Shelley on the Nature of Poetry

INTRODUCTION

This study of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, although bearing the appearance of a commentary, does not have the objective usually associated with works described by that term. The writer of a commentary, generally speaking, may be thought to assume a two-fold duty: that of exposing clearly the meaning of the document he is studying, and then of making a critical estimate of the ideas it contains. But, whereas this notion of a commentator's function is proper and necessary wherever the student and the author of the work which is being examined share the same field of knowledge and the same scientific purpose, it is not applicable in the case where one science is seeking to utilize information furnished by another or found in a source which cannot be called scientific at all. To take an example, it is easy to see that a geologist's criticism of a work by a fellow-geologist is one thing, while his study of an account brought back by a party of hunters in the Andes, let us say, will be quite another. In the first instance his task will be that of the true commentator; in the second, it is a mere searching of an amateur report for experience unknown to himself which he may be able to put to use in founding or confirming hypotheses of his own science.

A student of philosophy approaching the great essay in which Shelley explains and defends his art will not be long in doubt as to which of the two alternatives just mentioned is thrust upon him. Whatever its author may have thought, the *Defence of Poetry* is not a philosophical work, nor would its fame or value be as great if it were. As a philosopher, Shelley is not important; as a poet, he is a treasure both to the world and to the science of philosophy, and to the latter in a special way because he is that rare phenomenon, an authentic poet who has left a splendid record of his experience of poetry. The famous essay, which is to be the chief object of our study, thus provides the philosopher with a true *topos*, or locus, in the Aristotelian sense, and we need only grasp the significance of this term to see exactly what sort of contribution the artist can make to our science and how that contribution is to be employed.

The locus is resorted to by the mind when it is dealing with uncertain and doubtful matters and can find no worthier basis for its reasonings. Then it must take its propositions where it can find them, doing its best to choose the most reliable, and to estimate the exact degree in which these deserve consideration. Such propositions may sometimes be drawn from the universal experience of mankind and may represent a high degree of probability; as when a psychologist, for example, might argue that the images in dreams are always related to things of which we have had actual

sensation at some time or other in the past. More often, however, confidence must be placed in the opinions of men who are quite literally expert, that is, who have a special experience not shared by others; and this happens so often nowadays in the experimental sciences that we are only mildly surprised to hear that a certain great physicist has never handled laboratory apparatus, or that some famous zoologist has never left his native country. Now the condition of aesthetics is in some degree similar. A great part of its task is to determine the nature and causes of art and, whatever art may or may not be, there is no doubting that it involves abilities and experience not shared in the same degree by all men. When a genuine artist, therefore, undertakes to tell what he knows of the processes of his art, he deserves that attention we would give to an account of specialised experience in any field where there are no surer means of securing information. It must never be forgotten, however, that the enjoyment of the experience is not the interpretation of it and that he who has the richest share of the former may be the least able to understand or explain what he has seen and felt so vividly. In the poet's case it may almost be predicted that he is not likely to be very successful in achieving a scientific analysis of the phenomena he is actually living; because the temperament and endowments which make a true artist are inclined to positively indispose a man towards the speculative and abstract. Whatever may be thought of this suggestion, it remains true that our science will place reliance on the poet as a thinker or theorist only accidentally, and will appeal to him primarily in his capacity as artist. Such an attitude almost finds justification enough in the mere style and general tone of the work we propose to examine, which is so essentially the utterance of a poetic, not of a scientific mind; nevertheless it has been felt necessary to state this position in explicit form because we are most of us inevitably inclined to consider that, as the poet knows best how to make poetry, so he should know best what it is he is making.

