toward a model of the best kind of play, meaning by this the play best-adapted to creating tragic pleasure in the beholder or reader. Hence his analysis of the elements of tragedy always has a prescriptive, or normative, force. Aristotle not only enumerates "the species of Discovery" (Chapter 16)—that is merely inductive and descriptive—but he also judges which of them is "best" for the credibility and therefore the power of the play. The famous definition of "tragedy" at the beginning of Chapter 6 is a whole network of *criteria of evaluation,* in the light of which particular tragedies are assessed as more and less good. This use of definition to render a philosopher's decision on what is important in art (is it simply an expression of personal preference?) should also be remarked by the student in the selections from Tolstoy and Clive Bell.

The running debate throughout the centuries, between those who have espoused and those who have rebelled against Aristotle, has been over this decision. Are these the criteria we ought to use in our encounter with tragedy? (Clearly this kind of question cannot be settled by empirical facts, which is by no means to say that they are irrelevant.) That the debate has gone on with regard to all forms of tragedy—Shakespeare, the classical French drama, recent "naturalism"—is proof enough that the significance of the *Poetics* transcends its historical origins. Why is it that the *Poetics* has been "perennially" relevant?

The history of the book, which leads us to put the question, itself cautions us against any simple answer. Such a book must be many-faceted and endlessly rich. I will single out an issue around which a great deal of the *Poetics* revolves, and which has become, largely

[1] Cf. Introduction to *Collected Plays* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957).

because of Aristotle, one of the major problematic areas in aesthetic theory.

Aristotle speaks repeatedly of tragedy as an "imitation" of men and action. You will have to spend some time on that word, bearing in mind that Aristotle also takes music, as well as painting, to be a mode of "imitation." Whatever its correct analysis may be, "imitation" at once ties tragedy to the realm of common human experience beyond art. As a value-criterion it generates such demands upon the play as "lifelikeness" and "plausibility." So we condemn a play because its loose ends are tied up by too outrageous a coincidence, or because the motivation of its characters is not convincing. Aristotle also speaks of the tragedy as a self-contained entity, a "whole" with a "beginning, middle, and end" (Chapter 7). Now, is the unity of the play dependent upon that of the "imitation," so that the drama necessarily loses coherence when the predictable connections among character and event are not present? Or can there be a kind of unity peculiar to the play, whose laws are not those of nonartistic experience?

As you will see, Aristotle in general holds to the former alternative. Yet these two conceptions of the drama tend to pull in opposite directions. So when, in Chapter 25, Aristotle justifies "impossibilities" if they enhance the "effect" of the play, he is divorcing the worth of the play from its "real-life" credibility. The difficulty is summed up in the key phrase "probable or necessary," which occurs throughout the *Poetics*. Aristotle uses it to describe the relations between both the dramatic events and the actions of a given character that are required for successful tragedy. But again, can the standards of "probability or necessity" defy our ordinary rational understanding and yet be so persuasively honored within the world that is the play itself that we forego ordinary understanding and allow the play to work its "effect" upon us?

Historically this question has assumed many different shapes, depending upon the kind of drama under debate at a given period and the conventions of thinking and discourse. In whatever form, it has been close to the center of thoughtful concern, whether that of the creative artist, the spectator trying to decide what he must "look for" in the play, or the critic. Aristotle anticipates this concern and helps those who have come later to give voice to it. He does so

because he envisions the play both as an "imitation" and as a vehicle of poetic "effect," attempts to reconcile the two and yet remains sensitive to the tension between them. Aristotle does this for a single literary form. Yet much of modern aesthetics, more ambitiously concerned with all the arts, has tended to gravitate toward one or the other of Aristotle's conceptions. Thus, further along in this anthology, Bell is at one extreme—"to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs"—and T. M. Greene is at the other—the work of art is enmeshed in man's moral and religious allegiances and subject to critical judgment in these terms. When you read the arguments that convert these slogans into theories, you will see their affinity to Aristotle, when he tried to do justice to both ways of thinking.

Now, perhaps, we can better understand the historical claim on behalf of Aristotle with which we began, and what it implies for those reading the *Poetics* for the first time: Aristotle sets inquiry going and he illuminates and fructifies it. Which is not at all the same thing as saying that Aristotle is "right" or that we must accept his theses, in part or as a whole. Greatness in philosophy is not in telling the right answers but in asking the right questions, though what the questions are can only be learned by seeing how they are unfolded in the course of the answering.

II

If Aristotle is modern in the sense that he is always relevant, Tolstoy is modern in the narrower sense. Listen to what people say about art, in critical writings and in ordinary conversation, in program notes and art gallery catalogues, and you find this view constantly expressed—art is an emotional language, a personal utterance addressed to the reader or beholder by means of which he grasps the emotion the artist has felt and makes it his own. For roughly a century this conception of art has probably been the dominant one, and Tolstoy is its most influential spokesman in aesthetic theory.

To study philosophically an idea that is so much the common coin of our own belief, runs several dangers and therefore requires different cautions before we start. To study any idea philosophically is an effort of firm and scrupulous objectivity. The idea tries

to answer to certain facts and to achieve the clarity and order of a logical structure. Neither the facts nor the logical criteria are of its making; it is responsible to them. The idea must be judged on its success in these terms, not by whether it is widely believed or whether it happens to be congenial to the reader or whether it "sounds good"—or by any of the false standards by which we warp our own judgment. When, as in the present case, the idea is accepted by many as an unquestioned, almost self-evident truth, the effort of objectivity becomes doubly imperative and doubly difficult. On the other hand, there is the danger that the Tolstoyan view may be so familiar to us that it seems rather stale. Here history can be of help. At the beginning of this century Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* was hailed as a liberation, a "deliverance."[2] Tolstoy had done away with abstract theorizing. He had caught the actuality of what it is like to create art and appreciate it. Neither the artist nor the spectator seeks "beauty." Art begins with a man feeling some emotion, and it fulfils itself when another man shares this emotion. Reminding ourselves of the excitement this theory caused refreshes the theory and gets us to consider that what is now a cliché may yet embody considerable empirical insights.

Tolstoy's theory installs the experience of the creative artist squarely at its center. It thereby points up something we probably miss in reading the *Poetics*, namely, that Aristotle says almost nothing about the artist. Except for Chapter 17, it is the work of art, its structure and effect, that is at the focus of his discussion. Now, clearly, no artist, no art. Aristotle, indeed, had formulated the distinction between art and "nature" in terms of the skilled, self-aware "making" of which only an artist is capable. Thus is art set off from natural objects and also random or reflex human activities. This is common ground in our thought and language, but much more than this is at stake in Tolstoy's radically different approach to aesthetics. He too, like Aristotle, wishes to distinguish the elements that make up the art object, to give an account of the response of the audience to it, and to propose a set of criteria for evaluating it. In doing each of these things, the point of departure for Tolstoy is the experience of the artist, indeed his preartistic experience, that is, the emotions he had before ever undertaking creative activity. If only these emo-

[2] Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 292.

tions are authentically his own and deeply felt, their communication to the audience and the value of the work of art are almost automatically guaranteed.

We can say, then, that there is a recognizable similarity between Tolstoy's subject matter and Aristotle's. But it is probably even more important to say that they get into or take hold of the subject matter at different points—Tolstoy, at the artist, Aristotle, at the work of art; Margaret Macdonald, later in this anthology, starts from the critical judgment after the work has been experienced—and then range outward from these points. The entire subject matter is shaped differently as a result. No one approach is infallible, and each has something to be said for it, though the insights come at different places and are arrived at in different ways. The opposition between these approaches can take two forms. It can be explicit, like Macdonald's denying that it is of any importance to the critic to know what the artist felt, denying, even, that the critic or anyone else *can* ever know what the artist felt (p. 102). Or the disagreement is tacit, when the philosopher, without looking over his shoulder at his rivals, justifies his approach simply by carrying it out and showing the intellectual gains that accrue from it. Aristotle tells us much about the inner mechanism of tragedy and brings out the distinctive potentialities and limitations of this literary form. Tolstoy, by contrast, tells us relatively little about the particular arts, and indeed the differences between them hardly seem to matter. Notice how Tolstoy runs together all of the artistic media—"lines, colours, sounds, etc."—in his definition of "art" (p. 43). Notice too how little important the technical control of the medium becomes, on Tolstoy's theory—if the artist is sincere he will necessarily be lucid (p. 45), which sounds like putting too much trust in the power of sheer feeling. In some clear way a work of art is much more certainly a pattern of tones or a structure of marble than it is an "embodiment" of emotion, yet it is just these elements of form and medium that Tolstoy slights. Thus the implicit criticism that might be extracted from the *Poetics* is that Tolstoy tells us less than we need to know about what makes up the particular work of art and determines its value, and that this failure results from the one-sidedness of his approach.

Another area of our subject matter should now be identified.

Tolstoy and Aristotle both examine the spectator's response to the work and single out certain psychological states that are—or ought to be—crucial to such experience and are the measure of its goodness. These are "feeling" and "tragic pleasure," respectively. But the enjoyment of art, however good it may be in itself, has, like any experience, consequences beyond itself, and both Tolstoy and Aristotle consider these as well. After the book has been closed or he has left the theater, what are the effects of the experience upon the individual and on the well-being of his society? The vague and therefore greatly debated concept of "catharsis" occurs only once in the *Poetics* (Chapter 6), but Aristotle apparently uses it to show how tragedy, by giving insight into the objects of our pity and fear, stabilizes these otherwise corrupting emotions and thereby contributes to the health of the soul.

Tolstoy, however, far from proposing a blanket justification of art, subjects most of art, particularly modern art, to a blistering condemnation. The artist whose only goal is to entertain the audience is often inspired by no emotion of his own. He works to a formula of commercial success, and his art is therefore lifeless, even when it "sells." When the audience, inevitably, becomes jaded, the artist resorts to wilful obscurity or else sensationalism—the emotions of sex, perversion, and violence. These criticisms are two-edged. They reveal the intrinsic shortcomings of such art, but they also have moral implications which are, for Tolstoy, even more important. Modern art has the obligation to arouse the community of emotions latent in all men and thereby to unite and exalt them. But the poet or painter who thrives on the admiration of the small cult cannot speak to the many; the playwright who traffics in thinly veiled pornography depraves the audience that he delights.

You will doubtless have remarked how strikingly Tolstoy's criticisms of art resemble those we hear in our own day. Written well over half a century ago, they are echoed in the latest diatribes against television, the moving picture, the paperback novel. Yet there is the noteworthy and, from Tolstoy's standpoint, painful paradox that whereas his criticisms were directed against "the art of the upper classes," in the name of a wholly popular art, precisely the same criticisms are now being turned against the "mass media," which have, for the first time, created just such art. Tolstoy believed

that "good art always pleases every one" (p. 46), and this is not simply a historical proposition for him because universality of appeal is itself a criterion of the value of art. Here is a more recent social commentator: [3]

> It is unwise to think that the emotions modern crowds expect from the arts are necessarily profound. On the contrary, they are often superficial and puerile, and scarcely go beyond the amorous and Christian sentimentalities, the taste for violence, a little cruelty, collective vanity and sensuality.

In this respect, Tolstoy's critique may be misdirected. It remains an acute and powerful indictment of the art of our time and a grave reminder of the social import of art at any time.

The philosopher is a man often ahead of his time. He is when he challenges ideas and exposes their flaws, even while they are still widely and uncritically accepted.

Tolstoy's concepts of "expression" and "communication of emotion" are good examples. As we have noted, they are very much the working capital of our thinking and talking about art. In the last few years, however, a number of philosophers have begun to raise searching questions about the meaningfulness and validity of these ideas.[4] The paper by John Hospers is a brief, representative statement of their doubts.

The differences between Tolstoy and Hospers are not simply doctrinal. The student will see that they dramatize two distinct kinds of philosophizing. Their essays differ in scale—Tolstoy elaborates a full-scale aesthetic theory, Hospers limits himself to one or two concepts—in tone—to Tolstoy's confident certainties Hospers opposes a cautious scepticism—in intent—by contrast to Tolstoy, Hospers is as much concerned with analyzing the weakness of an idea as with finding an alternative for it. Of these two mentalities, which are counterpoises to each other throughout the history of philosophy, Hospers' is dominant in present-day American and English philosophy. See how he proceeds. To many, Tolstoy's account

[3] André Malraux, "Art, Popular Art, and the Illusion of the Folk," *Partisan Review*, XVIII (1951), p. 489.

[4] In the Bibliography, cf. Beardsley, Chap. VII; Stolnitz, Chaps. 7, 10; and Bouwsma.

of the transaction between artist and spectator seems the simple, natural, accurate rendering of the truth of the matter. Hospers asks —the question never stays down—what precisely it is Tolstoy means or can mean. *Just to put this* question seriously already makes the locution "The artist has conveyed his feelings about . . ." sound different, less glib and assured, more problematical. Hospers then proposes and canvasses various possible meanings and offers arguments against each of them. Notice, for this is characteristic of philosophy generally, that the arguments are not all of the same logical kind. Some are straightforwardly empirical, adducing facts (the facts are all familiar; the philosopher makes no claim to have discovered them); some show up the vagueness and opacity of the concept; some trace out what else you are committed to if you hold the concept, and if these implications are rationally unacceptable, then so is it.

As a result of these recent analyses, the usefulness of the Tolstoyan concepts is now very much an open question in aesthetics. Hospers' constructive hypothesis at the close of his paper is but one of the attempts currently being made to preserve "expression." Or perhaps the concept should be abandoned. Most of all one would like to see, among the art critics and in ordinary discourse, greater recognition of the force and urgency of the questions the philosophers have raised and therefore greater wariness and self-consciousness in all the talk about artistic "expression." That would bring a large gain. The philosopher holds up for examination ideas the nonphilosopher uses quite naturally and freely. But the nonphilosopher wants these ideas to be clear and intelligible to his fellows. So it is *his* values that philosophy seeks to preserve. The nonphilosopher who is aware of the work done in philosophy runs less risk of being betrayed by his ideas, of being led, unwittingly, into confusion, by ideas that are supposed and deceptively seem to be the instruments of clarity.

III

Clive Bell was one of the major apologists at the beginning of this century for those revolutionary movements in postimpressionistic painting and sculpture that gave up the old ideal of "imitating nature," not out of incompetence, but on principle. These move-

ments went from the wilful "distortion" of the objects of ordinary experience, as in Cubism, to their elimination, as in Mondrian, to the uninhibited squiggles and splashes of pigments in the "action painting" and "abstract expressionism" of our own day. Bell's strategy was his legislative use of the term "art": story-telling and description on canvas are not, as has been generally thought, art at all; only its organization of the elements of line, mass, and color, or what Bell calls "significant form," entitles a painting or sculpture to be called a "work of art."

It is fair to say that Bell's theory has not been widely accepted among aestheticians. The wholesale exclusion of representation from the definition of "art" is thought too extreme—as I suggested earlier, it misses the point to think that this is a matter of "mere definition" —and Bell's injunction that we should "look through" the person or event depicted in the painting, to the form, is too expensive. It would cost us the psychological insight of a Rembrandt, the pathos of a Crucifixion. Bell's formalism is extreme, and yet it is not a lunatic fringe theory of the sort that can comfortably be ignored. If you read at all widely in recent aesthetics and criticism, you find Bell being "refuted" at almost every turn. Those who will not believe him have had to come to terms with him.

This is, I believe, because the root ideas that inspire Bell's theory are accepted, indeed insisted upon, by many other aestheticians. Bell, however, holds that we cannot be consistent in these ideas unless we carry them to an extreme. Here is what I mean. Modern aesthetics, say since the eighteenth century, has found a rationale for the artist and his audience in the uniqueness and autonomy of art. The work of art is not a scientific document, a vehicle of knowledge; it is not a religious icon, important only because of what it represents; it is not a moral tract. The nature and value of art are not to be understood in these other terms. Its nature and value are peculiar to itself. The artist's imagination—a key word in modern aesthetics—can and must be far-ranging, not subject to the claims of truth or practicality. And the response of the spectator to his work is a mode of spiritual experience unlike any other. He pays tribute to the unique value of art in his approach to it. He comes with no thought of any consequences or effects ulterior to the act of perception itself. His attention dwells upon and comes to rest in the

work. Bell puts it, as you will see in the selection, that the object is then regarded as "an end in itself," not as a means (p. 59). Only when seen in this way, so different from the ordinary way of looking at things, can the work of art be appreciated for what it distinctively is, or, as Bell has it, only then can the work arouse "the pure aesthetic emotion."

Where Bell goes beyond most theorists is in claiming that genuinely aesthetic perception is possible if and only if the painting has no representational subject matter (or, where it has, only if the subject matter is ignored). Otherwise the painting will lead attention from itself to the "real-life" object. Pure form is free from this danger. Since it stands for nothing else, it is of intrinsic interest solely.

The controversy stirred up by this theory has been fruitful precisely because you cannot fight Bell unless you get clear about some of the major concepts in aesthetics. If you want to argue that perception can still be aesthetic in the face of "Descriptive Painting," you have to consider the peculiarities of aesthetic perception and where its limits are to be set. If you hold that the subject matter, seen as such, interacts with and enhances the value of the form, even helps to make the form what it *is*, you cannot take a step forward until you analyze the concepts of "form" and "subject matter." If you refuse to give up the conviction that painting is properly judged in terms of its "human" significance—moral, psychological, dramatic —you must rebut Bell's charge that the use of such criteria erodes the uniqueness of painting and reduces it to a rather inferior form of story-telling.

Moreover Bell's theory forces us to think again about the relations between the various arts. It is no accident that, to illustrate artistic form, Bell goes outside of the visual arts to music, since the medium of music is least well-adapted to representation. But what of literature? Words, unlike tones, have a reference and they therefore compose an "imitation." Bell concludes that since literature "reposes on the emotions of life" it is "impure" and an art wholly different from painting.[5] The use of "impure" does not add much and need not frighten anyone, but nasty-sounding words aside, there are

[5] Clive Bell, "The 'Difference' of Literature," *New Republic*, **XXXIII** (1922), p. 18.

serious and important questions here, quite apart from formalism. Can we legitimately employ the same patterns of analysis and evaluation in music as in literature? Do such concepts as "form," "meaning," "theme" have the same significance and application when used in speaking of all the arts? Most generally, then, there is the question *about* (rather than *in*) aesthetics, viz., is it most fruitfully carried on as an inquiry into the individual arts (Aristotle) or, as in Tolstoy, as a blanket answer to "*What is Art?*"

E. H. Gombrich and T. M. Greene join issue with Bell, though in very different ways.

Greene urges the objection, which is doubtless felt by many of Bell's readers, that the artist has always sought to "express" his deepest moral, religious, or intellectual convictions about his subject matter, in painting as well as literature, and that this is just as much an integral part of the work of art as its form. To ignore the artist's sense of what is humanly important impoverishes art almost beyond recognition. So Greene takes up and defends a position opposite Bell's.

Gombrich does something more subtle. He is not, in any straightforward way, opposing Bell. At the beginning of the selection, he endorses the view for which Bell, much earlier in the history of "modern art," had to propagandize against great odds—painting and sculpture need not be representational. Gombrich does not think, however, that the representational art of the many centuries preceding our own should therefore be cavalierly dismissed. Much more important, he wants to take a fresh look at the notion of "representation" itself. The fresh look casts doubt on Bell's commonsense conception of it. But before going on to Gombrich's conclusions, a few words about how he arrives at them.

It has been said of aesthetics that it is "the crossroads of different sciences." [6] Perhaps this remark holds true of other philosophical disciplines as well, but it has much point. The name the Germans have given the scientific study of art, *Kunstwissenschaft*, does not refer to any one science but to many—history, psychology, anthropology, and others. These studies are united in rejecting the tradi-

[6] R. Bayer, quoted in Guido Morpurgo-Tagliabue, *L'Esthétique Contemporaine* (Milan: Marzorati, 1960), p. 417.

tional view of art as a "mystery," ineffable and beyond explanation. Art is one concrete social institution among others, like government or an economic system; and, like them, it can be studied empirically. This conviction has been vindicated. *Kunstwissenschaft* has yielded rich results. It has taught us much that is genuinely new about the origins of artistic creation, the evolution of art, the psychology of aesthetic experience. Important recent work, in addition to Gombrich's, includes Arnheim's psychological analysis of "expression," [7] Panofsky's studies in symbolism,[8] and Hauser's "social history of art." [9]

Still, many thinkers distinguish between *Ästhetik* and *Kunstwissenschaft.* And it is on the whole true that they assign the classic philosophical questions, such as those discussed in this Introduction, to "aesthetics." As a matter of terminology this is of interest only to library cataloguers. There is more involved. Granted the value of the kind of work just cited to the philosopher, who would be absurd and arrogant if he disregarded it on the grounds that it is "not philosophy." Yet even to say this seems to imply some salient difference between *philosophical* aesthetics and the other approaches to art and aesthetic experience, by whatever name one calls them. How is the distinction to be drawn? This is one of the thorniest of questions to answer in general terms. Then let the student answer it in the local terms of specific readings. Let him ask himself as he reads Gombrich: Is there something here—the problem Gombrich sets for himself, the data he uses, his way of going about it—that makes *this* selection more unlike the other, "philosophical," selections in the anthology than they are unlike each other?

Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* is at the "crossroads" of psychology and the history of art. From the latter, Gombrich takes the most obvious fact of all and turns it into a searching and fruitful question. Artists have tried to depict faithfully the natural world. But why

[7] Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954).

[8] Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1955).

[9] Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (4 vols.; New York: Vintage Books, 1958).

have they done it so differently? They have had the same models, the objects all of us see about us. Why are the results so diverse? Someone like Tolstoy would point to the personality of the artist, his individual way of seeing and feeling. This is surely true, but it is not enough. It concentrates too much on the individual artist; it is too little social and historical. For certainly there are recognizable similarities among the works produced by a great number of artists at the same period. All of us, to some extent, and art historians in particular, can identify an artistic age in this way. "Style" is a cultural as well as a personal phenomenon.