It will scarcely be necessary to detail the effects which this conception of the use to be made of Shelley's essay will have upon our handling of it. First of all, it should be clear that all consideration of the poet's own views in philosophy will be dismissed as totally irrelevant; it being of no more consequence to the science of aesthetics to know that he was a platonist than to know that he was a vegetarian. A somewhat greater regard may be shown for his personal opinions in matters of art, but always with perfect freedom to accept or reject as we see fit. What we shall really look for in Shelley is simply facts, the facts of his experience of poetry, of how it came to him, of what powers of mind and body it aroused, what materials it seemed to need, what labor and skill in execution, and so forth. Such facts cannot be questioned; an interpretation of them is to be judged as we would judge any other piece of reasoning. The reader must not be surprised, therefore, if certain sections of the *Defence* are ignored completely, or if matters which seemed crucial to its author are dismissed as of little consequence, while at other times great and valuable significance is assigned to some of his casual remarks. These tactics are the simple duty of science and find their parallel in the doctor who listens carefully to the tale of our

aches and pains, but coolly ignores our own anxious conjectures as he proceeds to his diagnosis. And it may perhaps be observed, although the matter is really irrelevant, that the policy just described is in fact the only one if a study of Shelley's essay is to achieve more than pleasant literary criticism or uncertain and valueless history. The first of these alternatives would mean a repetition with personal variations of the praises so often earned by his magnificent prose; the second would be the inevitable result of any attempt to criticise theories and opinions which the poet has expressed in terms so vague, and so often in conflict with his other writings, that it is hardly possible to know what his views were, much less to know what to think of them.

The guiding principles of this attempt to utilize the testimony of a great poet will be drawn from the same philosophy which has furnished its plan of attack. It will strive to be faithfully Aristotelian, out of a conviction that there is no reliable approach to the problems of art save through the basic principles laid down in the *Poetics*. Without going into the matter at length, it may be stated that, in this writer's opinion, the Aristotelian mind has for our purpose the immense advantage over those which lie at the extremes of idealism or materialism, that it never speculates a priori but believes in constant reference to experience as it proceeds. A good many modern theories of aesthetics, on the contrary, have a little the air of awkward afterthoughts; as if their authors, having elaborated or inherited some system of thought, were now faced with the troublesome problem of reconciling with it the phenomena of art. The very criticism occasionally made of the *Poetics*, that its observations deal only with the relatively few literary models which its writer knew, constitutes for us, therefore, a genuine claim to respect. Here was a thinker who regarded facts; who was content to keep his eye on the object and to study a tragedy with the accuracy and detachment of a biologist at work upon a specimen. No doubt such a mode of procedure means the end of any hope of complete synthesis and leaves little room for brilliant generalisations. Being thoroughly and literally unpoetic, it will make dull reading. Yet it is thoroughly and splendidly scientific; for it is not the business of the science of aesthetics to construct fascinating hypotheses inspired by the mind's innate love of order and completeness but rather to examine the elusive realities of art with the caution and detachment of true speculation in order to determine, as far as possible, their causes and the laws which govern them.

Nor must we fall into the error of supposing that the dryness and apparent inadequacy of Aristotle's treatment of poetry is the effect of a dry and unpoetic nature unable to appreciate the beauty and power of the works it is studying. True scientific detachment, let it never be forgotten, holds itself at a distance from the object out of reverence for the object; it will never murder to dissect. Now, as we shall have occasion to explain later, poetry is a reality which simply is not susceptible of the kind of analysis applicable to processes of reasoning. This Aristotle admits implicitly by his steadfast adherence to an inductive attitude, and explicitly when he lets fall the remark that the power of metaphor is the one thing

that cannot be taught. He knows better than to seek to pry into the vitals of a work of art; and by his rigid detachment and persistent refusal to speak of the masterpieces of his day in any but the most general terms, he pays them the highest tribute possible, and gives ample proof of taste and feeling far more genuine than those of critics who think they are telling us something about a poem when they describe its emotional effect upon themselves.

The cornerstone of all Aristotelian aesthetics is of course the great doctrine of imitation, a theory which is not so simple as it looks and which has received varying interpretations. Since it is to be the basis of all our investigations, it would seem necessary to offer the reader some exposition of this doctrine as understood by us and, in view of the importance of the matter, to risk being tedious by making our presentation as thorough and orderly as the circumstances of an introduction will allow.