The artist, then, represents nature by using certain conventions, the "language of art" of his time. Gombrich expands this thesis by going to recent psychological theories of ordinary perception, apart from art. Perception is never merely passive, a registering of the appearances of shoes and ships as they confront us. It is never "just seeing." The mind, always, brings with it and employs models of how things of various kinds are expected to look, so that whatever is seen is seen *as* fitting into one of these "schemata." The hold of the schema on the mind is so great that sometimes we "see" just what we think we *ought* to see, even when, without our realizing it, important properties of the object are distorted or ignored. Other times, the object defies the schema, that is, it frustrates our expectations of how it will look and feel. Then the schema may be altered, by "trial and error." But nothing can be puzzling to us unless we already have some standard of what is familiar and predictable. Thus, in different ways, both these cases evidence the importance of the schema. It is the indispensable condition of all perception. Now, for the artist, the schemata of perception are largely the stylistic conventions of his time. It therefore follows that style is not a mere accessory, something we can divorce from the work of art. For it not only guides the "trial and error" of the creative process, but also, more fundamentally and quite literally, it determines what the world *looks like* to the artist. As Gombrich puts it, in the striking sentence around which his whole argument revolves, ". . . the artist (tends) to see what he paints rather than to paint what he sees" (p. 66).

Bell, pleading the cause of "modern art," urges that the desire to represent leads the artist away from authentic art. Painting devoted to what Bell calls "catching a likeness" (p. 55) is merely a

replica of ordinary experience, showing us what we can see outside of art. It is an abuse of painting because it is not—Bell's other alternative—a construction built up out of the peculiar resources of the art. Now, in the light of Gombrich's analysis, this is, if not downright false, seriously misleading. If Gombrich is right, intrinsic to any representation whatever are certain forms of seeing that are uniquely painterly. Style, a set of visual conventions peculiar to painting and evolved by painters, is not a mere device enlisted in the service of "catching a likeness." It dictates what the "likeness" is a likeness *of*. "The artist . . . cannot transcribe what he sees; he can only translate it into the terms of his medium." [10] Bell speaks of "Descriptive Painting," which he chooses not to call "art." But if such painting is, as it must be, a "translation" into "the language of art," then it is not simply trading one linguistic stipulation for another to consider it artistic. It is, rather, a way of summing up an important truth about representation. And, one may add, this can be affirmed with no prejudice whatever to any claims for the significance and value of nonrepresentational art.

The fight between Bell and Bell's opponents has generally been over the relative importance of representation and form in art. Gombrich, by throwing new light on what representation is and how it functions, alters our understanding of the pivotal concepts. It is too soon to predict how the controversy over formalism will be reformulated as a result. Notably, Gombrich has relatively little to say about aesthetic *value*. But as the concepts change, the philosophical issues necessarily change. It is safe to say that in the future the war will not be fought on quite the same terrain.

IV

T. M. Greene considers the importance of the artist's subject matter from the standpoint of the critic. Not that he is, in this discussion, himself a critic. He is doing *philosophy of* criticism, analyzing some of the major concepts employed by critics and bringing out the presuppositions of using them intelligently and with profit. Yet, as the reader very likely sees at this point, you can hardly talk about any one philosophical problem without touching upon a great many

[10] E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (new ed.; London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1962), p. 30.

others. One has to take some things for granted in order to say anything at all, though it does not follow that we should be ignorant or lazy about what we take for granted. Greene limits himself to one criterion of value, "artistic greatness," and he tries to show under what conditions a critic is qualified to use this criterion and, therefore, under what conditions some evaluation of the greatness of a work of art can be known to be sound and accurate. Underlying this discussion are several more inclusive questions Greene does not (in this selection) consider, for example: What in general does art criticism try to do? What sort of arguments does the critic use to support his judgment? Are we justified in thinking that one man's judgment of art is better than another's and if so, how? The two final selections in the anthology are addressed to these questions.

There is no need here for any summary introduction to the issues of evaluation and "good taste." It is very difficult to see how it could possibly be done better than it is by Hume himself in his classic "Dissertation." Hume tries to show that and how "the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing" (p. 96). Equally interesting and, to the beginning student perhaps even more important, is Hume's way of working up to this conclusion. He begins with nonphilosophical common sense. It is divided against itself on the issue of taste. On the one hand, it holds that to judge something beautiful is just to record a personal feeling and that therefore the judgment can never achieve the validity of science. On the other, common sense condemns some judgments as too "extravagant" to be taken seriously. To make common sense articulate in this way is already to go beyond it, but each of these common-sense viewpoints is persuasive. Throughout and up to the very end, when he tries to decide which critical disagreements are "innocent and unavoidable" (p. 97), Hume's thinking feels the impulses of these opposing ideas. He attempts to mediate between them, preserving what is sound of each. Hume makes a second start from another commonly held belief, viz., those works of art that have endured and been popular in all "nations and ages" are thereby shown to be good or great works of art. This appeal to historical fact is, however, legitimate only on the premise Hume makes explicit and seeks to justify—the judgment of time is the judgment of *good* taste. Then Hume sets out the five personal characteristics required for good taste. This

part of the job takes up more of the "Dissertation" than any other, and this too is instructive. However important and suggestive the history of taste may be, it cannot of itself solve the central problem. No collection of historical facts can establish the existence of a "standard of taste," in Hume's sense, let alone tell us of what it consists. That demands a different kind of inquiry, a *logical* inquiry in the sense of analyzing "good taste" in order to find its necessary and sufficient conditions.

The critical questions to be raised against Hume correspond in kind to the arguments he deploys. Some will be empirical: Are there in fact any works that have enjoyed lasting esteem? Are there any of the so-called "enduring" works, whose reputation when plotted does not look like a series of peaks and troughs? Some questions, more vital and therefore, as we might expect, more difficult, will be logical: Is "delicacy" just one of the five conditions of good taste, or is it itself the necessary and sufficient condition? Is Hume guilty of circularity? ("The man of good taste appreciates beautiful works of art" and "Those works of art are beautiful that are appreciated by men of good taste.") Other questions will be about the relation between empirical and logical arguments: Does Hume's distinction between "sound" and "deficient" taste depend upon the fact of historical consensus? Could the distinction be drawn if there were no such "fact"? Whatever the student's final judgment on the soundness of the theory, he will find that an earnest reading of Hume leads him through some of the major options of belief about taste, and he cannot but see as a result what each is worth and what each costs.

Margaret Macdonald also thinks that whether a critic's opinion is authoritative depends upon his personal qualifications. But she skips over these in a couple of sentences at the close of her paper. One can say, particularly after reading Hume, that this is not enough on so complicated an issue. Yet we should also recognize that Macdonald was trying quite deliberately to initiate a new line of approach to the problems of evaluation and criticism. The center of gravity therefore shifts. New questions demand attention, different facts become prominent. And still there is real and substantial continuity between her paper and the selections from Greene and

Hume. It is the continuity of ideas in thoughtful conversation, arising out of and defining themselves by opposition to each other.

For Greene and, though less straightforwardly, for Hume, the value-terms "great" or "beautiful" denote or stand for some property in the work of art. Most of us probably think this. On such a view, the value-judgment alleges the presence of the property in the work. It is therefore, in principle, either true or false. Macdonald's essay is written very much under the influence of Wittgenstein, the most consequential English philosopher of recent decades. Wittgenstein had insinuated the radical suggestion that words do not always or even characteristically denote. They perform many functions, only one of which is to state or describe facts. He therefore enjoined philosophers to respect the peculiarities of different kinds of discourse (note Macdonald's title) and to conceive of the workings of language in relation to the purposes of the user. What are the purposes of the art critic? First, Macdonald thinks, he uses "this work is good" to esteem or commend the work, "like bestowing a medal" (p. 103). Yet though it looks like a proposition ("The work is in four movements"), it is not. It is not fact-stating and is therefore neither true nor false. It follows that the aesthetic value-judgment cannot be "proved," in any ordinary sense of the term. It does not follow that it is therefore trivial, any more than "bestowing a medal" is. The judgment makes a significant claim within the community of those interested in art. It sets going the processes of criticism and the education of taste, for now the work must be analyzed in order to find reasons to support the claim. So far, though Macdonald differs widely from traditional accounts of the "logic" of evaluation, she sticks to the customary view of the critic as a man who evaluates a work of art. But Macdonald finds a second purpose in criticism, and here she brings to light something that has been too much neglected in the past. The critic does not simply sit in judgment on the work; he performs the sweeter and humbler task of "conveying" the work to the reader, making him see what it is like, so that he may take delight in it in the same way. In the course of this discussion, Macdonald urges the interesting and provocative thesis that there is indeed no work of art to be judged except as interpreted by some critic.

Largely because of Macdonald's paper, philosophy of criticism

is at the present time the most intensively worked area in aesthetic theory. Each of the steps in her argument has become a major issue —whether the value-judgment is factual; if not, how it can be supported by "reasons"; the purposes of critical language and the criteria of its success—and each is being widely discussed. Not that there has been, of course, general agreement or anything approaching it. The issues remain open.

So do almost all the other issues discussed in this anthology, going back to Aristotle. And the same is true in the other philosophical disciplines as well, not just aesthetics. Nobody who reads this book will think that the issues remain unsettled because philosophers, as a class, fail to take sufficient pains or because they just are not very bright fellows. It has to do, I suppose, with the kind of questions the philosopher talks about, the fact that they are not empirically decidable, and their propensity to spawn endlessly other questions, to *become* other questions. It has more to do, I suspect, with the sort of mind the philosopher has, his insistence on "following the argument wherever it may lead," as Socrates said, his adamant refusal to stop short or to settle for the easy answer, his resolve to turn up and pursue the new questions. It has to do, that is to say, with his intellectual stubbornness and his courage.

ARISTOTLE

Poetics

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) is, along with Plato, the dominant figure in classical Greek philosophy. Aristotle's intellectual interests were, however, more catholic, and probably no single mind has exerted a greater influence across a broad range of Western thought—logic, metaphysics, aesthetics, philosophy of science.

1

Our subject being Poetry, I propose to speak not only of the art in general but also of its species and their respective capacities; of the structure of plot required for a good poem; of the number and nature of the constituent parts of a poem; and likewise of any other matters in the same line of inquiry. Let us follow the natural order and begin with the primary facts.

Epic poetry and Tragedy, as also Comedy, Dithyrambic poetry, and most flute-playing and lyre-playing, are all, viewed as a whole, modes of imitation. But at the same time they differ from one another in three ways, either by a difference of kind in their means, or by differences in the objects they imitate, or in the manner of their imitations.

Just as form and colour are used as means by some, who (whether by art or constant practice) imitate and portray many things by their aid, and the voice is used by others; so also in the above-mentioned group of arts, the means with them as a whole are rhythm, language, and harmony—used, however, either singly or in certain combinations. A combination of rhythm and harmony alone is the means in flute-playing and lyre-playing, and any other arts there may be of the same description, e.g. imitative piping. Rhythm alone, without harmony, is the means in the dancer's imitations; for even he, by the rhythms of his attitudes, may represent men's char-

From *Aristotle's Art of Poetry* (trans. I. Bywater and ed. W. H. Fyfe; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), Chaps. 1–11, 13–18, 25, *passim*. Used by permission of the Clarendon Press, with some minor revisions.

acters, as well as what they do and suffer. There is further an art which imitates by language alone, without harmony, in prose or in verse, and if in verse, either in some one or in a plurality of metres. This form of imitation is to this day without a name. We have no common name for a mime of Sophron or Xenarchus and a Socratic dialogue; and we should still be without one even if the imitation in the two instances were in trimeters or elegiacs or some other kind of verse—though it is the way with people to tack on 'poet' to the name of a metre, and talk of elegiac-poets and epic-poets, thinking that they call them poets not by reason of the imitative nature of their work, but indiscriminately by reason of the metre they write in. Even if a theory of medicine or physical philosophy be put forth in a metrical form, it is usual to describe the writer in this way; Homer and Empedocles, however, have really nothing in common apart from their metre; so that, if the one is to be called a poet, the other should be termed a physicist rather than a poet. . . . So much, then, as to these arts. There are, lastly, certain other arts, which combine all the means enumerated, rhythm, melody, and verse, e.g. Dithyrambic and Nomic poetry, Tragedy and Comedy; with this difference, however, that the three kinds of means are in some of them all employed together, and in others brought in separately, one after the other. These elements of difference in the above arts I term the means of their imitation.

2

The objects the imitator represents are actions, with agents who are necessarily either good men or bad—the diversities of human character being nearly always derivative from this primary distinction, since the line between virtue and vice is one dividing the whole of mankind. It follows, therefore, that the agents represented must be either above our own level of goodness, or beneath it, or just such as we are. . . . This difference it is that distinguishes Tragedy and Comedy also; Comedy would make its personages worse, and Tragedy better, than the men of the present day.

3

A third difference in these arts is in the manner in which each kind of object is represented. Given both the same means and the

same kind of object for imitation, one may either (1) speak at one moment in narrative and at another in an assumed character, as Homer does; or (2) one may remain the same throughout, without any such change; or (3) the imitators may represent the whole story dramatically, as though they were actually doing the things described.

As we said at the beginning, therefore, the differences in the imitation of these arts come under three heads, their means, their objects, and their manner.

So that as an imitator Sophocles will be on one side akin to Homer, both portraying good men; and on another to Aristophanes, since both present their personages as acting and doing. This in fact, according to some, is the reason for plays being termed dramas, because in a play the personages act the story. . . .

4

It is clear that the general origin of poetry was due to two causes, each of them part of human nature. Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation. The truth of this second point is shown by experience: though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms for example of the lowest animals and of dead bodies. The explanation is to be found in a further fact: to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it; the reason of the delight in seeing pictures is that one is at the same time learning —gathering the meaning of things, e.g. that the man there is so-and-so; for if one has not seen the thing before, one's pleasure will not be in the picture as an imitation of it, but will be due to the execution or colouring or some similar cause. Imitation, then, being natural to us—as also the sense of harmony and rhythm, the metres being obviously species of rhythms—it was through their original aptitude, and by a series of improvements for the most part gradual on their first efforts, that men created poetry out of their improvisations.

Poetry, however, soon broke up into two kinds according to the differences of character in the individual poets; for the graver among them would represent noble actions, and those of noble personages; and the meaner sort the actions of the ignoble.

If it be asked whether Tragedy is now fully developed in its formative elements, to consider that, and decide it theoretically and in relation to the stage is a matter for another inquiry.

It certainly began in improvisations—as did also Comedy; the one originating with the prelude to the Dithyramb, the other with the prelude to the phallic songs, which still survive as institutions in many of our cities. And its advance after that was little by little, through men improving on whatever they had before them at each stage. It was in fact only after a long series of changes that the movement of Tragedy stopped on its attaining to its natural form. (1) The number of actors was first increased to two by Aeschylus, who curtailed the business of the Chorus, and made the dialogue, or spoken portion, take the leading part in the play. (2) A third actor and scenery were due to Sophocles. (3) Tragedy acquired also its magnitude.[1] Discarding short stories and a ludicrous diction, through its passing out of its satyric stage, it assumed, though only at a late point in its progress, a tone of dignity; and its metre changed then from trochaic to iambic. The reason for their original use of the trochaic tetrameter was that their poetry was satyric and more connected with dancing than it now is. As soon, however, as a spoken part came in, nature herself found the appropriate metre. The iambic, we know, is the most speakable of metres, as is shown by the fact that we very often fall into it in conversation, whereas we rarely talk hexameters, and only when we depart from the speaking tone of voice. (4) The number of acts was increased.

5

As for Comedy, it is (as has been observed) an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a blunder or deformity not productive of pain or harm

[1] The word implies both length and dignity.

to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.

Epic poetry . . . has been seen to agree with Tragedy to this extent, in that it is an imitation of serious subjects in a grand kind of verse. It differs from it, however, (1) in that it is in one kind of verse and in narrative form; and (2) in its length—which is due to its action having no fixed limit of time, whereas Tragedy endeavours to keep as far as possible within a single circuit of the sun, or something near that. This, I say, is another point of difference between them, though at first the practice in this respect was just the same in tragedies as in epic poems. They differ also (3) in their constituents, some being common to both and others peculiar to Tragedy—hence a judge of good and bad in Tragedy is a judge of that in epic poetry also. All the parts of an epic are included in Tragedy; but those of Tragedy are not all of them to be found in the Epic.

6

. . . Let us proceed now to the discussion of Tragedy; before doing so, however, we must gather up the definition resulting from what has been said. A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious, has magnitude, and is complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the various parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions. Here by 'language with pleasurable accessories' I mean that with rhythm and harmony or song superadded; and by 'the kinds separately' I mean that some portions are worked out with verse only, and others in turn with song.

I. As they act the stories, it follows that in the first place the Spectacle (or stage-appearance of the actors) must be some part of the whole; and in the second place Melody and Diction, these two being the means of their imitation. Here by 'Diction' I mean merely this, the composition of the verses; and by 'Melody,' what is too completely understood to require explanation. But further: the subject represented also is an action; and the action involves agents, who must necessarily have their distinctive qualities both of character and thought, since it is from these that we ascribe certain

qualities to their actions. There are in the natural order of things, *therefore, two causes*—Character and Thought—of their actions, and consequently of their success or failure in their lives. Now the action (that which is done) is represented in the play by the . . . Plot. The Plot, in our present sense of the term, is simply this, the combination of the incidents or things done in the story; whereas Character is what makes us ascribe certain moral qualities to the agents; and Thought is shown in all they say when proving a particular point or, it may be, enunciating a general truth. There are six parts consequently of every tragedy, which determine its quality, viz. Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Melody; two of them arising from the means, one from the manner, and three from the objects of the dramatic imitation; and there is nothing else besides these six. Of these elements, then, practically all of the dramatists have made due use, as all plays alike admit of Spectacle, Character, Plot, Diction, Melody, and Thought.

II. The most important of the six is the combination of the incidents of the story. Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery. All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end aimed at is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions—what we do—that we are happy or the reverse. In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the Characters; they include the Characters for the sake of the action. So that it is the action in it, i.e. its . . . Plot, that is the end and purpose of the tragedy; and the end is always the chief thing. Besides this, a tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without Character. . . . And again: one may string together a series of speeches expressing character of the utmost finish as regards Diction and Thought, and yet fail to produce the true tragic effect; but one will have much better success with a tragedy which, however inferior in these respects, has a Plot, a combination of incidents, in it. And again: the most powerful elements . . . in Tragedy, the Peripeties and Discoveries,[2] are parts of the Plot. A further proof is in the fact that beginners succeed earlier with the Diction and Characters than with the construction of a story; and the same may be said of nearly all the early dramatists. We maintain, therefore, that the first essen-

[2] These are explained and discussed in Chapters 11 and 16.

tial, the life and soul, so to speak, of Tragedy is the Plot; and that the Characters come second—compare the parallel in painting, where the most beautiful colours laid on without order will not give one the same pleasure as a simple black-and-white sketch of a portrait. We maintain that Tragedy is primarily an imitation of action, and that it is mainly for the sake of the action that it imitates the personal agents. Third comes the element of Thought, i.e. the power of saying what is possible or appropriate to the occasion. This is what, in the speeches in Tragedy, falls under the arts of Politics and Rhetoric; for the older poets make their personages discourse like statesmen, and the moderns like rhetoricians. One must not confuse it with Character. Character in a play is that which reveals the moral purpose of the agents, i.e. the sort of thing they seek or avoid, where that is not obvious—hence there is no room for Character in a speech on a purely indifferent subject. Thought, on the other hand, is shown in all they say when proving or disproving some particular point, or enunciating some universal proposition. Fourth among the literary elements is the Diction of the personages, i.e. as before explained, the expression of their thoughts in words, which is practically the same thing with verse as with prose. As for the two remaining parts, the Melody is the greatest of the pleasurable accessories of Tragedy. The Spectacle, though an attraction, is the least artistic of all the parts, and has least to do with the art of poetry. The tragic effect is quite possible without a public performance and actors; and besides, the getting-up of the Spectacle is more a matter for stage-craft then poetry.

7

Having thus distinguished the parts, let us now consider the proper construction of the . . . Plot, as that is at once the first and the most important thing in Tragedy. We have laid it down that a tragedy is an imitation of an action that is whole and complete in itself and of some magnitude; for a whole may be of no magnitude to speak of. Now a whole is that which has beginning, middle, and end. A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something else after it; an end is that which is naturally after something else, either as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it; and a middle, that

which is by nature after one thing and has also another after it. A well-constructed Plot, therefore, cannot either begin or end at any point one likes; beginning and end in it must be of the kind just described. Again: to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a certain definite magnitude. Beauty is a matter of size and order, and therefore impossible either (1) in a very minute creature, since our perception becomes indistinct as it approaches instantaneity; or (2) in a creature of vast size—one, say, 1,000 miles long—as in that case, instead of the object being seen all at once, the unity or wholeness of it is lost to the beholder. Just in the same way, then, as a beautiful whole made up of parts, or a beautiful living creature, must be of some size, and of a size to be taken in by the eye, so a story or Plot must be of some length, but of a length to be taken in by the memory. As for the limit of its length, so far as that is relative to public performances and spectators, it does not fall within the theory of poetry. If a hundred tragedies were performed, they would be timed by water-clocks, as they are said to have been at one period. The limit, however, set by the actual nature of the thing is this: the longer the story, consistently with its being comprehensible as a whole, the finer it is by reason of its magnitude. As a rough general formula, 'a length which allows of the hero passing by a series of probable or necessary stages from misfortune to happiness, or from happiness to misfortune,' may suffice as a limit for the magnitude of the story.

8

The Unity of a Plot does not consist, as some suppose, in its having one man as its subject. An infinity of things befall that one man, some of which it is impossible to reduce to unity; and in like manner there are many actions of one man which cannot be made to form one action. One sees, therefore, the mistake of all the poets who have written a *Heracleid*, a *Theseid*, or similar poems; they suppose that, because Heracles was one man, the story also of Heracles must be one story. Homer, however, evidently understood this point quite well, whether by art or instinct, just in the same way as he excels the rest in every other respect. In writing an *Odyssey*, he did not make the poem cover all that ever befell his hero—it befell him,

for instance, to get wounded on Parnassus and also to feign madness at the time of the call to arms, but the two incidents had no probable or necessary connexion with one another—instead of doing that, he took an action with a Unity of the kind we are describing as the subject of the *Odyssey*, as also of the *Iliad*. The truth is that, just as in the other imitative arts one imitation is always of one thing, so in poetry the story, as an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole. For that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole.

9

From what we have said it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but the kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse—you might put the work of Herodotus into verse and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean a statement of what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do—which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters; by a singular statement I mean a statement of what, say, Alcibiades did or had done to him. In Comedy this has become clear by this time; it is only when their plot is already made up of probable incidents that they give it a basis of proper names, choosing for the purpose any names that may occur to them, instead of writing like the old iambic poets about particular persons. In Tragedy, however, they still adhere to the historic names; and for this reason: what convinces is the possible; now whereas we are not yet sure as to the possibility of that which has not happened, that which has happened is manifestly possible, else it would not have come to pass. Nevertheless even in Tragedy there are some plays

with but one or two known names in them, the rest being inventions; and there are some without a single known name. . . . So that one must not aim at a rigid adherence to the traditional stories on which tragedies are based. It would be absurd, in fact, to do so, as even the known stories are only known to a few, though they are a delight none the less to all.

It is evident from the above that the poet must be more the poet ["maker"] of his stories or Plots than of his verses, inasmuch as he is a poet by virtue of the imitative element in his work, and it is actions that he imitates. And if he should come to take a subject from actual history, he is none the less a poet for that; since some historic occurrences may very well be in the probable and possible order of things; and it is in virtue of *that* that he is their poet.

Of simple Plots and actions the episodic are the worst. I call a Plot episodic when there is neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of its episodes. Actions of this sort bad poets construct through their own fault, and good ones on account of the players. His work being for public performance, a good poet often stretches out a Plot beyond its capacity, and is thus obliged to twist the sequence of incident.

Tragedy, however, is an imitation not only of a complete action, but also of incidents arousing pity and fear. Such incidents have the very greatest effect on the mind when they occur unexpectedly and at the same time in consequence of one another; there is then more of the marvellous in them than if they happened of themselves or by mere chance. Even matters of chance seem most marvellous if there is some appearance of design in them; as for instance the statue of Mitys at Argos killed the man who caused Mitys' death by falling on him when a looker-on at a public spectacle; for incidents like that we think to be not without a meaning. A Plot, therefore, of this sort is necessarily finer than others.

10

Plots are either simple or complex, since the actions they represent are naturally of this twofold description. The action, proceeding in the way defined as one continuous whole I call simple, when the change in the hero's fortunes takes place without Peripety or Dis-

covery; and complex, when it involves one or the other, or both. These should each of them arise out of the structure of the Plot itself, so as to be the consequence, necessary or probable, of the antecedents. There is a great difference between a thing happening *propter hoc* and *post hoc*.

11

A peripety is the change of the kind described [3] from one state of things within the play to its opposite, and that too in the way we are saying, in the probable or necessary sequence of events; as it is for instance in *Oedipus:* here the opposite state of things is produced by the Messenger, who, coming to gladden Oedipus and to remove his fears as to his mother, reveals the secret of his birth. . . . A Discovery is, as the very word implies, a change from ignorance to knowledge, and thus to either love or hate, in the personages marked for good or evil fortune. The finest form of Discovery is one attended by Peripeties, like that which goes with the Discovery in *Oedipus*. There are no doubt other forms of it; what we have said may happen . . . in reference to inanimate things, even things of a very casual kind; and it is also possible to discover whether someone has done or not done something. But the form most directly connected with the Plot and the action of the piece is the first-mentioned. This, with a Peripety, will arouse either pity or fear—actions of that nature being what Tragedy . . . represents; and it will also serve to bring about the happy or unhappy ending. The Discovery, then, being of persons, it may be that of one party only to the other, the latter being already known; or both the parties may have to discover themselves. Iphigenia, for instance, was discovered to Orestes by sending the letter; and another Discovery was required to reveal him to Iphigenia.

Two parts of the Plot, then, are Peripety and Discovery. . . . A third part is Suffering, which we may define as an action of a destructive or painful nature, such as murders on the stage, tortures, woundings, and the like.[4] . . .

[3] At the end of Chapter 7 'from misfortune to happiness or from happiness to misfortune'.

[4] Suffering is treated in Chapters 13–14.

13

The next points after what we have said above will be these: (1) What is the poet to aim at, and what is he to avoid, in constructing his Plots? and (2) What are the conditions on which the tragic effect depends?

We assume that, for the finest form of Tragedy, the Plot must be not simple but complex; and further, that it must imitate actions arousing pity and fear, since that is the distinctive function of this kind of imitation. It follows, therefore, that there are three forms of Plot to be avoided. (1) A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us. The second is the most untragic that can be; it has no one of the requisites of Tragedy; it does not appeal either to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our fears. Nor, on the other hand, should (3) an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse the human feeling in us, but it will not move us to either pity or fear; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves; so that there will be nothing either piteous or fear-inspiring in this situation. There remains, then, the intermediate kind of person, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgement, he being one of those who enjoy great reputation and prosperity; e.g. Oedipus, Thyestes, and the men of note of similar families. The perfect Plot, accordingly, must have a single, and not (as some tell us) a double issue; the change in the hero's fortunes must be not from misery to happiness, but on the contrary from happiness to misery; and the cause of it must lie not in any depravity, but in some great error on his part; the man himself being either such as we have described, or better, not worse, than that. Fact also confirms our theory. Though the poets began by accepting any tragic story that came to hand, in these days the finest tragedies are always on the story of some few families, on that of Alcmeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, or any others that may have been involved, as either agents or sufferers, in some deed of horror. The theoretically best tragedy, then, has a

Plot of this description. The critics, therefore, are wrong who blame Euripides for taking this line in his tragedies, and giving many of them an unhappy ending. It is, as we have said, the right line to take. The best proof is this: on the stage, and in the public performances, such plays, properly worked out, are seen to be the most truly tragic; and Euripides, even if his execution be faulty in every other point, is nevertheless seen to be certainly the most tragic of the dramatists. After this comes the construction of Plot which some rank first, one with a double story (like the *Odyssey*) and different endings for the good and the bad personages. It is ranked as first only through the weakness of the audiences; the poets merely follow their public, writing as its wishes dictate. But the pleasure here is not that of Tragedy. It belongs rather to Comedy, where the bitterest enemies in the piece (e.g. Orestes and Aegisthus) walk off good friends at the end, with no slaying of anyone by anyone.

14

The tragic fear and pity may be aroused by the Spectacle; but they may also be aroused by the very structure and incidents of the play—which is the better way and shows the better poet. The Plot in fact should be so framed that, even without seeing the things take place, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity at the incidents; which is just the effect that the mere recital of the story in *Oedipus* would have on one. To produce this same effect by means of the Spectacle is less artistic, and requires extraneous aid. Those, however, who make use of the Spectacle to put before us that which is merely monstrous and not productive of fear, are wholly out of touch with Tragedy; not every kind of pleasure should be required of a tragedy, but only its own proper pleasure.

The tragic pleasure is that of pity and fear, and the poet has to produce it by a work of imitation; it is clear, therefore, that its causes should be included in the incidents of his story. Let us see, then, what kinds of incident strike one as horrible, or rather as piteous. In a deed of this description the parties must necessarily be either friends, or enemies, or indifferent to one another. Now when it is between enemies, there is nothing to move us to pity

either in doing or in meditating the deed, except so far as the actual pain of the sufferer is concerned; and the same is true when the parties are indifferent to one another. Whenever the tragic deed, however, is done within the family . . . these are the situations the poet should seek after. The traditional stories, accordingly, must be kept as they are, e.g. the murder of Clytaemnestra by Orestes. . . . At the same time even with these there is something left to the poet; it is for him to devise the right way of treating them. Let us explain more clearly what we mean by 'the right way.' The deed of horror may be done by the doer knowingly and consciously, as in the old poets, and in Medea's murder of her children in Euripides. Or he may do it, but in ignorance of his relationship, and discover that afterwards, as does Oedipus in Sophocles. . . . A third possibility is for one meditating some deadly injury to another, in ignorance of his relationship, to make the discovery in time to draw back. These exhaust the possibilities, since the deed must necessarily be either done or not done, and either knowingly or unknowingly.

The worst situation is when the person is with full knowledge on the point of doing the deed, and leaves it undone. It is odious and also (through the absence of suffering) untragic; hence it is that no one is made to act thus except in some few instances, e.g. Haemon and Creon in *Antigone.* Next after this comes the actual perpetration of the deed meditated. A better situation than that, however, is for the deed to be done in ignorance, and the relationship discovered afterwards, since there is nothing odious in it, and the Discovery will serve to astound us. But the best of all is the last; what we have in *Cresphontes,* for example, where Merope, on the point of slaying her son, recognizes him in time . . . and in *Helle,* where the son recognizes his mother when on the point of giving her up to her enemy.

This will explain why our tragedies are restricted (as we said just now) to such a small number of families. It was accident rather than art that led the poets in quest of subjects to embody this kind of incident in their Plots. They are still obliged, accordingly, to have recourse to the families in which such horrors have occurred.

On the construction of the Plot, and the kind of Plot required for Tragedy, enough has now been said.

15

In the Characters there are four points to aim at. First and foremost, that they shall be good. There will be an element of character in the play, if (as has been observed) what a personage says or does reveals a certain moral purpose; and a good element of character, if the purpose so revealed is good. Such goodness is possible in every type of person, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is perhaps an inferior, and the other a wholly worthless being. The second point is to make them appropriate. The Character before us may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female Character to be manly, or clever. The third is to make them as they are in reality, which is not the same as their being good and appropriate, in our sense of the term. The fourth is to make them consistent . . . throughout; even if the original is inconsistent and presents that type of character for the poet to imitate, he should still be consistently inconsistent. We have an instance of baseness of character, not required for the story, in Menelaus in the *Orestes;* of the incongruous and unbefitting in the lamentation of Ulysses in *Scylla;* . . . and of inconsistency in *Iphigenia at Aulis,* where Iphigenia the suppliant is utterly unlike the later Iphigenia. The right thing, however, is in the Characters just as in the incidents of the play to endeavour always after the necessary or the probable; so that whenever such-and-such a personage says or does such-and-such a thing, it shall be the probable or necessary outcome of his character; and whenever this incident follows on that, it shall be either the necessary or the probable consequence of it. From this one sees (to digress for a moment) that the Denouement also should arise out of the plot itself, and not depend on a stage-device, as in *Medea,* or in the story of the (arrested) departure of the Greeks in the *Iliad.* Such artifice must be reserved for matters outside the play—for past events beyond human knowledge, or events yet to come, which require to be foretold or announced; since it is the privilege of the Gods to know everything. There should be nothing improbable among the actual incidents. If it be unavoidable, however, it should be outside the tragedy, like the improbability in the *Oedipus* of Sophocles. But to return to the Characters. As Tragedy is an imitation of persons better than the ordinary man, we in our way should follow the example of good portrait-painters, who reproduce

the distinctive features of a man, and at the same time, without losing the likeness, make him handsomer than he is. The poet in like manner, in portraying men quick or slow to anger, or with similar infirmities of character, must know how to represent them as such, and at the same time as good men, as Agathon and Homer have represented Achilles.

16

Discovery in general has been explained already.[5] As for the species of Discovery, the first to be noted is (1) the least artistic form of it, of which the poets make most use through mere lack of invention, Discovery by signs or marks. Of these signs some are congenital, . . . others acquired after birth—these latter being either marks on the body, e.g. scars, or external tokens, like necklaces. . . . Even these, however, admit of two uses, a better and a worse; the scar of Ulysses is an instance; the Discovery of him through it is made in one way by the nurse and in another by the swineherds. A Discovery using signs as a means of proof is less artistic, as indeed are all such. Whereas one which arises out of a scene of peripety, as in the *Bath-story,* is of a better order. Next after these are (2) Discoveries made directly by the poet; which are inartistic for that very reason; e.g. Orestes' Discovery of himself in *Iphigenia:* whereas his sister reveals who she is by the letter, Orestes is made to say himself what the poet rather than the story demands. This, therefore, is not far removed from the first-mentioned fault, since he might have presented certain tokens as well. . . . (3) A third species is Discovery through memory, from a man's consciousness being awakened by something seen or heard. Thus . . . in the *Tale of Alcinous,* hearing the harper Ulysses is reminded of the past and weeps; and by this means he is discovered. (4) A fourth kind is Discovery through reasoning; e.g. in *The Choephoroe:* 'One like me is here; there is no one like me but Orestes; he, therefore, must be here.' . . . (5) There is, too, a composite Discovery arising from bad reasoning on the side of the other party. An instance of it is in *Ulysses the False Messenger:* he said he should know the bow—which he had not seen; but to suppose from that that he would know it again (as though he had once seen it)

[5] In Chapter 11.

was bad reasoning. (6) The best of all Discoveries, however, is that arising from the incidents themselves, when the great surprise comes about through a probable incident, like that in the *Oedipus* of Sophocles; and also in *Iphigenia;* for it was not improbable that she should wish to have a letter taken home. These last are the only Discoveries independent of the artifices of signs and necklaces. Next after them come Discoveries through reasoning.

17

At the time when he is constructing his Plots, and engaged on the Diction in which they are worked out, the poet should remember (1) to put the actual scenes as far as possible before his eyes. In this way, seeing everything with the vividness of an eyewitness as it were, he will devise what is appropriate, and be least likely to overlook incongruities. This is shown by what was censured in Carcinus, the return of Amphiaraus from the sanctuary; it would have passed unnoticed, if it had not been actually seen by the audience; but on the stage his play failed, the incongruity of the incident offending the spectators. (2) As far as may be, too, the poet should even act his story with the very gestures of his personages. Given the same natural qualifications, he who feels the emotions described will be the most convincing; distress and anger, for instance, are portrayed most truthfully by one who is feeling them at the moment. Hence it is that poetry demands a man with a special gift for it, or else one with a touch of madness in him; the former can easily assume the required mood, and the latter may be actually beside himself with emotion. . . .

18

(3) There is a further point to be borne in mind. Every tragedy is in part Complication and in part Denouement; the incidents before the opening scene, and often certain also of those within the play, forming the Complication; and the rest the Denouement. By Complication I mean all from the beginning of the story to the point just before the change in the hero's fortunes; by Denouement, all from the beginning of the change to the end. . . . Now it is right, when one speaks of a tragedy as the same or not the same as another, to do so on the ground before all else of their Plot, i.e. as

having the same or not the same Complication and Denouement. Yet there are many dramatists who, after a good Complication, fail in the Denouement. But it is necessary for both points of construction to be always duly mastered. (4) There are four distinct species of Tragedy—that being the number of the constituents also that have been mentioned: first, the complex Tragedy, which is all Peripety and Discovery; second, the Tragedy of suffering . . . ; third, the Tragedy of character. . . . The fourth constituent is that of 'Spectacle', exemplified in *The Phorcides,* in *Prometheus,* and in all plays with the scene laid in the nether world.[6] The poet's aim, then, should be to combine every element of interest, if possible, or else the more important and the major part of them. This is now especially necessary owing to the unfair criticism to which the poet is subjected in these days. Just because there have been poets before him strong in the several species of tragedy, the critics now expect the one man to surpass that which was the strong point of each of his predecessors. (5) One should also remember what has been said more than once, and not write a tragedy on an epic body of incident (i.e. one with a plurality of stories in it), by attempting to dramatize, for instance, the entire story of the *Iliad.* In the epic owing to its scale every part is treated at proper length; with a drama, however, on the same story the result is very disappointing. This is shown by the fact that all who have dramatized the fall of Ilium in its entirety, and not part by part, like Euripides, or the whole of the Niobe story, instead of a portion, like Aeschylus, either fail utterly or have but ill success on the stage. . . . Yet in their Peripeties, as also in their simple plots, the poets show wonderful skill in aiming at the kind of effect they desire—a tragic situation and one that satisfies our human feelings, like the clever villain (e.g. Sisyphus) deceived, or the brave wrongdoer worsted. This is probable, however, only in Agathon's sense, when he speaks of the probability of even improbabilities coming to pass. (6) The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and take a share in the action—such as it has in Sophocles rather than in Euripides. With the later poets, however, the songs

[6] The effect of these plays largely depended on the 'make-up' and costume of the strange characters introduced.

in a play of theirs have no more to do with the Plot than with that of any other tragedy. Hence it is that they are now singing mere interludes, a practice first introduced by Agathon. And yet what real difference is there between singing such choral interludes, and attempting to fit in a speech, or even a whole act, from one play into another?

25

. . . Any impossibilities there may be in [the poet's] description of things are faults. But from another point of view they are justifiable, if they serve the object of poetry itself (what that is has been already stated) and make the effect of some portion of the work more astounding. The Pursuit of Hector is an instance in point. If, however, the poetic end might have been as well or better attained without sacrifice of technical correctness in such matters, the impossibility is not to be justified, since the description should be, if it can, entirely free from error. One may ask, too, whether the error is in a matter directly or only accidentally connected with the poetic art; since it is a lesser error in an artist not to know, for instance, that the hind has no horns, than to produce an unrecognizable picture of one. . . .

Speaking generally, one has to justify (1) the Impossible by reference to the requirements of poetry, or to the better,[7] or to common opinion. For the purposes of poetry a convincing impossibility is preferable to an unconvincing possibility; and if men such as Zeuxis depicted be impossible, the answer is that it is better they should be like that, as the artist ought to improve on his model. (2) The Improbable one has to justify either by showing it to be in accordance with opinion, or by urging that at times it is not improbable; for there is a probability of things happening also against probability. (3) The contradictions found in the poet's language one should first test as one does an opponent's confutation in a dialectical argument, so as to see whether he means the same thing, in the same relation, and in the same sense, before admitting that he has contradicted either something he has said himself or what a man of sound sense assumes as true. But there is no possible

[7] i.e. 'things as they ought to be.'

apology for improbability of Plot or depravity of character when they are not necessary and no use is made of them, like the improbability in the appearance of Aegeus in *Medea* and the baseness of Menelaus in *Orestes*. . . .

LEO TOLSTOY

Art—The Language of Emotion

Among the novels written by Count Tolstoy (1828–1910), War and Peace *is preeminent. His acute social concern is manifest not only in* What Is Art? *but also in the essays he wrote on cultural and religious subjects.* What Is Art? *was published in 1898.*

In order to define any human activity, it is necessary to understand its sense and importance; and in order to do this it is primarily necessary to examine that activity in itself, in its dependence on its causes and in connexion with its effects, and not merely in relation to the pleasure we can get from it.

If we say that the aim of any activity is merely our pleasure and define it solely by that pleasure, our definition will evidently be a false one. But this is precisely what has occurred in the efforts to define art. Now if we consider the food question it will not occur to any one to affirm that the importance of food consists in the pleasure we receive when eating it. Everybody understands that the satisfaction of our taste cannot serve as a basis for our definition of the merits of food, and that we have therefore no right to presuppose that dinners with cayenne pepper, Limburg cheese, alcohol, and so on, to which we are accustomed and which please us, form the very best human food.

In the same way beauty, or that which pleases us, can in no sense serve as a basis for the definition of art; nor can a series of objects which afford us pleasure serve as the model of what art should be.

. . . People come to understand that the meaning of eating lies in the nourishment of the body, only when they cease to consider that the object of that activity is pleasure. And it is the same with regard to art. People will come to understand the meaning of art only when they cease to consider that the aim of that activity is beauty, that is to say, pleasure. . . .

From Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* trans. A. Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 116–117, 120–125, 175–178, 181, 184–185, 193–195, 227–230, *passim.* Used by permission of Oxford University Press, London.

In order to define art correctly it is necessary first of all to cease to consider it as a means to pleasure, and to consider it as one of the conditions of human life. Viewing it in this way we cannot fail to observe that art is one of the means of intercourse between man and man. . . .

Speech transmitting the thoughts and experiences of men serves as a means of union among them, and art serves a similar purpose. The peculiarity of this latter means of intercourse, distinguishing it from intercourse by means of words, consists in this, that whereas by words a man transmits his thoughts to another, by art he transmits his feelings. . . .

If a man infects another or others directly, immediately, by his appearance or by the sounds he gives vent to at the very time he experiences the feeling; if he causes another man to yawn when he himself cannot help yawning, or to laugh or cry when he himself is obliged to laugh or cry, or to suffer when he himself is suffering—that does not amount to art.

Art begins when one person with the object of joining another or others to himself in one and the same feeling, expresses that feeling by certain external indications. To take the simplest example: a boy having experienced, let us say, fear on encountering a wolf, relates that encounter, and in order to evoke in others the feeling he has experienced, describes himself, his condition before the encounter, the surroundings, the wood, his own lightheartedness, and then the wolf's appearance, its movements, the distance between himself and the wolf, and so forth. All this, if only the boy when telling the story again experiences the feelings he had lived through, and infects the hearers and compels them to feel what he had experienced—is art. Even if the boy had not seen a wolf but had frequently been afraid of one, and if wishing to evoke in others the fear he had felt, he invented an encounter with a wolf and recounted it so as to make his hearers share the feelings he experienced when he feared the wolf, that also would be art. And just in the same way it is art if a man, having experienced either the fear of suffering or the attraction of enjoyment (whether in reality or in imagination), expresses these feelings on canvas or in marble so that others are infected by them. . . .

The feelings with which the artist infects others may be most

various—very strong or very weak, very important or very insignificant, very bad or very good: feelings of love of one's country, self-devotion and submission to fate or to God expressed in a drama, raptures of lovers described in a novel, feelings of voluptuousness expressed in a picture, courage expressed in a triumphal march, merriment evoked by a dance, humour evoked by a funny story, the feeling of quietness transmitted by an evening landscape or by a lullaby, or the feeling of admiration evoked by a beautiful arabesque—it is all art.

If only the spectators or auditors are infected by the feelings which the author has felt, it is art.

To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked it in oneself then by means of movements, lines, colours, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling—this is the activity of art. . . .

As every man, thanks to man's capacity to express thoughts by words, may know all that has been done for him in the realms of thought by all humanity before his day, and can in the present, thanks to this capacity to understand the thoughts of others, become a sharer in their activity and also himself hand on to his contemporaries and descendants the thoughts he has assimilated from others as well as those that have arisen in himself; so, thanks to man's capacity to be infected with the feelings of others by means of art, all that is being lived through by his contemporaries is accessible to him, as well as the feelings experienced by men thousands of years ago, and he has also the possibility of transmitting his own feelings to others. . . .

. . . If men lacked this . . . capacity of being infected by art, people might be almost more savage still, and above all more separated from, and more hostile to, one another.

And therefore the activity of art is a most important one, as important as the activity of speech itself and as generally diffused.

As speech does not act on us only in sermons, orations, or books, but in all those remarks by which we interchange thoughts and experiences with one another, so also art in the wide sense of the word permeates our whole life, but it is only to some of its manifestations that we apply the term in the limited sense of the word.

We are accustomed to understand art to be only what we hear

and see in theatres, concerts, and exhibitions; together with buildings, statues, poems, and novels. . . . But all this is but the smallest part of the art by which we communicate with one another in life. All human life is filled with works of art of every kind—from cradle-song, jest, mimicry, the ornamention of houses, dress, and utensils, to church services, buildings, monuments, and triumphal processions. It is all artistic activity. . . .