The *Poetics*, unless read with considerable penetration, does not seem to offer the means of arriving at an exact notion of what is meant by imitation. In it poetry is at first called imitation, then a little later is said to be a thing more universal and of graver import than history. Either statement may at first glance seem acceptable, as sufficiently in accord with average experience or implicit knowledge; but when the two are taken together, it is seen that they rest on a considerable substructure of thought which the student is apparently held able to work out for himself. The poet's imitation, it would seem, is not going to aim at the accuracy of history, but just how it should be understood is not clear from a mere contrasting of the two. The fact is that imitation and image are treacherous terms because they commonly bear a vague but too narrow acceptation which nobody takes the trouble to analyse, but which, if so analysed, would prove quite unjustifiable[1]; while our difficulty with Aristotle arises because he has penetrated to their actual basis and employs them in all the breadth of truth.

Fortunately, in the greatest of Aristotelians may be found carried out in sufficient detail the analysis which his master seems to have taken for granted. Under St. Thomas's guidance,[2] let us put aside for the moment all consideration of the fine arts and examine the simple notion of imitation as it might be exemplified anywhere, as by a reflection in water, let us say. It is obvious that every case of imitation involves two entities: the exemplar or original which is imitated, and that which does the imitating, or the image itself. These are linked together by some common feature which makes us say that one resembles the other. Regarding this common quality, there are two things to be noted:(1) it must be present unchanged in the two objects, or at least according to a due proportion such as is retained by an enlarged or reduced photograph;(2) it must be, not any sort of quality, but of such a type that it may stand as a sure sign of the nature and kind

[1] The absurdity of the notion of an exact copy has been well exposed by J. MARITAIN, *Art et Scolastique*, Paris 1927, p.295.

[2] Cf. *Ia*, q.35, a.1, c.; *ibid.*, q.93, a.1, c.; and, above all, *In I Sententiarum*, d.28, q.2, a.1.

of the original; thus, a mass of white clay may resemble a swan in color, size and weight, but it does not imitate one until it acquires a resemblance revelatory of the nature of this bird, such as its shape or figure. This second point deserves special attention, for it shows that not all similarities will give rise to an image but only such as are significant.

The requirement of a common attribute which is significant, and without which the image could not convey the original, leads us naturally to our next point: there must also be dependence of the image on the original. At first sight we may feel that dependence will inevitably be present whenever a common essential attribute is present. But such is not the case: two eggs, as in St. Augustine's example, or two leaves from the same oak, cannot be said to imitate each other; similarly, a child is not the image of its identical twin, although both may be images of their parents. In short, there must exist between the two objects the further relationship of prior and posterior, of origin and originated, the reason for this stipulation lying in the very nature of the image, which essentially represents another, that is, designates it, leads the mind towards it, as being that from which it is derived by way of expression. If, by independent right, without any such procession or origination, one object should happen to possess even a multitude of traits found also in another, none of these similarities would permit the intelligence to infer anything whatever about the other and, therefore, no matter how much the two manifestly had in common, there would be no true imitation.[1]

The foregoing requirement, that the image must somehow proceed as expression from the original, deserves particular attention because it is the ultimate measure fixing both extremes of the wide extension which the words image and imitation can bear. If there is dependence, resemblance according to even a single significant attribute will deserve the title of imitation as much as the most accurate copy, and perhaps more so indeed, if the copy has failed by allowing significant features to become lost in a mass of meaningless detail. Hence we can have images ranging all the way from the utter fidelity of the swan's reflection in the water to a representation of its mere movement, let us say, in a dance. At one extreme we need only stop short of a duplication without procession or dependence, as in leaves of the same kind of tree; at the other we need only exclude a similarity which has no significance, meaning one which, having no relation to the nature of the original, again does not permit us to see the image as derived from it. So that, when Aristotle speaks of poetry as imitation, he by no means obliges himself to think of it as a simple copying of reality; and when he makes his second statement that it is more universal than history, or goes on to observe that it conveys what may or should be, rather than what is, it should surely be clear which extreme in the genus imitation he considers poetry to approach.