Art in our society has become so perverted that not only has bad art come to be considered good, but even the very perception of what art really is has been lost. In order to be able to speak about the art of our society it is, therefore, first of all necessary to distinguish art from counterfeit art.

There is one indubitable sign distinguishing real art from its counterfeit—namely, the infectiousness of art. . . .

The recipient of a truly artistic impression is so united to the artist that he feels as if the work were his own and not someone else's—as if what it expresses were just what he had long been wishing to express. A real work of art destroys in the consciousness of the recipient the separation between himself and the artist, and not that alone, but also between himself and all whose minds receive this work of art. In this freeing of our personality from its separation and isolation, in this uniting of it with others, lies the chief characteristic and the great attractive force of art.

If a man is infected by the author's condition of soul, if he feels this emotion and this union with others, then the object which has effected this is art; but if there be no such infection, if there be not this union with the author and with others who are moved by the same work—then it is not art. And not only is infection a sure sign of art, but the degree of infectiousness is also the sole measure of excellence in art. . . .

And the degree of the infectiousness of art depends on three conditions:—

The more individual the feeling transmitted the more strongly does it act on the recipient; the more individual the state of soul into which he is transferred the more pleasure does the recipient obtain and therefore the more readily and strongly does he join in it.

Clearness of expression assists infection because the recipient who mingles in consciousness with the author is the better satisfied the

more clearly that feeling is transmitted which, as it seems to him, he has long known and felt and for which he has only now found expression.

But most of all is the degree of infectiousness of art increased by the degree of sincerity in the artist. As soon as the spectator, hearer, or reader, feels that the artist is infected by his own production and writes, sings, or plays, for himself, and not merely to act on others, this mental condition of the artist infects the recipient; and, on the contrary, as soon as the spectator, reader, or hearer, feels that the author is not writing, singing, or playing, for his own satisfaction—does not himself feel what he wishes to express, but is doing it for him, the recipient—resistance immediately springs up, and the most individual and the newest feelings and the cleverest technique not only fail to produce any infection but actually repel.

I have mentioned three conditions of contagion in art, but they may all be summed up into one, the last, sincerity; that is, that the artist should be impelled by an inner need to express his feeling. That condition includes the first; for if the artist is sincere he will express the feeling as he experienced it. And as each man is different from every one else, his feeling will be individual for every one else; and the more individual it is—the more the artist has drawn it from the depths of his nature—the more sympathetic and sincere will it be. And this same sincerity will impel the artist to find clear expression for the feeling which he wishes to transmit.

Therefore this third condition—sincerity—is the most important of the three. It is always complied with in peasant art, and this explains why such art always acts so powerfully; but it is a condition almost entirely absent from our upper-class art, which is continually produced by artists actuated by personal aims of covetousness or vanity. . . .

The absence of any one of these conditions excludes a work from the category of art and relegates it to that of art's counterfeits. If the work does not transmit the artist's peculiarity of feeling and is therefore not individual, if it is unintelligibly expressed, or if it has not proceeded from the author's inner need for expression—it is not a work of art. If all these conditions are present even in the smallest degree, then the work even if a weak one is yet a work of art. . . .

Universal art arises only when some one of the people, having

experienced a strong emotion, feels the necessity of transmitting it to others. The art of the rich classes, on the other hand, arises not from the artist's inner impulse but chiefly because people of the upper classes demand amusement and pay well for it. They demand from art the transmission of feelings that please them, and this demand artists try to meet. But it is a very difficult task, for people of the wealthy classes, spending their lives in idleness and luxury, desire to be continually diverted by art; and art, even the lowest, cannot be produced at will, but has to generate spontaneously in the artist's inner self. . . .

As soon as ever the art of the upper classes separated itself from universal art a conviction arose that art may be art and yet be incomprehensible to the masses. And as soon as this position was admitted it had inevitably to be admitted also that art may be intelligible only to the very smallest number of the elect and eventually to two, or to one, of our nearest friends, or to oneself alone—which is practically what is being said by modern artists:—'I create and understand myself, and if any one does not understand me so much the worse for him.'

The assertion that art may be good art and at the same time incomprehensible to a great number of people, is extremely unjust, and its consequences are ruinous to art itself; but at the same time it is so common and has so eaten into our conceptions, that it is impossible to make sufficiently clear its whole absurdity.

Nothing is more common than to hear it said of reputed works of art that they are very good but very difficult to understand. We are quite used to such assertions, and yet to say that a work of art is good but incomprehensible to the majority of men, is the same as saying of some kind of food that it is very good but most people can't eat it. . . . Perverted art may not please the majority of men, but good art always pleases every one.

It is said that the very best works of art are such that they cannot be understood by the masses, but are accessible only to the elect who are prepared to understand these great works. But if the majority of men do not understand, the knowledge necessary to enable them to understand should be taught and explained to them. But it turns out that there is no such knowledge, that the works cannot be explained, and that those who say the majority do not understand

good works of art, still do not explain those works, but only tell us that in order to understand them one must read, and see, and hear, these same works over and over again. But this is not to explain, it is only to habituate! And people may habituate themselves to anything, even to the very worst things. As people may habituate themselves to bad food, to spirits, tobacco, and opium, just in the same way they may habituate themselves to bad art—and that is exactly what is being done.

Moreover it cannot be said that the majority of people lack the taste to esteem the highest works of art. The majority always have understood and still understand what we also recognize as being the very best art: the epic of Genesis, the Gospel parables, folk-legends, fairy-tales, and folk-songs, are understood by all. How can it be that the majority has suddenly lost its capacity to understand what is high in our art? . . .

. . . Art is differentiated from activity of the understanding, which demands preparation and a certain sequence of knowledge (so that one cannot learn trigonometry before knowing geometry), by the fact that it acts on people independently of their state of development and education, that the charm of a picture, of sounds, or of forms, infects any man whatever his plane of development.

The business of art lies just in this: to make that understood and felt which in the form of an argument might be incomprehensible and inaccessible. Usually it seems to the recipient of a truly artistic impression that he knew the thing before, but had been unable to express it. . . .

But as soon as . . . the upper classes acclaimed every kind of art as good if only it afforded them pleasure, and began to reward such art more highly than any other social activity, a large number of people immediately devoted themselves to this activity, and art assumed quite a different character and became a profession.

And as soon as this occurred the chief and most precious quality of art—its sincerity—was at once greatly weakened and eventually quite destroyed.

The professional artist lives by his art and has continually to invent subjects for his works, and does invent them. And it is obvious how great a difference must exist between works of art produced on the one hand by men such as the Jewish prophets, the authors of

the Psalms, Francis of Assisi, the authors of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, of folk-stories, legends, and folk-songs, many of whom not only received no remuneration for their work but did not even attach their names to it, and on the other hand works produced by court poets, dramatists, and musicians receiving honours and remuneration, and later on by professional artists who lived by the trade, receiving remuneration from newspaper editors, publishers, impresarios, and in general from the agents who come between the artists and the town public—the consumers of art.

Professionalism is the first condition of the diffusion of false, counterfeit art.

The second condition is the growth in recent times of art-criticism, that is, the valuation of art not by everybody, and above all not by plain men, but by erudite, that is, by perverted and at the same time self-confident, individuals.

A friend of mine, speaking of the relation of critics to artists, half-jokingly defined it thus: 'Critics are the stupid who discuss the wise.' However partial, inexact, and rude, this definition may be, it is yet partly true, and incomparably more just than the definition which considers critics to be men who can explain works of art.

'Critics explain!' What do they explain?

The artist, if a real artist, has by his work transmitted to others the feeling he experienced. What is there, then, to explain?

If a work is a good work of art, then the feeling expressed by the artist—be it moral or immoral—transmits itself to other people. If it is transmitted to others, then they feel it, and all interpretations are superfluous. If the work does not infect people, no explanation can make it contagious. An artist's work cannot be interpreted. Had it been possible to *explain* in words what he wished to convey, the artist would have expressed himself in words. He expressed it by his art, only because the feeling he experienced could not be otherwise transmitted. The interpretation of works of art by words only indicates that the interpreter is himself incapable of feeling the infection of art. And this is actually the case, for, however strange it may seem to say so, critics have always been people less susceptible than other men to the contagion of art. For the most part they are able writers, educated and clever, but with their capacity for being infected by art quite perverted or atrophied. And therefore their writings have

always largely contributed, and still contribute, to the perversion of the taste of that public which reads them and trusts them. . . .

[Modern art resorts to] action, often purely physical, on the outer senses. Work of this kind is said to be 'striking' and 'effective'. In all arts these effects consist chiefly in contrasts: in bringing together the terrible and the tender, the beautiful and the hideous, the loud and the soft, darkness and light, the most ordinary and the most extraordinary. In verbal art, besides effects of contrast there are also effects consisting in the description of things that have never before been described. These are usually pornographic details evoking sexual desire, or details of suffering and death evoking feelings of horror, such, for instance, as when describing a murder, to give a detailed medical account of the lacerated tissues, of the swellings, of the smell, quantity, and appearance, of the blood. It is the same in painting: besides all kinds of other contrasts one is coming into vogue which consists in giving careful finish to one object and being careless about all the rest. The chief and usual effects in painting are effects of light and the presentation of the horrible. In the drama the most common effects, besides contrasts, are tempests, thunder, moonlight, scenes at sea or by the sea-shore, changes of costume, exposure of the female body, madness, murder, and death generally: the dying person exhibiting in detail all the phases of agony. In music the most usual effects are a *crescendo* passing from the softest and simplest sounds to the loudest and most complex crash of the full orchestra; a repetition of the same sounds *arpeggio* in all the octaves and on various instruments; or for the harmony, tone, and rhythm, to be not at all those naturally flowing from the course of the musical thought, but such as strike one by their unexpectedness.

JOHN HOSPERS

Art and Emotion

John Hospers (1918–) is Professor of Philosophy at Brooklyn College. He has previously taught in the University of Minnesota and the University of North Carolina. He is the author of Meaning and Truth in the Arts *(1946), two widely used textbooks in philosophy, and numerous articles in philosophical journals.*

Throughout a large part of the writings of critics in our century, it is assumed that there is a close connection between art and emotion. We are told that a certain painting or symphony is a good one because it contains sincere feeling, or because it expresses certain emotions. We are told that we cannot understand Beethoven's quartets until we know what emotions the composer was trying to express. And no matter what the emotion or feeling-state is—sadness, joy, disturbance, yearning, religious fervor or mystic ecstasy—it is assumed that the presence of these features makes the work of art much greater than it otherwise would have been, and even that these alone make the work of art great or worth-while.

In all this the exact relation between works of art and emotions is not made clear. Critics write about music compositions expressing this emotion or that, apparently assuming that what they say offers no difficulties. Yet, as every aesthetician knows, such language is bristling with difficulties. It is easy to understand that people express emotions, but in what sense can works of art be said to do so? Human beings can be suffused with feeling, but can works of art also have this property? I want to consider three ways in which we might construe statements of this kind.

1. Many critics, in saying that works of art express emotions, take this quite naturally to mean that works of art express the emotions *of their creators.* Accounts like the following are sufficiently familiar to require no repetition: An artist is in the grip of emotions which

From John Hospers, "Art and Emotion," from *Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress on Aesthetics* (Athens, 1960), pp. 662–666. Used by permission of Professor P. A. Michelis and the author.

he desires to clarify and to release through creative activity. The idea of a work of art gradually comes to him, and in the act of conceiving and developing this idea his turbid and inchoate emotions become gradually clarified and ordered in his mind, and finally, the work having been completed, he finds release from the emotion that has possessed him. A number of questions, however, must be asked about such descriptions. (1) Does it hold true of all artists? This is extremely doubtful. Typically a composer begins with a theme which drifts into his mind and haunts him, which he then develops and amplifies until he has composed a work which satisfies him. Whether or not he is possessed by emotion in doing so, depends on who he is and what are the circumstances. Is there really any evidence that emotion accompanies the process of artistic creation any more than it accompanies the process of sweeping the floor or arguing with one's neighbors? (2) Even more dubious is the description of "getting rid of the emotions" described in the usual Romantic account of artistic creation. Does the artist always experience this Catharsis of the emotions, easing himself of them by discharging them? The implication is that the very same emotion which possessed the artist is the one which he somehow "puts into" the work, thus re-locating it: it was in him, now it is in the work. But is this at all a plausible account of *all* artistic creation? Even if the artist did feel a certain emotion at the work's inception, he might well not have "got rid of" it in the manner described; and even if he did, the emotions he felt during the creative process need not be those he lost during creation. Perhaps he felt disturbed or sad and now he feels sad or disturbed no more; but perhaps he feels only relief now, relief that the job is finished, and felt nothing during the process but a desire to get the job done. Surely *this* is not the emotion that he "put into" the work? What does it mean, anyway, to say that he "put the emotion" into the work? Is this any more than an unfortunate metaphor? (3) In any case, how is this relevant to a characterization of the work of art? Emotion in this sense is a feature not of the work of art but of the artist, and of interest primarily to the artist's biographer. Nor is it even peculiar to artists: certain emotions characterize all creative processes, whether of the scientist, the mathematician, or the student writing an essay; moreover, it characterizes many pseudo- or would-be

artists as much as it does the genuine ones: the ineffectual poet may undergo more divine agonies of creation, with accompanying emotion and surcease therefrom, than did Bach or Haydn. And even if there *were* some kind of emotion distinguishing all artists from all non-artists or would-be artists, this still would tell us nothing of the nature of the work of art, any more than a description of Newton's state of mind when he wrote his *Principles* would inform us concerning the Law of Gravitation.

2. Secondly, a work of art may be connected with emotion in its effects. To say that a work of art is disturbed (according to this account) is to say that I am disturbed when I hear or see it. But this too may be questioned. (1) A work of art sometimes produces emotions in spectators; but this is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for aesthetic experience. Emotion may sometimes accompany this experience, but when it does it may well be asked whether it adds to or detracts from the quality of the experience. Many would say that emotion is harmful to the calm, the detachment, the objectivity necessary to appreciate complex works of art. And often the intensity of the aesthetic experience itself is mistaken for emotion, so that to call the state an emotion is a mistake. (2) When the work of art does produce an emotion in the spectator, such as Aristotle's Catharsis, the relevance of this to an appreciation of the work may be questioned. Presumably it is the work of art which one is supposed to be appreciating, and this appreciation requires a close attention to countless details. If a person describes his reaction in emotional terms, it is all too likely that he is not concentrating on the work itself, but is simply *using* the work as a springboard or background for an emotional debauch of his own. (3) In any case, the theory seems to be incorrect as a description; when I call the Mozart andante melancholy, it is not necessary that I *feel* melancholy. I may feel nothing at all. Or I may feel tired or depressed, but I do not attribute these states to the music. Rather, I *recognize* the andante as melancholy, whether I myself feel anything or not.

3. Finally, it is alleged that a work of art not only expresses (releases) emotions of the artist and expresses (evokes) them in the observer, but in some sense *contains* emotion. This, unlike the first two, does characterize the work of art rather than its creator or its spectator. And I do want to say that it is the work of art, not the

observer, that is gay or tense or disturbed. But the problem is to give this sense an adequate interpretation. It is said, for example, that a work of art is an *embodiment* of emotion. But how is this metaphor of embodiment to be construed? If we interpret it as a disguised statement about the observer's reactions—"the work embodies X" means "I feel X when I hear or see it"—then again it falls into the second (response) category and is no longer a characterization of the work of art itself. The statement *seems* to be a statement about what the work of art contains, and yet it is difficult to see in what sense a work of art can truly be said to contain emotions. If on the other hand we construe statements about embodiment of emotion as statements about something the *artist* has experienced—if we say, for example, that it reflects something *he* felt—then once again we are characterizing not the work of art but referring back to the conditions which helped to produce it. I do not want to throw out talk about embodiment, but to suggest that it too needs elucidation.

What sense, then, can be given to statements that a work of art contains or embodies some specific emotion? That they do this in some sense is assumed by virtually everyone, but to analyze such statements is extremely difficult. Let us say that when a work of art has a certain emotional feature, such as melancholy or jubilation, this means that it contains any of a certain combination of elements—tones or lines or colors. Since this combination of tones or lines is a property of the aesthetic object, so is the emotion. So far, so good.

But why should just *this* combination of lines or tones be said to have this emotional feature, and not others? There is our problem. How are we to solve it? It is easy to attribute such features to works of art, but how are we to justify such attribution?

I suggest, then, that we may find a clue in the most primordial sense of "expression," that in which a facial expression or gesture may express a person's inner state. (1) There is an outer object, in the public world (a face, a work of art), revealing the nature of an inner state. But if we stop here, we have only a work of art revealing to us the inner state of its creator, just as a facial expression reveals whether the person is sad or glad. We are still using the work of art only as a vehicle, a means of ascertaining something

beyond itself. So let us go further: (2) a work of art may be said to express (contain) a certain emotion if it possesses features *like* those which people have when they express those same emotions in words or gestures. A work of music may be sad: that is, it may contain some of the same features which characterize people when they are sad; it is soft, seldom loud; it is slow, seldom fast; it is hushed, never strident. A composition which is played in a fast tempo would, I think, hardly be called a sad composition, no matter what other features it had, because rapidity of motion does not go with sad feelings. Some of these features, it is true, seem to be describable only in musical terms—such as being in a minor key, containing certain harmonic intervals (diminished thirds and sixths) rather than others. These, though they do seem to characterize sadness in music, can hardly be said to characterize sadness in life. Yet it seems to me that if one is to attempt at all to grasp the relevance of these emotion-terms in characterizing works of art, one must refer back to their behavior-correlates in life for an answer. So it is throughout the arts. Some works of art are gay, some sombre; some brooding, some exultant; some are peaceful and quiescent, others disturbed and tense. Paintings which are characterized by tension and disturbance, for example, typically contain jagged lines and do not emphasize the horizontal; and doubtless this is because, since we are all gravitational beings, we feel restful and secure in a position from which we cannot fall. The work, again, contains features like those we possess when *we* feel the corresponding emotion. In summary, then: all these attributions, if they are seriously meant to characterize works of art rather than our response to them, must find their verifications in our daily behavior; we must be able to say that we attribute these features, not to ourselves as audience or to the artist as creator, but to the work of art which he created; and the evidence we can give for their possession of these features is a fact about our own nature, the fact that we ourselves, in response to certain cues in our environment, possess some of the same characteristics possessed by works of art.

CLIVE BELL

Artistic Representation and Form

Clive Bell (1881–1964), English critic and man of letters, was a prominent member of the "Bloomsbury Group," which included the critic Roger Fry, the novelists Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster, and the social scientist J. M. Keynes. In addition to Art, *Bell's writings on aesthetics include* Since Cézanne *and* Enjoying Pictures.

Like all sound revolutions, Post-Impressionism is nothing more than a return to first principles. Into a world where the painter was expected to be either a photographer or an acrobat burst the Post-Impressionist, claiming that, above all things, he should be an artist. Never mind, said he, about representation or accomplishment —mind about creating significant form, mind about art. Creating a work of art is so tremendous a business that it leaves no leisure for catching a likeness or displaying address. Every sacrifice made to representation is something stolen from art. Far from being the insolent kind of revolution it is vulgarly supposed to be, Post-Impressionism is, in fact, a return, not indeed to any particular tradition of painting, but to the great tradition of visual art. It sets before every artist the ideal set before themselves by the primitives, an ideal which, since the twelfth century, has been cherished only by exceptional men of genius. Post-Impressionism is nothing but the reassertion of the first commandment of art—Thou shalt create form. . . .

We are all familiar with pictures that interest us and excite our admiration, but do not move us as works of art. To this class belongs what I call 'Descriptive Painting'—that is, painting in which forms are used not as objects of emotion, but as means of suggesting emotion or conveying information. Portraits of psychological and

From Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1928), pp. 16–17, 25, 26–33, 43–44, 49–50, 51–53, 70–71, 98–99, 102–103, *passim*. Reprinted by permission of Chatto & Windus, and G. P. Putnam's Sons (Capricorn Edition).

historical value, topographical works, pictures that tell stories and suggest situations, illustrations of all sorts, belong to this class. That we all recognise the distinction is clear, for who has not said that such and such a drawing was excellent as illustration, but as a work of art worthless? Of course many descriptive pictures possess, amongst other qualities, formal significance, and are therefore works of art: but many more do not. They interest us; they may move us too in a hundred different ways, but they do not move us aesthetically. According to my hypothesis they are not works of art. They leave untouched our aesthetic emotions because it is not their forms but the ideas or information suggested or conveyed by their forms that affect us. . . .

Let no one imagine that representation is bad in itself; a realistic form may be as significant, in its place as part of the design, as an abstract. But if a representative form has value, it is as form, not as representation. The representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful; always it is irrelevant. For, to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life. . . .

. . . the rapt philosopher, and he who contemplates a work of art, inhabit a world with an intense and peculiar significance of its own; that significance is unrelated to the significance of life. In this world the emotions of life find no place. It is a world with emotions of its own.

To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three-dimensional space. That bit of knowledge, I admit, is essential to the appreciation of many great works, since many of the most moving forms ever created are in three dimensions. To see a cube or a rhomboid as a flat pattern is to lower its significance, and a sense of three-dimensional space is essential to the full appreciation of most architectural forms. Pictures which would be insignificant if we saw them as flat patterns are profoundly moving because, in fact, we see them as related planes. If the representation of three-dimensional space is to be called 'representation,' then I agree that there is one kind

of representation which is not irrelevant. Also, I agree that along with our feeling for line and colour we must bring with us our knowledge of space if we are to make the most of every kind of form. Nevertheless, there are magnificent designs to an appreciation of which this knowledge is not necessary: so, though it is not irrelevant to the appreciation of some works of art it is not essential to the appreciation of all. What we must say is that the representation of three-dimensional space is neither irrelevant nor essential to all art, and that every other sort of representation is irrelevant.