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[1] Natural science seems to agree with this restriction of the term by applying the word mimicry rather than imitation to the curious instances of close resemblance between species found in the insect world.

With these simple principles established, it will now be possible to determine how the image has a peculiar fascination in itself and can become an instrument of such mighty power in the hands of the artist. The first thing we must note is that the image is not the original, yet in it we see the original; in other words, it says or speaks something other than itself; it is expression. Hence it is already on the plane of representation and belongs in the domain of knowledge. The act of knowing, it should be recalled, consists in somehow drawing the object into the mind; but since the object cannot be physically absorbed, the mind must embrace it by means of likenesses or concepts. Now the image, as a likeness which conveys, without being, its exemplar, has already a certain detachment and intelligibility which give it an affinity to the concept. But the curious fact is that, although the concept is purely and essentially a means of knowledge (by which the mind must of course function even when using an image), the intervention of an image, conveying the original and at the same time perceived in itself, procures a certain striking advantage over the concept which is implicitly stated by Aristotle when he remarks that we can take pleasure in imitations even of things hideous and repulsive in themselves, and gives as an example paintings of dead bodies. The point is that both concept as formal sign and image are expressions, both utter something other than themselves, (indeed the concept too is a kind of image), but with this crucial difference, that knowledge by means of the concept grasps only the original, whereas knowledge by means of the image grasps both original and image, seeing one and seeing the other in it. This dual aspect of knowledge through images is everywhere proved and illustrated by the experimental fact to which Aristotle appeals, namely, that no matter how much we may dislike the subject, we can still enjoy the imitation, if it be well done. Hence imitative expression can reveal evil and ugliness without rendering us subject to them. The consummate villainy of Iago does not mar our detachment and even gives pleasure; our experience of him is, not actual, but intellectual, implying an understanding of his character, whereby we seem to master its wickedness. Detachment, not from the original, but from conditions of the original, this is the secret principle responsible for the influence of the image upon the human mind, the principle which thus becomes the measure of the attractiveness of images whether natural or artificial, and the means of their exploitation by the power of art. Here is the reason why there is a charm in the movement of clouds across the surface of the pool not felt when they are beheld moving through the heavens; why a mere silhouette may give a pleasure not found in a photograph; and finally why the good poem or painting can exert a compulsion stronger than reality.

There are two chief respects in which the special advantage of the image manifests itself and may receive development or intensification in fine art. First of all, the condition of the original from which the image may most vividly set us free is that of apparent disorder and lack of meaning, "the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world." The image — and this is true even of those of nature — may reduce the

complexity of the exemplar by confining and organising disparate elements into an orderly whole which can be easily and quickly taken in. Expressed in any other form, such elements would require a tedious and elaborate chain of propositions which could only be attended to one at a time; whereas here the multiple is seized in a single form without division of the knower. There is thus a satisfaction and sense of completeness in learning through images which has no parallel in scientific investigation. We may also note in passing that such knowledge has an air of richness from the simple fact that the mind is carried towards the original by an agency valuable in itself, so that there is pleasure, both in knowledge and in the means of its acquisition.

But what is perhaps more important than its superior intelligibility is the dynamic or stimulating quality of this means of knowledge. The condition of the image being different from that of the original, yet with a relation of procession or dependence between the two, there are two poles in the contemplative act of the mind, and a movement to and fro from image to original which cannot of course be present in straightforward knowledge by concept. The image proceeds, and declares itself as proceeding; even the simple shadows and reflections of nature have the resulting air of activity, forever emerging from and expressing their original or, if taken in relation to ourselves, forever beckoning, pointing, urging the mind towards it; so that they have something unfinished and vital about them which is an invitation to thought. The reason for this special appeal lies in the constitution of the mind itself, which might be described as that of a learner, not a knower. Knowledge with us is inevitably a process, beginning with the known and passing to the unknown, and therefore, because of the very nature of our being, we have more gratification in learning than in knowing, in moving from dark to day, in feeling the delightful shock of the new. The image is forever stirring us up with its suggestion and promise, so that the mind, in contemplating it, has the impression of continually enjoying the charm of discovery. "The reason of the delight in seeing the picture is that one is at the same time learning — gathering the meaning of things, e.g. that the man there is so-and-so."[1]

There must finally be mentioned an attribute of images which is quite unrelated to the foregoing line of thought, although of immense importance, namely, that as far as man is concerned, they are always sensible. Hence they have a special effectiveness from a new point of view as being objects proportioned to the dual nature of our power of thought; we can feel as well as know them; or better, in them we can feel what we are knowing. Once more there may be seen here a superiority over knowledge by mere concept, which seems to engage only half, and the less real and vital half, of our being.