That there is an irrelevant representative or descriptive element in many great works of art is not in the least surprising. . . . A painter too feeble to create forms that provoke more than a little aesthetic emotion will try to eke that little out by suggesting the emotions of life. To evoke the emotions of life he must use representation. Thus a man will paint an execution and, fearing to miss with his first barrel of significant form, will try to hit with his second by raising an emotion of fear or pity. But if in the artist an inclination to play upon the emotions of life is often the sign of a flickering inspiration, in the spectator a tendency to seek, behind form, the emotions of life is a sign of defective sensibility always. It means that his aesthetic emotions are weak or, at any rate, imperfect. Before a work of art people who feel little or no emotion for pure form find themselves at a loss. They are deaf men at a concert. They know that they are in the presence of something great, but they lack the power of apprehending it. They know that they ought to feel for it a tremendous emotion, but it happens that the particular kind of emotion it can raise is one that they can feel hardly or not at all. And so they read into the forms of the work those facts and ideas for which they are capable of feeling emotion, and feel for them the emotions that they can feel—the ordinary emotions of life. When confronted by a picture, instinctively they refer back its forms to the world from which they came. They treat created form as though it were imitated form, a picture as though it were a photograph. Instead of going out on the stream of art into a new world of aesthetic experience, they turn a sharp corner and come straight home to the world of human interests. For them the significance of a work of art depends on what they bring to it; no new thing is added to their lives, only the old material is stirred. . . . You will notice that people who cannot feel pure aesthetic emotions remem-

ber pictures by their subjects; whereas people who can, as often as not, have no idea what the subject of a picture is. They have never noticed the representative element, and so when they discuss pictures they talk about the shapes of forms and the relations and quantities of colours. Often they can tell by the quality of a single line whether or no a man is a good artist. They are concerned only with lines and colours, their relations and quantities and qualities; but from these they win an emotion more profound and far more sublime than any that can be given by the description of facts and ideas.

This last sentence has a very confident ring—over-confident, some may think. Perhaps I shall be able to justify it, and make my meaning clearer too, if I give an account of my own feelings about music. I am not really musical. I do not understand music well. I find musical form exceedingly difficult to apprehend, and I am sure that the profoundest subtleties of harmony and rhythm more often than not escape me. The form of a musical composition must be simple indeed if I am to grasp it honestly. My opinion about music is not worth having. Yet, sometimes, at a concert, though my appreciation of the music is limited and humble, it is pure. Sometimes, though I have a poor understanding, I have a clean palate. Consequently, when I am feeling bright and clear and intent, at the beginning of a concert for instance, when something that I can grasp is being played, I get from music that pure aesthetic emotion that I get from visual art. It is less intense, and the rapture is evanescent; I understand music too ill for music to transport me far into the world of pure aesthetic ecstasy. But at moments I do appreciate music as pure musical form, as sounds combined according to the laws of a mysterious necessity, as pure art with a tremendous significance of its own and no relation whatever to the significance of life; and in those moments I lose myself in that infinitely sublime state of mind to which pure visual form transports me. How inferior is my normal state of mind at a concert. Tired or perplexed, I let slip my sense of form, my aesthetic emotion collapses, and I begin weaving into the harmonies, that I cannot grasp, the ideas of life. Incapable of feeling the austere emotions of art, I begin to read into the musical forms human emotions of terror and mystery, love and hate, and spend the minutes, pleasantly enough, in a world of turbid and inferior feeling. At such times, were the grossest pieces of onomat-

opoeic representation—the song of a bird, the galloping of horses, the cries of children, or the laughing of demons—to be introduced into the symphony, I should not be offended. Very likely I should be pleased; they would afford new points of departure for new trains of romantic feeling or heroic thought. I know very well what has happened. I have been using art as a means to the emotions of life and reading into it the ideas of life. I have been cutting blocks with a razor. I have tumbled from the superb peaks of aesthetic exaltation to the snug foothills of warm humanity. It is a jolly country. No one need be ashamed of enjoying himself there. Only no one who has ever been on the heights can help feeling a little crestfallen in the cosy valleys. And let no one imagine, because he has made merry in the warm tilth and quaint nooks of romance, that he can even guess at the austere and thrilling raptures of those who have climbed the cold, white peaks of art. . . .

It seems to me possible, though by no means certain, that created form moves us so profoundly because it expresses the emotion of its creator. Perhaps the lines and colours of a work of art convey to us something that the artist felt. . . . For what . . . does the artist feel the emotion that he is supposed to express?

. . . Occasionally when an artist—a real artist—looks at objects (the contents of a room, for instance) he perceives them as pure forms in certain relations to each other, and feels emotion for them as such. These are his moments of inspiration: follows the desire to express what has been felt. The emotion that the artist felt in his moment of inspiration he did not feel for objects seen as means, but for objects seen as pure forms—that is, as ends in themselves. He did not feel emotion for a chair as a means to physical well-being, nor as an object associated with the intimate life of a family, nor as the place where someone sat saying things unforgettable, nor yet as a thing bound to the lives of hundreds of men and women, dead or alive, by a hundred subtle ties; doubtless an artist does often feel emotions such as these for the things that he sees, but in the moment of aesthetic vision he sees objects, not as means shrouded in associations, but as pure forms. It is for, or at any rate through, pure form that he feels his inspired emotion.

Now to see objects as pure forms is to see them as ends in them-

selves. For though, of course, forms are related to each other as parts of a whole, they are related on terms of equality; they are not a means to anything except emotion. But for objects seen as ends in themselves, do we not feel a profounder and a more thrilling emotion than ever we felt for them as means? All of us, I imagine, do, from time to time, get a vision of material objects as pure forms. We see things as ends in themselves, that is to say; and at such moments it seems possible, and even probable, that we see them with the eye of an artist. Who has not, once at least in his life, had a sudden vision of landscape as pure form? For once, instead of seeing it as fields and cottages, he has felt it as lines and colours. In that moment has he not won from material beauty a thrill indistinguishable from that which art gives? And, if this be so, is it not clear that he has won from material beauty the thrill that, generally, art alone can give, because he has contrived to see it as a pure formal combination of lines and colours? May we go on to say that, having seen it as pure form, having freed it from all casual and adventitious interest, from all that it may have acquired from its commerce with human beings, from all its significance as a means, he has felt its significance as an end in itself?

. . . Be they artists or lovers of art, mystics or mathematicians, those who achieve ecstasy are those who have freed themselves from the arrogance of humanity. He who would feel the significance of art must make himself humble before it. Those who find the chief importance of art or of philosophy in its relation to conduct or its practical utility—those who cannot value things as ends in themselves or, at any rate, as direct means to emotion—will never get from anything the best that it can give. Whatever the world of aesthetic contemplation may be, it is not the world of human business and passion; in it the chatter and tumult of material existence is unheard, or heard only as the echo of some more ultimate harmony. . . .

To understand completely the history of an age must we know and understand the history of its art? It seems so. And yet the idea is intolerable to scientific historians. What becomes of the great scientific principle of water-tight compartments? Again, it is unjust: for assuredly, to understand art we need know nothing whatever

about history. It may be that from works of art we can draw inferences as to the sort of people who made them: but the longest and most intimate conversations with an artist will not tell us whether his pictures are good or bad. We must see them: then we shall know. I may be partial or dishonest about the work of my friend, but its aesthetic significance is not more obvious to me than that of a work that was finished five thousand years ago. To appreciate fully a work of art we require nothing but sensibility. To those that can hear Art speaks for itself: facts and dates do not; to make bricks of such stuff one must glean the uplands and hollows for tags of auxiliary information and suggestion; and the history of art is no exception to the rule. To appreciate a man's art I need know nothing whatever about the artist; I can say whether this picture is better than that without the help of history; but if I am trying to account for the deterioration of his art, I shall be helped by knowing that he has been seriously ill or that he has married a wife who insists on his boiling her pot. To mark the deterioration was to make a pure, aesthetic judgment: to account for it was to become an historian. . . .

To criticise a work of art historically is to play the science-besotted fool. No more disastrous theory ever issued from the brain of a charlatan than that of evolution in art. Giotto did not creep, a grub, that Titian might flaunt, a butterfly. To think of a man's art as leading on to the art of someone else is to misunderstand it. To praise or abuse or be interested in a work of art because it leads or does not lead to another work of art is to treat it as though it were not a work of art. The connection of one work of art with another may have everything to do with history: it has nothing to do with appreciation. So soon as we begin to consider a work as anything else than an end in itself we leave the world of art. Though the development of painting from Giotto to Titian may be interesting historically, it cannot affect the value of any particular picture: aesthetically, it is of no consequence whatever. Every work of art must be judged on its own merits.

E. H. GOMBRICH

Artistic Representation

E. H. Gombrich (1909–) is Director of the Warburg Institute, University of London. His recently published Meditations on a Hobby Horse *takes up and pursues many of the themes of* Art and Illusion.

There was a time when the methods of representation were the proper concern of the art critic. Accustomed as he was to judging contemporary works first of all by standards of representational accuracy, he had no doubt that this skill had progressed from rude beginnings to the perfection of illusion. Egyptian art adopted childish methods because Egyptian artists knew no better. Their conventions could perhaps be excused, but they could not be condoned. It is one of the permanent gains we owe to the great artistic revolution which has swept across Europe in the first half of the twentieth century that we are rid of this type of aesthetics. The first prejudice teachers of art appreciation usually try to combat is the belief that artistic excellence is identical with photographic accuracy. The picture post card or pin-up girl has become the conventional foil against which the student learns to see the creative achievement of the great masters. Aesthetics, in other words, has surrendered its claim to be concerned with the problem of convincing representation, the problem of illusion in art. In certain respects this is indeed a liberation and nobody would wish to revert to the old confusion. . . .

That the discoveries and effects of representation which were the pride of earlier artists have become trivial today I would not deny for a moment. Yet I believe that we are in real danger of losing contact with the great masters of the past if we accept the fashionable doctrine that such matters never had anything to do with art. . . .

In his charming autobiography, the German illustrator Ludwig

From E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (new ed.; London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1962), pp. 4-7, 53-55, 73-78, 83-86, 147-148, *passim*. Used by permission of Phaidon Press and the Bollingen Foundation, New York.

Richter relates how he and his friends, all young art students in Rome in the 1820's, visited the famous beauty spot of Tivoli and sat down to draw. They looked with surprise, but hardly with approval, at a group of French artists who approached the place with enormous baggage, carrying large quantities of paint which they applied to the canvas with big, coarse brushes. The Germans, perhaps roused by this self-confident artiness, were determined on the opposite approach. They selected the hardest, best-pointed pencils, which could render the motif firmly and minutely to its finest detail, and each bent down over his small piece of paper, trying to transcribe what he saw with the utmost fidelity. 'We fell in love with every blade of grass, every tiny twig, and refused to let anything escape us. Every one tried to render the motif as objectively as possible.'

Nevertheless, when they then compared the fruits of their efforts in the evening, their transcripts differed to a surprising extent. The mood, the colour, even the outline of the motif had undergone a subtle transformation in each of them. Richter goes on to describe how these different versions reflected the different dispositions of the four friends, for instance, how the melancholy painter had straightened the exuberant contours and emphasized the blue tinges. We might say he gives an illustration of the famous definition by Emile Zola, who called a work of art 'a corner of nature seen through a temperament'.

It is precisely because we are interested in this definition that we must probe it a little further. The 'temperament' or 'personality' of the artist, his selective preferences, may be one of the reasons for the transformation which the motif undergoes under the artist's hands, but there must be others—everything, in fact, which we bundle together into the word 'style,' the style of the period and the style of the artist. . . .

Our perceptive apparatus is so built that it only jumps into action when prodded. . . . We hear a lot about training the eye or learning to see, but this phraseology can be misleading if it hides the fact that what we can learn is not to see but to discriminate. [Seeing is not] a passive process, a registration of sense data by the retina as a photographic plate. . . . Every day brings new and startling confirmation from the psychology laboratories that this idea, or ideal, of passivity is quite unreal. 'Perception,' it has been recently said,

'may be regarded as primarily the modification of an anticipation.' It is always an active process, conditioned by our expectations and adapted to situations. Instead of talking of seeing and knowing, we might do a little better to talk of seeing and noticing. We notice only when we look *for* something, and we look when our attention is aroused by some disequilibrium, a difference between our expectation and the incoming message. We cannot take in all we see in a room, but we notice if something is changed. We cannot register all the features of a head, and as long as they conform to our expectations they fall silently into the slot of our perceptive apparatus. . . .

We come to [works of art] with our receivers already attuned. We expect to be presented with a certain notation, a certain sign situation, and make ready to cope with it. Here sculpture is an even better example than painting. When we step in front of a bust we understand what we are expected to look for. We do not, as a rule, take it to be a representation of a cut-off head; we take in the situation and know that this belongs to the institution or convention called 'busts' with which we have been familiar even before we grew up. For the same reason, perhaps, we do not miss the absence of colour in the marble any more than we miss its absence in black-and-white photographs. On the contrary. Some who are so attuned will register shock, not necessarily of pleasure, when they discover that a bust has been slightly tinted. Such a bust may even look to them unpleasantly lifelike, transcending, as it were, the symbolic sphere in which it was expected to dwell, although objectively it may still be very remote indeed from the proverbial wax image which often causes us uneasiness because it oversteps the boundary of symbolism.

Psychologists call such levels of expectation 'mental set' . . . All culture and all communication depend on the interplay between expectation and observation, the waves of fulfillment, disappointment, right guesses, and wrong moves that make up our daily life. If somebody arrives at the office we may be set to hear him say 'good morning,' and the fulfillment of our expectation is hardly registered. If he fails to say 'good morning' we may, on occasion, adjust our mental set and watch out for other symptoms of rudeness or hostility. It is one of the problems of the foreigner in a strange country that

he lacks a frame of reference that allows him to take the mental temperature around him with assurance. A German will expect a handshake where an Englishman will scarcely nod his head. An Italian peasant may be scandalized by a tourist's dress which may seem to us a model of propriety. The point to remember is that here, as elsewhere, it is the 'more' or 'less' that counts, the relationship between the expected and the experienced.

The experience of art is not exempt from this general rule. A style, like a culture or climate of opinion, sets up a horizon of expectation, a mental set, which registers deviations and modifications with exaggerated sensitivity. . . .

All art originates in the human mind, in our reactions to the world rather than in the visible world itself, and it is precisely because all art is 'conceptual' that all representations are recognizable by their style.

Without some starting point, some initial schema, we could never get hold of the flux of experience. Without categories, we could not sort our impressions. Paradoxically, it has turned out that it matters relatively little what these first categories are. We can always adjust them according to need. Indeed, if the schema remains loose and flexible, such initial vagueness may prove not a hindrance but a help. An entirely fluid system would no longer serve its purpose; it could not register facts because it would lack pigeonholes. But how we arrange the first filing system is not very relevant.

The progress of learning, of adjustment through trial and error, can be compared to the game of 'Twenty Questions,' where we identify an object through inclusion or exclusion along any network of classes. The traditional initial schema of 'animal, vegetable, or mineral' is certainly neither scientific nor very suitable, but it usually serves us well enough to narrow down our concepts by submitting them to the corrective test of 'yes' or 'no.' The example of this parlour game [is] an illustration of that process of articulation through which we learn to adjust ourselves to the infinite complexity of this world. . . .

Everything points to the conclusion that the phrase 'the language of art' is more than a loose metaphor, that even to describe the visible world in images we need a developed system of schemata. . . .

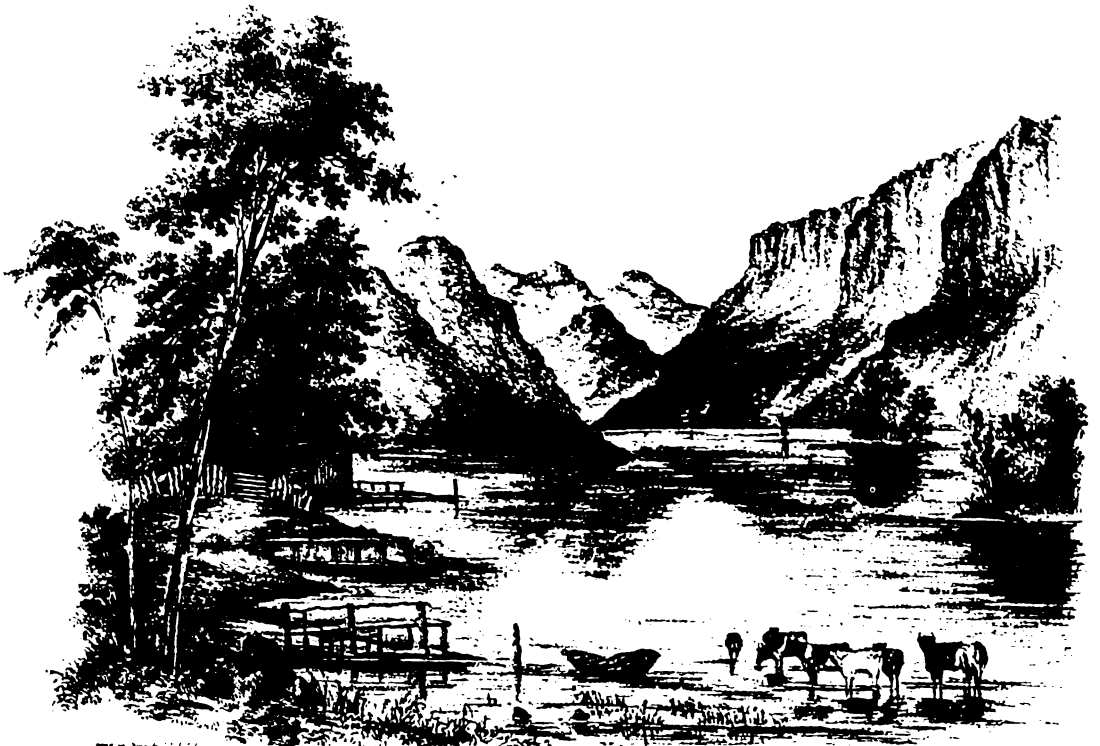
James Cheng, who taught painting to a group of Chinese trained in different conventions, once told me of a sketching expedition he made with his students to a famous beauty spot, one of Peking's old city gates. The task baffled them. In the end, one of the students asked to be given at least a picture post card of the building so that they would have something to copy. It is stories such as these, stories of breakdowns, that explain why art has a history and artists need a style adapted to a task.

I cannot illustrate this revealing incident. But luck allows us to study the next stage, as it were—the adjustment of the traditional vocabulary of Chinese art to the unfamiliar task of topographical portrayal in the Western sense. For some decades Chiang Yee, a Chinese writer and painter of great gifts and charm, has delighted us with contemplative records of the Silent Traveller, books in which he tells of his encounters with scenes and people of the English and Irish countryside and elsewhere. I take an illustration [Fig. 1] from the volume on the English Lakeland.

It is a view of Derwentwater. Here we have crossed the line that sparates documentation from art. Mr. Chiang Yee certainly enjoys the adaptation of the Chinese idiom to a new purpose; he wants us to see the English scenery for once 'through Chinese eyes.' But it is precisely for this reason that it is so instructive to compare his view with a typical 'picturesque' rendering from the Romantic period [Fig. 2]. We see how the relatively rigid vocabulary of the Chinese tradition acts as a selective screen which admits only the features for which schemata exist. The artist will be attracted by motifs which can be rendered in his idiom. As he scans the landscape, the sights which can be matched successfully with the schemata he has learned to handle will leap forward as centres of attention. The style, like the medium, creates a mental set which makes the artist look for certain aspects in the scene around him that he can render. Painting is an activity, and the artist will therefore tend to see what he paints rather than to paint what he sees.

. . . Take the next magazine containing snapshots of crowds and street scenes and walk with it through any art gallery to see how many gestures and types that occur in life can be matched from old paintings. Even Dutch genre paintings that appear to mirror life in all its bustle and variety will turn out to be created from a lim-

1. Chiang Yee, Cows in Derwentwater (*Courtesy Dr. Yee*)



2. *Anonymous*, Derwentwater, Looking Towards Borrowdale
(*Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum, London*)

ited number of types and gestures, much as the apparent realism of the picaresque novel or of Restoration comedy still applies and modifies stock figures which can be traced back for centuries. There is no neutral naturalism.[1] The artist, no less than the writer, needs a vocabulary before he can embark on a 'copy' of reality. . . .

Need we infer . . . that there is no such thing as an objective likeness? That it makes no sense to ask, for instance, whether Chiang Yee's view of Derwentwater is more or less correct than the nineteenth-century lithograph in which the formulas of classical landscapes were applied to the same task? It is a tempting conclusion and one which recommends itself to the teacher of art appreciation because it brings home to the layman how much of what we call 'seeing' is conditioned by habits and expectations. It is all the more important to clarify how far this relativism will take us. I believe it rests on the confusion between pictures, words, and statements. . . .

If all art is conceptual, the issue is rather simple. For concepts, like pictures, cannot be true or false. They can only be more or less useful for the formation of descriptions. The words of a language, like pictorial formulas, pick out from the flux of events a few signposts which allow us to give direction to our fellow-speakers in that game of 'Twenty Questions' in which we are engaged. Where the needs of users are similar, the signposts will tend to correspond. We can mostly find equivalent terms in English, French, German, and Latin, and hence the idea has taken root that concepts exist independently of language as the constituents of 'reality.' But the English language erects a signpost on the roadfork between 'clock' and 'watch' where the German has only *'Uhr.'* The sentence from the German primer, *'Meine Tante hat eine Uhr,'* leaves us in doubt whether the aunt has a clock or a watch. Either of the two translations may be wrong as a description of a fact. In Swedish, by the way, there is an additional roadfork to distinguish between aunts who are 'father's sisters,' and those who are 'mother's sisters,' and those who are just ordinary aunts. If we were to play our game in Swedish we would need additional questions to get at the truth about the timepiece.

This simple example brings out the fact, recently emphasized by

[1] The view that the artist can create a uniquely faithful reproduction of a natural scene, which will be independent of any stylistic convention.—Ed.

Benjamin Lee Whorf, that language does not give names to pre-existing things or concepts so much as it articulates the world of our experience. The images of art, we suspect, do the same. But this difference in styles or languages need not stand in the way of correct answers and descriptions. The world may be approached from a different angle and the information given may yet be the same.

From the point of view of information there is surely no difficulty in discussing portrayal. To say of a drawing that it is a correct view of Tivoli does not mean, of course, that Tivoli is bounded by wiry lines. It means that those who understand the notation will derive *no false information* from the drawing—whether it gives the contour in a few lines or picks out 'every blade of grass' as Richter's friends wanted to do. The complete portrayal might be the one which gives as much correct information about the spot as we would obtain if we looked at it from the very spot where the artist stood.

Styles, like languages, differ in the sequence of articulation and in the number of questions they allow the artist to ask; and so complex is the information that reaches us from the visible world that no picture will ever embody it all. That is not due to the subjectivity of vision but to its richness. Where the artist has to copy a human product he can, of course, produce a facsimile which is indistinguishable from the original. The forger of banknotes succeeds only too well in effacing his personality and the limitations of a period style.

But what matters to us is that the correct portrait, like the useful map, is an end product on a long road through schema and correction. It is not a faithful record of a visual experience but the faithful construction of a relational model.

Neither the subjectivity of vision nor the sway of conventions need lead us to deny that such a model can be constructed to any required degree of accuracy. What is decisive here is clearly the word 'required.' The form of a representation cannot be divorced from its purpose and the requirements of the society in which the given visual language gains currency. . . .

There are few more influential discussions on the philosophy of representation than the momentous passage in the *Republic* [2] where

[2] Bk. X, 596.—Ed.

Plato introduces the comparison between a painting and a mirror image. It has haunted the philosophy of art ever since. To re-examine his theory of ideas, Plato contrasts the painter with the carpenter. The carpenter who makes the couch translates the idea, or concept, of the couch into matter. The painter who represents the carpenter's couch in one of his paintings only copies the appearance of one particular couch. He is thus twice removed from the idea. The metaphysical implications of Plato's condemnation of art need not concern us. It is possible to translate his statement into terminology which does not operate with Platonic ideas. If you telephone a carpenter to order a couch, he must know what the word means, or, to put it somewhat pedantically, what pieces of furniture are subsumed under the concept 'couch'. A painter who draws the interior of a room need not trouble his head about the names given in the furniture trade to the objects in front of him. He is not concerned with concepts or classes but with particular things.

But it is just because this analysis looks so plausible that we must probe it carefully. Is there really this difference between the carpenter who makes the couch and the painter who imitates it? Surely the difference cannot lie in the medium. Many a couch is designed first and worked out in a blueprint before it is made. In this case, Plato would have to admit the designer into his Ideal State because he, too, imitated the idea of the couch rather than any deceptive reality. But . . . we cannot tell in any particular case whether the design is to serve as an instruction or as an imitation. A series of pictures of couches in a sales catalogue may be a promise that such pieces of furniture will be made to order, or that they have already been made; in an illustrated dictionary of English words they may be an 'iconic sign', a device to impart information about the meaning of the term.

The more we think about Plato's famous distinction between making and imitating, the more these border lines become blurred. Plato speaks of the painter who 'paints both reins and bit'. Unlike the horseman and the harness-maker, Plato thought, the painter need have no knowledge of these things. It is a doubtful assertion even in the case of painters. But what about the sculptor who fits a real metal bit to his marble horse, as many a sculptor has done? Or what,

for that matter, of a sculptor who represents a figure lying on a couch? Is he not also a maker?

Must it always be true that the sculptor's couch is a representation? If we mean by this term that it must refer to something else, that it is a sign, then this will surely depend on the context. Put a real couch into a shop window and you thereby turn it into a sign. It is true that once this is its only function, you may choose a couch which is not good for anything else. You may also make a cardboard dummy. In other words, there is a smooth and even transition, dependent on function, between what Plato called 'reality' and what he called 'appearance'. On the stage no less than in the shop window, we can find the real couch side by side with flimsy imitations or furniture painted on a backdrop. Any one of these may become a sign to us if we question it for information about the type of object it stands for. To one person, let us say, the model airplane may be interesting for its reference; to the child, it will be just a toy that really works.

In the world of the child there is no clear distinction between reality and appearance. He can use the most unlikely tools for the most unlikely purposes—a table upside down for a spaceship, a basin for a crash helmet. For the context of the game it will serve its purpose rather well. The basin does not 'represent' a crash helmet, it *is* a kind of improvised helmet, and it might even prove useful. There is no rigid division between the phantom and reality, truth and falsehood, at least not where human purpose and human action come into their own. What we call 'culture' or 'civilization' is based on man's capacity to be a maker, to invent unexpected uses, and to create artificial substitutes.

To us the word 'artificial' seems immensely far removed from art. But this was not always so. The works of cunning craftsmen in myth and story include precious toys and intriguing machines, artificial singing birds, and angels blowing real trumpets. And when men turned from the admiration of artifice to the worship of nature, the landscape gardener was called in to make artificial lakes, artificial waterfalls, and even artificial mountains. For the world of man is not only a world of things; it is a world of symbols where the distinction between reality and make-believe is itself unreal. The dignitary who lays the foundation stone will give it three taps with a

silver hammer. The hammer is real, but is the blow? In this twilight region of the symbolic, no such questions are asked, and therefore no answers need be given.

When we make a snowman we do not feel, I submit, that we are constructing a phantom of a man. We are simply making a man of snow. We do not say, 'Shall we represent a man who is smoking?' but 'Shall we give him a pipe?' For the success of the operation, a real pipe may be just as good or better than a symbolic one made of a twig. It is only afterward that we may introduce the idea of reference, of the snowman's representing somebody. We can make him a portrait or a caricature, or we can discover a likeness to someone and elaborate it. But always, I contend, making will come before matching, creation before reference. As likely as not, we will give our snowman a proper name, call him 'Jimmie' or 'Jeeves', and will be sorry for him when he starts to slump and melt away.

But are we not still matching something when we make the snowman? Are we not at least modelling our creation after the idea of a man? . . . This is the traditional answer, but . . . it will not quite do. First of all, it makes the created image into a replica of something nobody has ever seen, the snowman we allegedly carry in our heads before we body it forth. Moreover there was no such pre-existent snowman. What happens is rather that we feel tempted to work the snow and balance the shapes till we recognize a man. The pile of snow provides us with the first schema, which we correct until it satisfies our minimum definition. A symbolic man, to be sure, but still a member of the species man, subspecies snowman. What we learn from the study of symbolism, I contend, is precisely that to our minds the limits of these definitions are elastic.

This, once more, is the real issue. For Plato and those who followed him, definitions were something made in heaven. The idea of man, couch, or basin was something fixed eternally with rigid outlines and immutable laws. Most of the tangles into which the philosophy of art and the philosophy of symbolism got themselves can be traced back to this awe-inspiring starting point. For once you accept the argument that there are rigid classes of things, you must also describe their image as a phantom. But a phantom of what? What is the artist's task when he represents a mountain—does he copy a particular mountain, an individual member of the

class, as the topographic painter does, or does he, more loftily, copy the universal pattern, the idea of a mountain?

We know this to be an unreal dilemma. It is up to us how we define a mountain. We can make a mountain out of a molehill, or ask our landscape gardener to make one. We can accept the one or the other according to our wish or whim. . . .

T. M. GREENE

Artistic Greatness

Theodore Meyer Greene (1897–) is Professor of Humanities at Scripps College. He was formerly Professor of Philosophy at Yale and Princeton. Besides his best known work in aesthetics, from which this selection is taken, Greene is also the author of Moral, Religious, and Aesthetic Insight *(1958).*

1. FACTORS DETERMINING ARTISTIC GREATNESS

"The philosophy which is so important in each of us," says William James, "is not a technical matter; it is our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means. It is only partly got from books; it is our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos." [1] So conceived, a man's philosophy of life expresses itself in each of his particular evaluations; and it is the art lover's and art critic's philosophy of life which, in *some* sense, determines his appraisal of the greatness of a work of art. A work of art will be judged to possess profundity or greatness in proportion as it seems to the observer (his philosophy of life being what it is) to mediate a profound experience by expressing, *via* artistic form, some profound interpretation of its subject-matter.

The profundity of any artistic interpretation and evaluation must, in turn, be regarded as a function of the "depth" and the "breadth" we predicate of the artist's normative insight. . . . The greatness of a work of art can be determined only by reference to *both* of these complementary criteria.

A work of art is judged to be great, according to the criterion of depth, if it expresses a searching examination of, and an intense normative response to, the nature and immediate human import of those aspects of his subject-matter which the artist has chosen to

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[1] *Pragmatism* (New York: Longmans Green, 1922), p. 4.

explore from some particular point of view, irrespective of the scope of this subject-matter or the breadth of the artist's approach to it. The subject-matter of a still-life, as compared with that of a landscape or of a composition whose interest centers in human beings, is certainly restricted in scope. Yet some of the still-lifes of painters as different as Chardin, Cézanne, and Matisse . . . may all be said to satisfy the criterion of depth because each painter has, from his own point of view, interpreted certain aspects of this restricted subject-matter with penetrating insight and imaginative intensity. The subject-matter of the work of Félicien Rops, in contrast, is more extensive in scope, but his approach to it is highly restricted by his predominant erotic interest; even according to very low standards of human decency his philosophy of life is morally perverse and spiritually diabolic. Yet there is nothing trivial or superficial in his art, for it expresses an intense imaginative understanding of human depravity in some of its most extreme forms. It differs in kind from cheap and tawdry pornography. Rops plumbs the very depths of human bestiality, and his specific evaluations are as authentic of their kind as are those of Milton's Satan crying, "Evil, be thou my good!" The imaginative power with which this aspect of human nature is apprehended and depicted makes these works genuinely great, if greatness be defined solely in terms of depth or penetrating insight.

But when the work of Rops is appraised in terms of a more comprehensive philosophy of life, the perversity of his moral outlook and of his transvaluation of man's spiritual values becomes at once apparent. And when the most inspired still-life or landscape without human figures is compared with an equally inspired figure composition or landscape with figures, the intrinsic limitations of certain types of subject-matter cannot be denied. Ultimate greatness, in short, must be measured not only in terms of depth but also of breadth; and the breadth requisite to greatness in art, as in other fields, is a function both of the subject-matter dealt with and of the manner in which it is interpreted. If a work of art is to be truly great, its subject-matter must give the artist an opportunity to express his more comprehensive philosophy of life; and his interpretation of it must be commensurate to its scope and universal human import. The greatest artists in every medium have been those who

have interpreted a significant subject-matter in a significant way. They have chosen a subject-matter which lends itself to the richest normative exploitation, and they have exhibited in their interpretation of it an unusual catholicity of outlook and degree of normative sensitivity. Witness the great symphonies and operas, the great basilicas and cathedrals, the sculptural and pictorial masterpieces, and the great epics, tragedies, and novels of our Western culture.

We must be careful not to misinterpret the contribution of the subject-matter to artistic greatness. It is obvious that subject-matter cannot *of itself* make a work of art either trivial or profound: the factor of artistic interpretation is of crucial importance. It takes a Chardin to paint a jug, a pipe, and a loaf of bread in such a way as to suggest the rich contributions which such homely objects make to our daily life and happiness. And mere complexity of subject-matter cannot make art great. A Maillol can express greater profundity of insight in a marble torso than a lesser artist could in an ambitious sculptural group. A love sonnet may be more profound than an epic, a song than a symphony, not only in depth but in breadth of expressed content. We might even go so far as to say that, *theoretically*, an artist with the requisite insight and imagination should be able to select *any* subject-matter, however restricted, and so interpret its relations to a larger whole as to endow it with profound human significance.[2] But in *actual practice* those subjects which normally possess deep significance for us lend themselves more easily to a profound artistic interpretation than do those subjects which we normally judge to be petty and trivial. It is not accidental that the works of art whose greatness is universally acknowledged are invariably interpretations of man's most poignant social and religious experiences and of the objects and events to which men generally tend to ascribe ultimate value. . . .

Artistic greatness, accordingly, is essentially a function of normative interpretation, but also, in actuality, of subject-matter. However rich and suggestive may be a painter's interpretation of a still-life, or a musician's interpretation of a light and carefree mood,

[2] "One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can."—Wordsworth, *The Tables Turned.*

or an architect's handling of some spiritually unimportant activity and attitude, the resultant work of art will hardly merit classification among man's greatest masterpieces. And however penetrating may be an artist's comprehension of one restricted aspect of a complex subject-matter, his interpretation of it must fall short of genuine profundity because of the limitation of his approach and the inadequacy of his spiritual outlook.

2. THE CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF ARTISTIC GREATNESS

[Imagine] a critic under the necessity of deciding whether the *Avignon Pietà* or a Cézanne landscape [3] [Figs. 3, 4] is the greater picture. . . . Let us . . . assume that each picture expresses a truthful interpretation of its particular subject-matter—the *Pietà*, of the Christian Incarnation; the landscape, of a hilly countryside. And let us . . . assume, for the sake of the argument, that the two paintings express, with equal artistic eloquence, two radically different philosophies of life—the *Pietà*, the Christian interpretation of man's relation to Deity; the landscape, a naturalistic interpretation of man's place in the cosmos. How, then, is the critic to choose between these pictures? As I have described them, they differ only in ultimate philosophical outlook. But, according to the foregoing criterion of greatness, this difference would appear to necessitate an absolute choice. For from a consistently naturalistic point of view, the Christian interpretation of reality is false, since God is judged to be merely a projection and hypostatization of human desire; whereas, from the Christian point of view, the naturalistic interpretation of human life and its cosmic setting is either false or utterly inadequate. And the critic himself cannot be both a naturalist and a Christian, though he may be neither. Is it accordingly his duty *as a critic* to award the palm to the *Pietà*, if he be a Christian; to the landscape, if he be a naturalist; and, if he be neither, to neither of these pictures but to some third picture which satisfies all the other criteria of artistic merit and, in addition, expresses the particular philosophy of life which he himself happens to prefer? Would not any one of these three judgments commit the critic to a kind of comparison which he must find peculiarly odious? Can masterpieces

[3] Greene's example is *House in Provence*.—Ed.

3. Anonymous, Avignon Pietà (*Courtesy The Louvre*)

4. *Cézanne*, Mte. Ste. Victoire near Aix
(*Courtesy The Courtauld Gallery, London*)

like this be ranked and ordered according to any scale of values, objective or subjective, critical or non-critical? . . .

. . . the critic is ill-advised to insist on the correctness of his own individual philosophy of life, or to appraise the greatness of art solely by reference to any specific moralistic criterion. The moralistic attitude, like its religious and philosophical variants, is as illegitimate in criticism as it is in artistic creation. All that a critic has a right to demand of an artist is that he deal with *some* significant subject in *some* significant way, that is, that he exhibit in his art a genuine breadth of outlook and, simultaneously, a genuine depth of understanding which will reveal specific characteristics and values which had previously passed unnoticed. He can require of an artist merely that he explore *some* major phase of reality and human experience from *some* relatively inclusive point of view, and that this exploration be pursued with real imaginative power. And since there is no reason why many artists might not achieve this goal, and why many works of art might not possess artistic greatness so defined, the critic who restricts himself to this criterion need not make invidious comparisons between the world's great masterpieces.

Yet the critic cannot apply this criterion of imaginative depth and breadth without an appeal to what I have entitled a philosophy of life. For no critic can *recognize* genuine depth of artistic insight unless he has had profound experiences of his own, nor can he *appreciate* significant breadth of outlook unless his own outlook is catholic and integrated. If great art is the product of a great soul, only a critic of spiritual stature can hope to recognize and appreciate artistic greatness when he sees it. To the trivial all things are trivial. A critic with limited powers of observation, a weak imagination, and a restricted scale of values, must remain blind to artistic greatness and incapable of distinguishing artistic profundity from artistic triviality. . . .

But is it possible to reconcile this solution of our problem with the apparent dependence of artistic greatness upon artistic truth? It would seem obvious that an interpretation of reality which is believed to be false, either factually or normatively, can never be accepted as profound. Surely no interpretation and evaluation can be regarded as great if it is based upon what is judged by the critic to be a radical misconception of the object evaluated, or if the artist's

specific scale of values is believed to be fundamentally unsound. Artistic truth would thus seem to be a necessary though not a sufficient condition of artistic greatness. Furthermore, my definition of artistic greatness as a function of depth and breadth of *insight* would itself seem to preclude the possibility of a critic's accepting as great any work of art expressing an interpretation of reality which he believes to be either factually or normatively deficient. But if truth is integral to artistic greatness, how can the critic refrain from appealing, in any appraisal of artistic greatness, to his own individual interpretation of reality and his own scale of values? More specifically, how can a Christian critic assert the greatness of a pagan masterpiece, or a naturalistically-minded critic, the greatness of a work of art which expresses a Christian philosophy of life? In short, are we not compelled, after all, either (i) to redefine artistic greatness so as to divorce it from truth, or (ii) to require the critic to indulge in that type of appraisal, already described, which he would certainly regard as invidious and odious, or (iii) to abandon the category of artistic greatness altogether?

Each of these three alternatives does violence to the critical enterprise. Most critics could not accept a radical divorce of truth and greatness in art with a good conscience. All sensitive critics would find the second alternative so distasteful that they would presumably decline to put it into effect. The third alternative is undoubtedly the most congenial to the modern temper, for the typical modern man has in large measure lost his sense of objective values, and is either reconciled to the subjectivity of norms or else prepared to champion its cause with enthusiasm. Yet even the modern critic, however explicitly he disavows the desire and the right to indulge in the appraisal of artistic greatness, continues to evaluate specific works of art, ancient and modern, in these terms, and there can be no doubt that in the great critical tradition critics have persistently sought to discover and interpret artistic greatness in the several artistic media. Before abandoning the category of greatness, therefore, let us attempt to redefine its relation to truth in such a way as to preserve its critical integrity.

The clue to this definition is to be found in the finitude of human knowledge. Were man capable of omniscience, were it possible for a critic to discover or invent a philosophy of life which was ab-

solutely true and final, that is, perfectly correct in every detail and ideally compendious in scope, all works of art created by finite artists would have to be declared radically deficient in expressed insight and normative perspective. If an absolute standard of truth and value were available, and if the critic could appraise the truth and greatness of art according to this standard, it might be that no human work of art could ever be judged great.

But the philosopher should be the first to insist that no such standard is available. The wisest philosophers have failed, and will continue to fail, to apprehend absolute Truth or ultimate Value save as ideal limits of experience and inquiry. The critic can therefore certainly not be expected to possess perfect wisdom. What he is actually faced with is, on the one hand, a host of individual philosophies of life, as numerous and various as the sum and diversity of thoughtful individuals past and present, and, on the other hand, certain generic patterns of insight and belief which have been achieved cooperatively by the greatest minds through the ages, and to which multitudes of people have subscribed with varying degrees of comprehension. The mere fact that these more generic philosophies of life have stood the test of time suggests that each expresses some genuine insight and satisfies some basic interest and need of human nature. Each must be believed to reflect some relatively comprehensive, though partial and finite, normative intuitions. What the great artists have invariably done is to draw richly on one or other of these traditional philosophies of life, adding to them new insights which other men could share, and giving them new interpretations which others could find enlightening and ennobling. It is just this capacity to achieve *significant* originality, that is, freshness of outlook in essential harmony with some great tradition regarded as a heritage of universal insights, which has made the world's greatest artists great according to finite standards of greatness. Their art is great not because it expresses omniscience, or because it is merely idiosyncratic, but, in the language of Pater, because of "its compass, its variety, its alliance to great ends, or the depth of the note of revolt, or the largeness of hope in it." Great art "finds its logical, its architectural place, in the great structure of human life" because "it has something of the soul of humanity in it."

Now *both* the *Avignon Pietà* and a Cézanne landscape [Figs. 3,

4], to revert to our earlier illustration, satisfy this criterion of greatness. Each in its own way manifests significant originality. Each gives expression to one of the persistent philosophies of life, yet not slavishly, but with genuine freshness of artistic interpretation. Neither proclaims the whole truth regarding reality or human experience; but each gives eloquent expression to certain universal insights which many thoughtful men have shared and which no one with imaginative sensitivity can afford to ignore. The *Pietà* expresses a belief which sincere Christians have cherished and continue to cherish with varying degrees of comprehension. The landscape expresses man's abiding sense of the impersonality of nature—a sense which has profoundly influenced human thought and behavior. Both paintings therefore express what many thoughtful men and women have regarded, and will continue to regard, as true insights into some major aspect of reality, and as valid evaluations from some relatively inclusive point of view. If either interpretation is accepted as all-inclusive, absolute, and final, the other must be condemned as false: if either painting is judged to be absolutely great, all other paintings must be judged to be relatively trivial or perverse. But if we exorcise this "Demon of the Absolute" [4] and approach both paintings with human understanding and catholicity of outlook, we shall be able to admit that each expresses certain deep-seated human beliefs and that each in its own way is genuinely great according to finite human standards. . . .

This brings us, finally, to the question as to whether the critic does or does not exceed his prerogative *as critic* in attempting to estimate the greatness of art. Is it, or is it not, his duty to attempt to assess a work of art in terms of its artistic greatness?

My own answer to this question is implicit in what has gone before. The fact of crucial importance for the critic is the unity of the work of art itself. To do violence to this unity by ignoring as artistically irrelevant any element or dimension which is intrinsic to its nature as a unified whole is, I believe, to commit the unforgivable sin in criticism. And is not the ultimate significance or greatness of a work of art an essential aspect of its intrinsic nature? The artist himself believes that it is. He normally attaches great importance

[4] Cf. Paul Elmer More, *The Demon of the Absolute,* New Shelburne Essays, Vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1928).

to the significance of his own expressed evaluations of his subject-matter. He is not content with mere formal beauty, artistic perfection, or even artistic truth. He is concerned to express interpretations of his subject-matter which he believes to be both true *and* significant. What right, then, has the critic *as critic* to refuse to take seriously, i.e., critically to appraise, the work's larger significance for mankind? Similarly, the sensitive layman, who constitutes the artist's chief audience, does not hesitate to respond to art as the artist would have him respond to it, that is, to judge it as trivial or profound. What right, then, has the critic, one of whose chief functions it is to help the layman to evaluate the work of art *as a whole,* to refuse his assistance where so frequently his assistance is most needed?

DAVID HUME

Of the Standard of Taste

David Hume (1711–1776) is the foremost of the eighteenth-century British philosophers and a precursor of important movements in contemporary philosophy. Hume's acute analyses of causality and induction have been the object of intensive discussion in recent philosophy of science; his critique of traditional metaphysics anticipates logical positivism; his subtlety, tough-mindedness, and finesse have significantly molded the style of twentieth-century philosophy in England and America.

. . . It is natural for us to seek a *Standard of Taste;* a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another.

There is a species of philosophy, which cuts off all hopes of success in such an attempt, and represents the impossibility of ever attaining any standard of taste. The difference, it is said, is very wide between judgment and sentiment. All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard. Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true; and the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it. On the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. It only marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind; and if that conformity did not really exist, the sentiment could never possibly have being. Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty;

From David Hume, *Four Dissertations* (London, 1757).

and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others. To seek the real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an enquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter. According to the disposition of the organs, the same object may be both sweet and bitter; and the proverb has justly determined it to be fruitless to dispute concerning tastes. It is very natural, and even quite necessary, to extend this axiom to mental, as well as bodily taste; and thus common sense, which is so often at variance with philosophy, especially with the sceptical kind, is found, in one instance at least, to agree in pronouncing the same decision.