But those same relationships to mind and to reality which are responsible for its apparent advantages over the concept, also cause the image to

[1] ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*, 1448b15.

be in other respects sadly inferior. Essentially intermediate, midway between mind and reality, it is never completely expressive of the object nor completely satisfying to the mind. That reason should esteem such an instrument of knowledge is clear proof of the inherent weakness of reason, which can envelop nothing it seeks to know but is doomed to an endless labor of abstraction, hacking away at the rock of truth and carrying it off in chips and fragments. An image of the truth can set us free from that weary toil, giving us knowledge immediate, rich and apparently inexhaustible. Our escape, unfortunately, is bought at the price of that which we seek; the value of the image depends on its untruth as well as its truth; on what it ignores and excludes as well as on what it retains; it has the charm of promise, but the promise can never be completely fulfilled. Similarly, by offering us a meaning that we can touch and see, the image will seem to reconcile our divided powers of knowledge; yet it can never strike the senses with the force of a real object of nature, nor penetrate the intelligence like a true scientific universal.

All the advantages of the image, already identifiable in some degree even in the images of nature, are of course given enormous development by the artist, whose statements have besides something even of the power of the concept itself in that "they are of the nature of universals."[1] The inevitable shortcomings of this medium of thought and expression must also, of course, accompany it wherever it is found, and therefore persist even in the loftiest works of art. One of the chief aims of this study will be to elaborate and apply such general statements.

A brief sketch of the biographical circumstances of Shelley's essay will perhaps be appreciated by those less familiar with the history of English literature. The *Defence of Poetry* as its name suggests, was not a work of simple speculation or scholarship but a direct reply to a satirical attack on poetry by a close friend, Thomas Love Peacock. The latter's essay, entitled *The Four Ages of Poetry*, appeared in the first number of a review, *Ollier's Literary Miscellany*, begun by Shelley's own publisher in 1820. *The Four Ages of Poetry* was in no sense a serious work, its author being a celebrated wit who was a sincere admirer of good poetry and who had in fact himself composed two or three volumes of dignified verse. But our poet seems to have been alarmed and disconcerted in spite of himself by the plausibility of its mocking arguments and to have immediately set about a reply. This was intended to comprise three instalments and to be published in the same review which Peacock had used. When circumstances made this impossible, it was sent for publication to *The Liberal*, a periodical edited by two of Shelley's friends, the brothers John and Leigh Hunt. John Hunt felt obliged to prepare the essay for press by removing most of the explicit references to the article by Peacock which it was attacking, since lapse of time and the circumstance of publication in a different review would render these mystifying to the general reader. Before it could appear, however, Shelley was drowned in 1822, and soon

[1] *Poetics*, 1451b7.

after, *The Liberal* came to an end. The MS then went back to his wife and was eventually published by her in a volume of his letters and papers in 1840.

The text now most generally known being that of John Hunt, in which nearly all the references to Peacock's attack have disappeared, there is a danger that in reading it we may remain unaware of the degree to which his friend's satire is present in Shelley's mind as he proceeds. An examination of *The Four Ages of Poetry* will show that nearly every important proposition in Shelley's essay finds there its corresponding accusation or denial, and the sting of Peacock's brilliant witticisms may also help to explain the zeal and excess in both doctrine and expression of which it is sometimes guilty. Besides that of Peacock, other influences were at work upon him; but to estimate these in detail would be a considerable task. It may be noted, however, that he was actually reading Plato's *Ion* while working at this essay, and his remarks on poetic inspiration plainly reflect those of Socrates on the same theme. He had also recently studied Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poesie*, and several of his phrases are almost plagiarisms from that work. Through Sidney we can again perceive the influence of Plato and also, of course, that of Aristotle himself.