But though this axiom, by passing into a proverb, seems to have attained the sanction of common sense; there is certainly a species of common sense which opposes it, at least serves to modify and restrain it. Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between Ogilby and Milton, or Bunyan and Addison, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as Teneriffe, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there may be found persons, who give the preference to the former authors, no one pays attention to such a taste; and we pronounce without scruple the sentiment of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous. The principle of the natural equality of tastes is then totally forgot, and while we admit it on some occasions, where the objects seem near an equality, it appears an extravagant paradox, or rather a palpable absurdity, where objects so disproportioned are compared together.

It is evident that none of the rules of composition are fixed by reasoning *a priori*, or can be esteemed abstract conclusions of the understanding, from comparing those habitudes and relations of ideas, which are eternal and immutable. Their foundation is the same with that of all the practical sciences, experience; nor are they any thing but general observations, concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages. . . . If some negligent or irregular writers have pleased, they have not pleased by their transgressions of rule or order, but in spite of these transgressions: They have possessed other beauties, which were conformable to just criticism; and the force of these beauties has been able to overpower censure, and give the mind a satisfaction

superior to the disgust arising from the blemishes. Ariosto pleases; but not by his monstrous and improbable fictions, by his bizarre mixture of the serious and comic styles, by the want of coherence in his stories, or by the continual interruptions of his narration. He charms by the force and clearness of his expression, by the readiness and variety of his inventions, and by his natural pictures of the passions, especially those of the gay and amorous kind: And however his faults may diminish our satisfaction, they are not able entirely to destroy it. Did our pleasure really arise from those parts of his poem, which we denominate faults, this would be no objection to criticism in general: It would only be an objection to those particular rules of criticism, which would establish such circumstances to be faults, and would represent them as universally blameable. If they are found to please, they cannot be faults; let the pleasure, which they produce, be ever so unexpected and unaccountable. . . .

The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and at London. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator; but his reputation will never be durable or general. When his compositions are examined by posterity or by foreigners, the enchantment is dissipated, and his faults appear in their true colours. On the contrary, a real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with. Envy and jealousy have too much place in a narrow circle; and even familiar acquaintance with his person may diminish the applause due to his performances: But when these obstructions are removed, the beauties, which are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments, immediately display their energy; and while the world endures, they maintain their authority over the minds of men.

It appears then, that, amidst all the variety and caprice of taste, there are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind. Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others displease; and if they fail of their effect in any particular instance, it is from some

apparent defect or imperfection in the organ. A man in a fever would not insist on his palate as able to decide concerning flavours; nor would one, affected with the jaundice, pretend to give a verdict with regard to colours. In each creature, there is a sound and defective state; and the former alone can be supposed to afford us a true standard of taste and sentiment. If, in the sound state of the organ, there be an entire or a considerable uniformity of sentiment among men, we may thence derive an idea of the perfect beauty; in like manner as the appearance of objects in day-light, to the eye of a man in health, is denominated their true and real colour, even while colour is allowed to be merely a phantasm of the senses.

Many and frequent are the defects in the internal organs which prevent or weaken the influence of those general principles, on which depends our sentiment of beauty or deformity. Though some objects, by the structure of the mind, be naturally calculated to give pleasure, it is not to be expected, that in every individual the pleasure will be equally felt. Particular incidents and situations occur, which either throw a false light on the objects, or hinder the true from conveying to the imagination the proper sentiment and perception.

One obvious cause, why many feel not the proper sentiment of beauty, is the want of that *delicacy* of imagination, which is requisite to convey a sensibility of those finer emotions. This delicacy every one pretends to: Every one talks of it; and would reduce every kind of taste or sentiment to its standard. But as our intention in this essay is to mingle some light of the understanding with the feeling of sentiment, it will be proper to give a more accurate definition of delicacy, than has hitherto been attempted. And not to draw our philosophy from too profound a source, we shall have recourse to a noted story in *Don Quixote.*

It is with good reason, says Sancho to the squire with the great nose, that I pretend to have a judgment in wine: This is a quality hereditary in our family. Two of my kinsmen were once called to give their opinion of a hogshead, which was supposed to be excellent, being old and of a good vintage. One of them tastes it; considers it; and after mature reflection pronounces the wine to be good, were it not for a small taste of leather, which he perceived in it. The other, after using the same precautions, gives also his

verdict in favour of the wine; but with the reserve of a taste of iron, which he could easily distinguish. You cannot imagine how much they were both ridiculed for their judgment. But who laughed in the end? On emptying the hogshead, there was found at the bottom, an old key with a leathern thong tied to it.

The great resemblance between mental and bodily taste will easily teach us to apply this story. Though it be certain that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external; it must be allowed, that there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings. Now as these qualities may be found in a small degree, or may be mixed and confounded with each other, it often happens, that the taste is not affected with such minute qualities, or is not able to distinguish all the particular flavours, amidst the disorder, in which they are presented. Where the organs are so fine, as to allow nothing to escape them; and at the same time so exact as to perceive every ingredient in the composition: This we call delicacy of taste, where we employ these terms in the literal or metaphorical sense. Here then the general rules of beauty are of use; being drawn from established models, and from the observation of what pleases or displeases, when presented singly and in a high degree: And if the same qualities, in a continued composition and in a smaller degree, affect not the organs with a sensible delight or uneasiness, we exclude the person from all pretensions to this delicacy. To produce these general rules . . . of composition is like finding the key with the leathern thong; which justified the verdict of Sancho's kinsmen, and confounded those pretended judges who had condemned them. Though the hogshead had never been emptied, the taste of the one was still equally delicate, and that of the other equally dull and languid: But it would have been more difficult to have proved the superiority of the former, to the conviction of every by-stander. In like manner, though the beauties of writing had never been methodized, or reduced to general principles; though no excellent models had ever been acknowledged; the different degrees of taste would still have subsisted, and the judgment of one man been preferable to that of another; but it would not have been so easy to silence the bad critic, who might always insist upon his particular sentiment,

and refuse to submit to his antagonist. But when we show him an avowed principle of art; when we illustrate this principle by examples, whose operation, from his own particular taste, he acknowledges to be conformable to the principle; when we prove, that the same principle may be applied to the present case, where he did not perceive or feel its influence: He must conclude, upon the whole, that the fault lies in himself, and that he wants the delicacy, which is requisite to make him sensible of every beauty and every blemish, in any composition or discourse.

It is acknowledged to be the perfection of every sense or faculty, to perceive with exactness its most minute objects, and allow nothing to escape its notice and observation. The smaller the objects are, which become sensible to the eye, the finer is that organ, and the more elaborate its make and composition. A good palate is not tried by strong flavours; but by a mixture of small ingredients, where we are still sensible of each part, notwithstanding its minuteness and its confusion with the rest. In like manner, a quick and acute perception of beauty and deformity must be the perfection of our mental taste. . . . Wherever you can ascertain a delicacy of taste, it is sure to meet with approbation; and the best way of ascertaining it is to appeal to those models and principles, which have been established by the uniform consent and experience of nations and ages.

But though there be naturally a wide difference in point of delicacy between one person and another, nothing tends further to increase and improve this talent, than *practice* in a particular art, and the frequent survey or contemplation of a particular species of beauty. When objects of any kind are first presented to the eye or imagination, the sentiment, which attends them, is obscure and confused; and the mind is, in a great measure, incapable of pronouncing concerning their merits or defects. The taste cannot perceive the several excellences of the performance; much less distinguish the particular character of each excellency, and ascertain its quality and degree. If it pronounce the whole in general to be beautiful or deformed, it is the utmost that can be expected; and even this judgment, a person, so unpractised, will be apt to deliver with great hesitation and reserve. But allow him to acquire experience in those objects, his feeling becomes more exact and nice: He

not only perceives the beauties and defects of each part, but marks the distinguishing species of each quality, and assigns it suitable praise or blame. A clear and distinct sentiment attends him through the whole survey of the objects; and he discerns that very degree and kind of approbation or displeasure, which each part is naturally fitted to produce. The mist dissipates, which seemed formerly to hang over the object: The organ acquires greater perfection in its operations; and can pronounce, without danger of mistake, concerning the merits of every performance. In a word, the same address and dexterity, which practice gives to the execution of any work, is also acquired by the same means, in the judging of it.

So advantageous is practice to the discernment of beauty, that, before we can give judgment on any work of importance, it will even be requisite, that that very individual performance be more than once perused by us, and be surveyed in different lights with attention and deliberation. There is a flutter or hurry of thought which attends the first perusal of any piece, and which confounds the genuine sentiment of beauty. The relation of the parts is not discerned: The true characters of style are little distinguished: The several perfections and defects seem wrapped up in a species of confusion, and present themselves indistinctly to the imagination. Not to mention, that there is a species of beauty, which, as it is florid and superficial, pleases at first; but being found incompatible with a just expression either of reason or passion, soon palls upon the taste, and is then rejected with disdain, at least rated at a much lower value.

It is impossible to continue in the practice of contemplating any order of beauty, without being frequently obliged to form *comparisons* between the several species and degrees of excellence, and estimating their proportion to each other. A man, who has had no opportunity of comparing the different kinds of beauty, is indeed totally unqualified to pronounce an opinion with regard to any object presented to him. By comparison alone we fix the epithets of praise or blame, and learn how to assign the due degree of each. The coarsest daubing contains a certain lustre of colours and exactness of imitation, which are so far beauties, and would affect the mind of a peasant or Indian with the highest admiration. The most vulgar ballads are not entirely destitute of harmony or nature; and

none but a person, familiarized to superior beauties, would pronounce their numbers harsh, or narration uninteresting. A great inferiority of beauty gives pain to a person conversant in the highest excellence of the kind, and is for that reason pronounced a deformity: As the most finished object, with which we are acquainted, is naturally supposed to have reached the pinnacle of perfection, and to be entitled to the highest applause. One accustomed to see, and examine, and weigh the several performances, admired in different ages and nations, can alone rate the merits of a work exhibited to his view, and assign its proper rank among the productions of genius.

But to enable a critic the more fully to execute this undertaking, he must preserve his mind free from all *prejudice*, and allow nothing to enter into his consideration, but the very object which is submitted to his examination. We may observe, that every work of art, in order to produce its due effect on the mind, must be surveyed in a certain point of view, and cannot be fully relished by persons, whose situation, real or imaginary, is not conformable to that which is required by the performance. An orator addresses himself to a particular audience, and must have a regard to their particular genius, interests, opinions, passions, and prejudices. . . . A critic of a different age or nation, who should peruse this discourse, must have all these circumstances in his eye, and must place himself in the same situation as the audience, in order to form a true judgment of the oration. In like manner, when any work is addressed to the public, though I should have a friendship or enmity with the author, I must depart from this situation; and considering myself as a man in general, forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances. A person influenced by prejudice, complies not with this condition; but obstinately maintains his natural position, without placing himself in that point of view, which the performance supposes. If the work be addressed to persons of a different age or nation, he makes no allowance for their peculiar views and prejudices; but, full of the manners of his own age and country, rashly condemns what seemed admirable in the eyes of those for whom alone the discourse was calculated. If the work be executed for the public, he never sufficiently enlarges his comprehension, or forgets his interest as a friend or enemy, as a rival or commentator.

By this means, his sentiments are perverted; nor have the same beauties and blemishes the same influence upon him, as if he had imposed a proper violence on his imagination, and had forgotten himself for a moment. So far his taste evidently departs from the true standard; and of consequence loses all credit and authority.

It is well known, that in all questions, submitted to the understanding, prejudice is destructive of sound judgment, and perverts all operations of the intellectual faculties: It is no less contrary to good taste; nor has it less influence to corrupt our sentiment of beauty. It belongs to *good sense* to check its influence in both cases; and in this respect, as well as in many others, reason, if not an essential part of taste, is at least requisite to the operations of this latter faculty. In all the nobler productions of genius, there is a mutual relation and correspondence of parts; nor can either the beauties or blemishes be perceived by him, whose thought is not capacious enough to comprehend all those parts, and compare them with each other, in order to perceive the consistence and uniformity of the whole. Every work of art has also a certain end or purpose, for which it is calculated; and is to be deemed more or less perfect, as it is more or less fitted to attain this end. The object of eloquence is to persuade, of history to instruct, of poetry to please by means of the passions and the imagination. These ends we must carry constantly in our view, when we peruse any performance; and we must be able to judge how far the means employed are adapted to their respective purposes. Besides every kind of composition, even the most poetical, is nothing but a chain of propositions and reasonings; not always, indeed, the justest and most exact, but still plausible and specious, however disguised by the colouring of the imagination. The persons introduced in tragedy and epic poetry, must be represented as reasoning, and thinking, and concluding, and acting, suitably to their character and circumstances; and without judgment, as well as taste and invention, a poet can never hope to succeed in so delicate an undertaking. Not to mention, that the same excellence of faculties which contributes to the improvement of reason, the same clearness of conception, the same exactness of distinction, the same vivacity of apprehension, are essential to the operations of true taste, and are its infallible concomitants. It seldom, or never happens, that a man of sense, who has experience in

any art, cannot judge of its beauty; and it is no less rare to meet with a man who has a just taste without a sound understanding.

Thus, though the principles of taste be universal, and, nearly, if not entirely the same in all men; yet few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty. The organs of internal sensation are seldom so perfect as to allow the general principles their full play, and produce a feeling correspondent to those principles. They either labour under some defect, or are vitiated by some disorder; and by that means, excite a sentiment, which may be pronounced erroneous. When the critic has no delicacy, he judges without any distinction, and is only affected by the grosser and more palpable qualities of the object: The finer touches pass unnoticed and disregarded. Where he is not aided by practice, his verdict is attended with confusion and hesitation. Where no comparison has been employed, the most frivolous beauties, such as rather merit the name of defects, are the objects of his admiration. Where he lies under the influence of prejudice, all his natural sentiments are perverted. Where good sense is wanting, he is not qualified to discern the beauties of design and reasoning, which are the highest and most excellent. Under some or other of these imperfections, the generality of men labour; and hence a true judge in the finer arts is observed, even during the most polished ages, to be so rare a character: Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty.

But where are such critics to be found? By what marks are they to be known? How distinguish them from pretenders? These questions are embarrassing; and seem to throw us back into the same uncertainty, from which, during the course of this essay, we have endeavoured to extricate ourselves.

But if we consider the matter aright, these are questions of fact, not of sentiment. Whether any particular person be endowed with good sense and a delicate imagination, free from prejudice, may often be the subject of dispute, and be liable to great discussion and inquiry: But that such a character is valuable and estimable will be agreed in by all mankind. Where these doubts occur, men can do

no more than in other disputable questions, which are submitted to the understanding: They must produce the best arguments, that their invention suggests to them; they must acknowledge a true and decisive standard to exist somewhere, to wit, real existence and matter of fact; and they must have indulgence to such as differ from them in their appeals to this standard. It is sufficient for our present purpose, if we have proved, that the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing, and that some men in general, however difficult to be particularly pitched upon, will be acknowledged by universal sentiment to have a preference above others.

But in reality the difficulty of finding, even in particulars, the standard of taste, is not so great as it is represented. Though in speculation, we may readily avow a certain criterion in science and deny it in sentiment, the matter is found in practice to be much more hard to ascertain in the former case than in the latter. Theories of abstract philosophy, systems of profound theology, have prevailed during one age: In a successive period, these have been universally exploded: Their absurdity has been detected: Other theories and systems have supplied their place, which again gave place to their successors: And nothing has been experienced more liable to the revolutions of chance and fashion than these pretended decisions of science. The case is not the same with beauties of eloquence and poetry. Just expressions of passion and nature are sure, after a little time, to gain public applause, which they maintain for ever. Aristotle, and Plato, and Epicurus, and Descartes, may successively yield to each other: But Terence and Virgil maintain an universal, undisputed empire over the minds of men.

. . . But notwithstanding all our endeavours to fix a standard of taste, and reconcile the discordant apprehensions of men, there still remain two sources of variation, which are not sufficient indeed to confound all the boundaries of beauty and deformity, but will often serve to produce a difference in the degrees of our approbation or blame. The one is the different humours of particular men; the other, the particular manners and opinions of our age and country. The general principles of taste are uniform in human nature: Where men vary in their judgments, some defect or perversion in the faculties may commonly be remarked; proceeding either from prejudice, from want of practice, or want of delicacy; and there is just reason

for approving one taste, and condemning another. But where there is such a diversity in the internal frame or external situation as is entirely blameless on both sides, and leaves no room to give one the preference above the other; in that case a certain degree of diversity in judgment is unavoidable, and we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments.

A young man, whose passions are warm, will be more sensibly touched with amorous and tender images, than a man more advanced in years, who takes pleasure in wise, philosophical reflections concerning the conduct of life and moderation of the passions. At twenty, Ovid may be the favourite author; Horace at forty; and perhaps Tacitus at fifty. Vainly would we, in such cases, endeavour to enter into the sentiments of others, and divest ourselves of those propensities, which are natural to us. We choose our favourite author as we do our friend, from a conformity of humour and disposition. Mirth or passion, sentiment or reflection; whichever of these most predominates in our temper, it gives us a peculiar sympathy with the writer who resembles us.

One person is more pleased with the sublime; another with the tender; a third with raillery. One has a strong sensibility to blemishes, and is extremely studious of correctness: Another has a more lively feeling of beauties, and pardons twenty absurdities and defects for one elevated or pathetic stroke. The ear of this man is entirely turned towards conciseness and energy; that man is delighted with a copious, rich, and harmonious expression. Simplicity is affected by one; ornament by another. Comedy, tragedy, satire, odes, have each its partisans, who prefer that particular species of writing to all others. It is plainly an error in a critic, to confine his approbation to one species or style of writing and condemn all the rest. But it is almost impossible not to feel a predilection for that which suits our particular turn and disposition. Such preferences are innocent and unavoidable, and can never reasonably be the object of dispute, because there is no standard, by which they can be decided. . . .

MARGARET MACDONALD

Some Distinctive Features of Arguments Used in Criticism of the Arts

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[The original of this paper was the last of three in a Symposium in which the other two symposiasts were Mr. A. H. Hannay and Mr. John Holloway. The first part, therefore, contained references to their contributions. It has been impossible to delete these without completely destroying the original paper but they have been made as far as possible self-explanatory and footnote references added for those who wish to consult the original papers. I apologize to my fellow symposiasts. Part 2 has been expanded and partly re-written. I have not fundamentally altered the original doctrine but only tried to make clearer what I was trying to express in 1949. I no longer agree with all the views expressed in the paper. But I think it illustrates certain complexities in our use of the terms 'work of art' and 'æsthetically good' which are worth considering.—M. M.]

1

In his Preface Wordsworth says that he would not wish it to be supposed that he entertained the foolish hope of *reasoning* the reader into an approbation of the Lyrical Ballads. Certainly, it does seem queer to suppose that anyone could be *argued* into admiring *Persuasion* or condemning *The Stag at Eve*. This seems as absurd as to imagine that one could love and hate by argument. Yet the Preface increased the size of the volume by more than a score of pages. Whether or not this was argument, Wordsworth evidently did not regard it as a complete waste of time.

Works of art are esoteric objects.[1] That they hang on walls, together with cobwebs; stand on shelves, with aspidistras and cacti; are heard as are the noises of birds and trains, disguises their complexity. For they are not simple objects of sense perception. This

From Margaret Macdonald, "Some Distinctive Features of Arguments Used in Criticism of the Arts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. XXIII (1949). Used by permission of the Editor of the Aristotelian Society.

[1] Cf. also John Holloway, 'What are the distinctive features of arguments used in criticism of the arts?' (*Proc. Aris. Soc.* supp. vol. XXIII, p. 173).

may be less misleadingly expressed by saying that we do not use the term 'work of art' as simply equivalent to any terms describing physical objects and events. Those who listen to a concert, walk round a gallery, read a poem may have roughly similar sense perceptions, but some get a great deal more than others from what is perceived and judge it differently. What is this 'something more', how is it acquired, and by what criterion is the subsequent judgment of value deemed to be right or wrong?

Wordsworth obviously thought that the Ballads might misfire and be received with indifference, amazement or contempt. He tried to forestall this reaction by some account of the poems and their production which should show that such a judgment would be hasty and ill-considered, if not wrong. He was writing as a critic and not as a poet. For critics attempt a certain kind of explanation of works of art with the object of establishing correct judgments of their artistic merit.

This kind of explanation of works of art may be distinguished from two others; those of scholarship and history. Scholarship establishes, *e.g.*, the original text of a literary, and the correct score of a musical, work. The scholar may, perhaps, without derogation, be compared to the expert picture cleaner. Both enable us to become acquainted with an original something instead of a begrimed and inaccurate substitute. The historian provides dates and other biographical and social information. We know as the result of these what was produced and why by a particular artist at a certain date. We still do not know its artistic value, *i.e.* whether and why it is a good specimen of its kind. To fill this gap is the task of the critic. The æsthetic problem is to elucidate what he does and how he does it. (It is natural to assume that if disputation about art is not mere futile wrangling there must be some standards of appeal by which dispute may be terminated.) Such standards are provided in logic by the principles of deductive inference; in science by scientific method and verifiable fact. These apply also in scholarship and history. The propositions of scholars and historians are about verifiable facts and are established by, or by something very like, the normal procedures of scientific method and logical argument. The question is whether there are comparable criteria in art criticism. No one seriously thinks that all judgments about art are of equal

value. That critical procedures are admitted to differ from those of the establishment of facts is perhaps shown by the circumstance that Fleet Street employs political, sporting and scientific 'correspondents'; but literary, music, art, and dramatic 'critics'. Correspondents report facts; critics are evidently expected to perform a different task.

Some æsthetic philosophers, however, do seem to want to establish a criterion of agreement about critical conclusions in some procedures of reasoning and verification similar to those of deductive and inductive inference. Mr. A. H. Hannay, for example, has said,[2] 'behind individual criticisms of a work of art there always lies some general theory whether it is implicit or explicit'. I am puzzled about this use of 'theory'. It seems to assume that from observation of a selection of works of art, critics formulate hypotheses about a standard which all artists ought to achieve and by which their works may be judged. Further observation reveals contrary instances and the hypothesis is then superseded by an alternative. This is the familiar scientific procedure. But what sort of observation is relevant and what constitutes contrary instances, in art? Was Wordsworth establishing a contrary instance to the theory that all good poetry is written in a certain style? If so, it would seem, one must reject Milton and Pope in favour of Wordsworth and Coleridge as one rejects Newton in favour of Einstein. Or, perhaps, one should re-interpret the Augustan poets as 'limiting cases' of romanticism as Newton's theory may be re-interpreted as a limiting case of the more general theory of relativity. But this is surely wrong. Whatever the value of generalization in science, in art it invariably leads to sheer distortion. The scientist discovers new facts which refute the old theory or to which it must be adapted. Mr. Hannay seems to apply this procedure to Reynolds and the 'grand style'. He 'would question the validity of the reasons given by Reynolds for disparaging the Venetians',[3] presumably by showing that Venetian painting is good though it does not conform to Reynolds' criterion. It thus constitutes a contrary instance. He would reinforce his contention by showing Reynolds various causes why his opinion might be mere prejudice. But he does not indicate about precisely what

[2] A. H. Hannay, *loc. cit.*, p. 166.
[3] *Loc. cit.*, p. 166.

Reynolds can be proved to be mistaken and prejudiced. The Aristotelian physicists who refused to look down Galileo's telescope rejected the new facts which would refute their theories. Since what is seen through telescopes is relevant to the truth of astronomical theories, they must be condemned as prejudiced. But what new facts about the Venetians has Mr. Hannay discovered which Reynolds refused to admit? Roger Fry observes:

> Reynolds was so entirely at home in Venetian art; he felt its appeal so intensely, even basing upon it his own most magnificent designs and learning from it the secret of his rich and transparent colouring; that in the endeavour not to rate beyond its worth a style of which he was himself a master, he actually decried it more than justice required.[4]

It may be agreed that he did, but not, I suggest, from ignorance or prejudice. I doubt whether anyone could enlighten Reynolds on Venetian art. Yet he judged it inferior because not in the manner of Michael Angelo and Raphael. The Venetians were merely 'ornamental'. Mr. Hannay's disagreement with Reynolds seems to resolve itself into one not about facts or logic but nomenclature. This may not be trifling, but is quite different from disagreement about theory.

I think, however, that the view which Mr. Hannay wishes to oppose to that of Reynolds is that judgments of artistic merit are immediate responses to certain emotional states conveyed by artists in their work which we know from experience and can reproduce imaginatively in evaluating the work. Works of art are not judged by general rules as Reynolds supposed. To understand and check up on Reynolds' criticisms of Rigaud, for example, one must look at his portraits and 'try to repeat the imaginative process of the artist'.[5] The vulgarity of a piece of furniture is 'a process that we can observe and repeat in ourselves'.[6] We can recognize the laborious effort of George Eliot in producing the characters of *Daniel Deronda*. About these agreement is possible by something like an empirical test.

It would be foreign to the theme of this paper to discuss the

[4] Reynolds, *Discourses*, ed. Roger Fry, 1905. Introduction to 4th Discourse.
[5] *Loc. cit.*, p. 167.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

thesis that works of art express emotional states. But it would be interesting to know by what criterion Mr. Hannay or anyone else could determine whether or not he had correctly reproduced the emotional state of any artist. What seems to me wrong in such a suggestion is that critical discussion conducts a factual investigation into the mental processes either of an artist or the members of his audience. For this seems to make criticism just another exercise in empirical, including perhaps clinical, psychology. Do we really care whether a portrait painter feels genuine sentiment for his sitters? I don't believe we do or that it affects our judgment of his work. There is, however, no doubt that some critics do take this view. Certain critics of Shakespeare, for example, describe themselves as trying to discover 'what Shakespeare really meant'; 'what was in his mind'; 'what he was trying to express', etc. The temptation to say this is very understandable since such information might provide an objective standard of interpretation, if not of evaluation. For the problem of agreement about the interpretation of a work is often as acute as that about its merit. If one could know the state of mind in which a work was produced one could surely interpret it correctly. But this is an illusion. For a work of art is not a state of mind or the effect of such a state plus technical ability to handle a medium. However skilfully Shakespeare later described his mental state when writing *King Lear* this would not be the play he wrote. Nor are description and play the same thing in different words. This is obvious. One is about Shakespeare and the other about Lear and his daughters. Still less do we evaluate our own states of mind in judging a work of art or make them the criterion of its artistic merit. The critic's task is not to write his own or the artist's biography but to explain and evaluate a work of art. . . .

2

The logical type of value judgments affects the question whether critical discussion is argument to prove true and false propositions. I shall assume it to be generally agreed that value judgments are not simply descriptions of physical or psychological fact. For the statement that an object has certain physical qualities or an observer certain states is not an evaluation. 'This is good' does not *say* either 'This has certain observable qualities' or 'I admire this'. Nor shall I

recapitulate the arguments against the view that judgments of æsthetic value assert the presence in an object of the non-natural quality 'æsthetic goodness' or 'beauty'. Moreover, while those who affirm value judgments take favourable or unfavourable attitudes to what is evaluated, value judgments seem to do more than express personal attitudes. They are 'objective' at least to the extent that those who agree or disagree with them do so without necessarily referring to any private feeling or sentiment. 'I admit that Raphael is a great painter but I do not like his work; it does not move me.' Such a statement is not self-contradictory, and very often true. If so, it is hard to believe that 'Raphael is a good painter' expresses a favourable attitude which the speaker denies. To suppose that he is expressing the attitude of no one in particular (if, indeed, this makes sense) is to remove the chief charm of the theory. 'This is good' is ostensibly similar to 'This is red.' If 'good' does not name a simple quality like 'red' then the sole alternative, it has been supposed, is that it names a simple feeling in the assertor. But 'This is good' also has the form of the impersonal verdict 'He is guilty' with which it may perhaps be more profitably compared. For a verdict does not describe the accused nor express the feelings of judge and jury. It affirms a decision reached by a definite procedure but unlike that of relating evidence to conclusion in deductive and inductive inference.[7] This is a situation which extends far beyond law courts, to show rings, examiners' meetings, selection boards. All these estimate qualifications and indicate a decision by certain signs, a prize, diploma, appointment. It is this activity, far more than those of logicians and scientists, which resembles the critic's. For he, too, adjudicates; he affirms merit or demerit. By calling a work 'good' he places the hall mark on an artistic performance. But he does not describe it or himself. So that to affirm a work good is more like bestowing a medal than naming any feature of it or of the states of its creators and audience. Verdicts and awards are not true or false. They may be reversed but not disproved. But they can be justified and unjustified. Both the verdict and the competence of the judges may be contested. The opposition protests that the verdict was wrong or unjust; not that it was false or invalid.

[7] Cf. also J. Wisdom, 'Gods', *Logic and Language*, p. 187, and M. Macdonald, 'Natural Rights,' *Proc. Aris. Soc.*, 1946–47, esp. pp. 242–50.

If this account is accepted then it follows that critical discussion cannot establish value judgments by deductive and inductive inference. They are neither deduced nor confirmed by empirical evidence. So no one, as Wordsworth said, can be *argued* into a favourable verdict on the Lyrical Ballads. Does it follow that such a verdict can be obtained only by graft, sales talk, wheedling or whatever other device will influence a capricious fancy? No, for though these may obtain, they do not *justify*, a decision. The word 'judge' does not properly apply to those, like the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland*, who indulge a liking for cutting off heads. Nor to those, more amiable, like the Dodo, who give prizes to everyone. Even a bad judge makes some pretence of observing a procedure other than mere caprice. So, too, a critic is worthy of the name only if he distributes verdicts with discrimination. But discrimination about what, and what sort of procedure justifies a value judgment about art? What sort of considerations are invoked, and how, to justify a critical verdict?

I have said that we ordinarily distinguish a work of art from a physical object. That we use these terms differently. 'That,' exclaims A triumphantly, pointing to his newly acquired canvas, 'is a great picture!' 'I should not call it a picture,' retorts B, 'but only a pot of paint flung in the face of a gullible public!' [8] It seems clear that both have located the same physical object but that not both have located a work of art. Nor will it be of much use to tell B to look more closely and carefully when he will find the work of art hidden in the paint, like the monkey in the branches of a child's puzzle. He may look as hard as you please, but he will not succeed, for in *that* sense there is nothing more to find. It is not perceptual tricks which distinguish a painted canvas from a work of art. Remember Reynolds and the Venetians. What B lacks is not observation but that which A must supply as a critic to support his judgment, instruction, and interpretation. The distinction between physical object and work of art is even more complicated for the non-plastic arts. Even if one *can* locate 'Cremorne Lights' on the wall of a certain room in the National Gallery, where can one locate Shakespeare's plays or Beethoven's symphonies? I have an object on my bookshelf, of the same type as the shelf, a copy of Shakespeare's

[8] Cf. Ruskin *v.* Whistler.

Works; I have the score and a set of records of a Beethoven symphony. So have thousands of others, and they have the same works. When I talk of these works I do not refer only to my particular copies. But by 'Cremorne Lights' I mean the original by Whistler in the National Gallery of which anything resembling it is a mere copy and *not* the same work. The type/token distinction [9] applies to literary and musical but not to works of the plastic arts. I do not propose to discuss this further except to say that it shows that while a work of the plastic arts cannot, logically, be in more than one place at one time, this is not true of literary and musical works. Hence it is much more plausible to suppose that in painting and sculpture one refers simply to a physical object when talking of a work of art. But this is not true of any works of art. Because it is not, certain idealist æsthetic philosophers, *e.g.* Croce [10] and Collingwood [11] have held that a work of art is a mental image, an imaginary or 'ideal' object for which its physical expression in words, paint, stone, sounds, etc., is a mere vehicle, a stimulus to the reproduction of the 'real' work in an observer's mind. For Alexander [12] the work of art is a material thing magically endowed with mysterious life by the artist and so turned into an illusion, though a beautiful illusion. For Sartre, too, the work of art is 'something unreal' for which the artist constructs a material analogue in the external world.[13] There is obviously a very strong temptation to treat the work of art as a mysterious entity, somewhat like a genie in its physical bottle. But if a work of art is not a physical object, it does not follow that it is a mental state or ghost. These do not exhaust the possibilities for not all discourse which uses substantival words and phrases need be 'about' objects. If one wished to be metaphysically paradoxical one might say that a work of art is not an object

[9] A "type," such as the score of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, can occur many times; one such occurrence at a specific space or time, e.g., this score of the *Fifth*, is a "token of the type."—Ed.

[10] *Aesthetic*, trans. D. Ainslie. London, Macmillan, 1922.

[11] *Principles of Art*. Oxford University Press, 1938.

[12] Cf. *Beauty and other Forms of Value*. London, Macmillan, 1933; also Paul Ziff on 'Art and the "Object of Art,"' in W. Elton (ed.), *Aesthetics and Language* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), p. 170.

[13] *The Psychology of Imagination*, trans. New York, Philosophical Library, 1948. Conclusion, Section 2, 'The Work of Art.'

of any sort but only, as it were, a manner of speaking, though this, of course, is also highly misleading if taken seriously. But æsthetic, like all other philosophical problems, are those of how words are used rather than of what kinds of objects exist.

The problem of how 'work of art' is used, which I confess I cannot satisfactorily solve and may even be wrong in considering a problem, does at present seem to me connected with the question of how value judgments in art are justified and hence with that of critical interpretation. 'Work of art' is a cultural, not an everyday term. Like 'electron' its use is learned by a more sophisticated process than that of 'table.' Someone may object that this is only because 'work of art' is a general term and these should be avoided in philosophy. Everyone knows the difference between a poem, a play, a picture, a statue, a symphony. These are 'works of art' so why so much fuss? I can only say that even in particular cases there sometimes seems to be difficulty about what is being discussed and evaluated in art.

I shall introduce my difficulties by referring to some points in Mrs. Helen Knight's discussion of 'The Use of "Good" in Aesthetic Judgments.'[14] Mrs. Knight compares the use of 'good' in '*Persuasion* is a good novel,' 'Cézanne's "Green Jar" is a good picture' with its use in such judgments as '"Serena" is a good Persian cat,' '"Lady Jane" is a good arum lily,' 'Joan is a good knitter,' etc. The similarity in all such uses is the existence of a set of criteria-qualities for good novels, good Persian cats, good knitters, etc., which, when indicated, justify the use of 'good' for each type of performance. Works of art may be good for many such 'reasons.' There are many different criteria of merit recognized by critics. They form an indefinite and increasing family. Their exemplification can, however, be recognized in particular works of art which may be judged accordingly.

Mrs. Knight's interesting account does not quite satisfy me, for two reasons. (1) Two Persian cats, two tennis players, two roses, two knitters, may tie for first place. There may be 'nothing to choose between them.' They exemplify the agreed criteria-characters to an indistinguishable degree. But I am not sure that it makes sense to say that *Emma* and *Persuasion* might compete for the same place; that two works, even by the same artist, might excel by exhibiting

[14] In Elton, *op. cit.*, pp. 147–160.

certain meritorious characters in a way which makes them qualitatively indistinguishable. There could be twin prize cats, but it seems to me logically impossible that there should be twin masterpieces in art. Works of art are unique. Their performance cannot be repeated even by the artist. In this they seem to differ from certain other performances in which what is produced, though numerically different, may be qualitatively exactly similar. This is not a mysterious natural fact, but simply a characteristic of the way in which we talk about works of art. No doubt the borrower from a circulating library who just wants a 'good' novel for the week-end will accept any standard work. But then he is not interested in art. For those who are, though *The Portrait of a Lady* has much in common with *The Wings of the Dove* and both are good novels, it would seem absurd to list their characteristics and suppose them to add up to the same sum. One would not be content to lose either so long as the other were retained. They are not simply substitutable for each other. This would be admitted by any competent critic. (2) My second objection to Mrs. Knight's account is that it seems to assume that a work of art is an object rather like a cake, whose meritorious features may be picked out, like plums, and exhibited. The model suggested to me is of a combination of ingredients which it is the business of the critic to exhibit to justify his approval of the work. There is, *e.g.*, one object, the play of *Hamlet*, whose features can be revealed once and for all by expert interpretation and the result evaluated. Mrs. Knight gives an example of this in the description of its characters by which she would support a favourable verdict on Cézanne's 'Green Jar.'

If this is the correct story, it is strange that the task of interpreting and evaluating a work of art seems to be never completed. In art, the dead are never finally buried. The re-interpreting and re-valuating of established, and the resurrecting of forgotten, works is a favourite activity of critics. One need only think of the procession of critics of Shakespeare. Yet many of them from Johnson to the latest name may still be read with profit. Is it because the features of Shakespeare's plays are so inexhaustible that no one critic can ever finally list them as adequate grounds for value judgments? Or is it because the plays are not simple objects whose features can be presented for listing? To suppose that they are is, again, to be

misled by the methods of science. Scientists observe and explain the behaviour of objects. Whether bodies are observed to fall by X in Italy in the sixteenth century or by Y in London in the twentieth does not affect the result, unless new facts are relevant. I have suggested that new facts in this sense about works of art are discovered only by scholars and historians whose methods are scientific. There are few such facts about Shakespeare's plays known to-day which were unknown to Dr. Johnson, though later interpretations of the plays and perhaps their evaluation have differed. It is often said that a great artist is reinterpreted in every age and no doubt by some of these interpretations he would be much astonished. Yet even the apparently bizarre interpretations are often illuminating. It seems to follow that interpretation is partly subjective invention, but about this there could be endless argument of the sort that would hardly be necessary about the description of a chair or horse, except perhaps in extreme borderline cases. Certainly, the critic claims to be interpreting the work, not supplying his own fancies. But the work is what it is interpreted to be, though some interpretations may be rejected. There seems to be no work apart from *some* interpretation.

This critical function may be illustrated by another form of interpretation. The presentation of the character of 'Hamlet' by actors from Richard Burbage to John Gielgud is of 'the same character.' Each actor impersonates 'Hamlet' and speaks the lines given in any text of the play. Yet the effect of each interpretation may be very different but, apart from presentation through someone, what is *the* character 'Hamlet'? Does each actor find something in 'Hamlet' missed by the rest or is it not rather that the character is a construction [15] from this series of interpretations upon a text and evaluated by means of its members? Music and its executants are another example of interpretations which seem to constitute a work of art. A musical work is composed for performance but each performance while playing the notes of the same score varies, often

[15] A "construction" is a logical, not an empirical entity, which is, however, elaborated out of what can be experienced, e.g., the performances of a play. It is used by Macdonald to explain the meanings of terms such as "Hamlet," "work of art," which would otherwise mistakenly be thought to name a "simple, identifiable object" (p. 110).—Ed.

widely, from any other. A great conductor, with a responsive orchestra, may give an entirely fresh meaning to a hackneyed composition. Yet, again, the composition does not exist as a *musical* work apart from some performance. It is a construction from such performances. Nor need such performances be actual. In reading *Hamlet* or following a score one imagines a performance, gives a certain interpretation to the words and notes even though this may be a very poor relation of that given by a great actor or executant. The point is that there is no object which is 'the real' play or sonata which exists independently of any interpretation. If it be said that there is such an object, *viz.* the play or sonata as it existed in the minds of Shakespeare or Mozart, then the reply must surely be that if this is so we must remain not only ignorant of, but literally *without* these works, since we cannot restore the dead. I do not think we are condemned to such a pessimistic conclusion. Nor does this view conflict with the statement that a work of art is unique. For the fact that there could not be another play of exactly the same merit as *Hamlet* is not incompatible with its construction from many interpretations. This is an attempt to explain what is meant when we say that there is such a play, or any work of art.

I suggest that the task of the critic resembles those of the actor and executant rather than those of the scientist and logician. Another fruitful comparison might be with that of a good Counsel. The Counsel, too, has the 'facts' but from them he 'creates' his client's case. So the critic must present what is not obvious to casual or uninstructed inspection, *viz.* a work of art. Of course, he is not to be identified with an actor, executant or Counsel. He differs from these in one very important respect, in being also a judge of what he presents. That a critic is 'creative' is not very revolutionary doctrine and most great critics have been great showmen of their subjects. Such were Ruskin on Turner, Clive Bell and Roger Fry on Cézanne and the Post-Impressionists, Coleridge on Shakespeare and, finally, Wordsworth on the Lyrical Ballads. Should we have the works we value, without these and other advocates? But to a lesser degree we are all critics in relation to art. Some construction must precede serious judgment.

To judge a work of art, therefore, is to give a verdict on something to which the judge has contributed and this also 'justifies'

the verdict. It is an odd sort of justification, perhaps more like that by which we try to 'justify' our affections and antipathies. For a work of art appeals to more than the intellect. People often develop for their favourite works an almost personal relationship for which 'reasons' seem irrelevant. This should not be exaggerated, but is an element in the attitude to art which makes an account of 'proving' a value judgment by the listing of criteria-characters seem inappropriately mechanical. Not in that way, one protests, is conviction induced.

But if each interpretation is individual how is one to explain the fact that different ages or even different persons in any age evaluate the 'same' work of art? One might suggest that 'same' here is used analogously to its use in 'same function' and *Hamlet* is a function of which individual interpretations are values as '*x* is a man' is a function of which individual men are values.[16] Of course, they are not exactly similar for *Hamlet* is not a universal or set of universals of which its interpretations are instances as 'Man' is a universal of which individual men are instances. My reading of *Hamlet* is not an 'instance' of *Hamlet* though it is one of a vast number of more or less similar performances without which, I suggest, it would make no sense to speak of the play. The idea of a 'work of art-in-itself' which can never conceivably be experienced is as mythical as a 'material object-in-itself' which can never conceivably be perceived. But neither are its interpretations connected in the construction of a work of art as sense data are connected in the construction of a physical object on the phenomenalist thesis. If the work of art is such a construction as I have suggested, it is unique and not to be identified with any others with which it may be compared. The history of the arts, of criticism and evaluation, does seem to show that 'work of art' is not used for simple, identifiable objects which can be indicated like a pebble on a beach or a book on a shelf, but rather for something like a set of variations on a basic theme.

I wonder whether æsthetic philosophers do not make too much fuss about 'sameness' and 'objectivity' in art. Art is different from morals. It may be important that for Shakespeare as for us stealing

[16] The function "*x* is a man" is the logical form of the sentences which result when "values," e.g., "Jones," are substituted for the variable.—Ed.

a purse is theft, and wrong; wrong, perhaps, for all rational beings who acknowledge private property. I am much less sure that the play which Shakespeare's audience enjoyed as *Hamlet* is identical with that enjoyed now. Not only in matters such as text, which scholarship can rectify, but as a work of art. Since our circumstances and background are utterly different from those of the first Elizabethans, such an identity seems most unlikely. A simple, but important, difference is that the work would have *sounded* very different in Elizabethan English. As different as Bach's music would sound on the instruments for which it was originally composed. If we and our ancestors could change places each might loathe the other's version and we might wrangle interminably about which was the 'real' work. The answer is, surely, *both* and that there are and will continue to be innumerable members of the family. This may also be part of the answer to our differences with Reynolds about the Venetians. The problem becomes one of choosing an emphasis: same work but *different versions;* different versions but the *same work*. Either alternative is valid.

So, to affirm that a work of art is good or bad is to commend or condemn, but not describe. To justify such a verdict is not to give general criteria as 'reasons' but to 'convey' the work as a pianist might 'show' the value of a sonata by playing it. Critical talk about a work is, as it were, a construction of it by someone at a particular time, in a certain social context. Thus criticism does not, and cannot, have the impersonal character and strict rules, applicable independently of time and place, appropriate to science and mathematics. A mathematician who claimed to have squared the circle, a scientist who announced a law for which he could give no empirical evidence, would be justly ridiculed. But to attempt to legislate for art is to invite successful infringement of any law, as the 'Unities' showed. Criticism is, therefore, I suggest, an indefinite set of devices for 'presenting' not 'proving' the merits of works of art. It has none of the stability of logical truth, scientific method, legal and moral law. It varies with time, place and audience, while not being completely subject to these limitations. For it is certainly possible to appreciate the work of artists and critics of other ages and cultures. But the differences are as important as any common characters and must be equally respected. It is mythical to suppose that one can

distil some 'eternal essences' which are works of art and some uniform method of their appraisal from the vast and complex system of relationships between artists and their audiences throughout the history of art. (Art is creation, not discovery. Criticism and appraisal, too, are more like creation than like demonstration and proof.)

Does it follow from this that all judgments about art are of equal value, which I began by denying? I do not think so. But they are not measured by correspondence with the qualities of some mythical object, the 'real work of art' independent of all interpretation. Instead, they are generally appraised in relation to qualities of the critic. The judgments of a skilful, sympathetic, widely experienced critic are better than those of one without these, and other appropriate qualities. But 'better' and 'worse' judgments are probably all that can be achieved in this field. No critic, even the best, is infallible and sometimes we may be well advised to trust our own judgment rather than that of any expert.

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