I. REASON AND IMAGINATION: CONCEPT AND IMAGE

> According to one mode of regarding those two classes of mental action which are called reason and imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced, and the latter as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to color them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity. The one is the τὸ ποιεῖν, or the principle of synthesis, and has for its object those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself; the other is the τὸ λογίζεσθαι, or principle of analysis, and its action regards the relations of things simply as relations; considering thoughts not in their integral unity, but as the algebraical representations which conduct to certain general results. Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.

Shelley's first paragraph offers us, in its pairs of antithetical clauses, a simultaneous description of the mental faculty which is a first cause of poetry and of that other "calculating faculty" which, as we shall see later, seems to be looked upon almost as its arch-enemy. From what has been said in our introduction concerning the necessity of experimental methods in the investigation of poetry, it should be clear that to make a beginning with the faculties of the mind is a reversal of what, in our judgement, would be the proper order to be followed. To the artist it may well seem justifiable to begin with the immediate consideration of how the mind works in the domain of art and outside it, since the internal experience of his own art is that which is most direct and vivid for him; but, for the rest of men it is not possible to achieve much reliable knowledge of the mental

powers responsible for poetry except after an examination of the processes and effects of these powers, so that a scientific treatise should deal with them last rather than first. The general statements found in this chapter will appear therefore neither as clear nor as convincing as it is hoped they will become later, when an increasing amount of evidence can be brought forward to support them.

It is to be noted that the opposed forces of reason and imagination are spoken of very indeterminately as "two classes of mental action," so that the imagination is clearly not just an image-making power, but an intellectual ability superior indeed to that we call reason, and to which Shelley will not hesitate to attribute, not only the achievements of the artist, but those of the true thinker in almost every field. There should be no difficulty in accepting such a division of our mental powers, since there is no reason why the term image may not be used of that which is formed by the intellect as well as of that which is formed by the internal sense, and, more important still, since a power of perceiving similitudes, characteristic of the imagination as here understood, is what distinguishes the good mind from the inferior in every field. Without such a gift, it is difficult to see how the scientific thinker, for example, could achieve the relations and analogical concepts of speculative philosophy, or the inductions and hypotheses of natural science.

Reason, according to Shelley, takes up its ideas merely as tools and levers, concerning itself only with that element of their being whereby they may be employed to bring about a certain general result; whereas imagination esteems rather the value a thing has in itself. We might find a personification of reason in the general of an army to whom the common soldier is a mere cipher, "a lifeless algebraical representation"; whereas imagination triumphs in the dramatist or novelist who can transform the single soldier into a being of inexhaustible interest, an entire microcosm of human hopes and fears. Reason and prose are not interested in the attainment of a whole; they ignore the vital, inapprehensible reality, contenting themselves with those elements of it which are susceptible of abstraction, and which for that reason are universal, applicable to all cases, permitting us to fix relations and draw conclusions of constant validity. Hence the language of reason will always work towards an unobtrusive clarity, setting aside all that cannot be grasped and understood; while the language of poetry, springing from a desire to achieve wholeness of knowledge, will be inclined to sacrifice even intelligibility, twisting and shaping the means of communication, and even cultivating a certain vagueness in order to convey an impression possessing the vigor and richness of reality. Reason, as opposed to imagination in the sense in which imagination is here understood, surveys objects with a certain detachment, being concerned primarily with what they are apart from our consideration of them. It considers the relations between things "however produced," that is, quite objectively, disregarding their possible suitability or unsuitability to man. In true rational science the mind takes things as it finds them; it has no power whatever to influence the production of the relations which it beholds and it is in this

sense that how they are produced is none of its business. Reason does not deal with things as the poetic imagination deals with them; the object of the two powers may sometimes be materially the same; it can never be formally the same.

In contrast to the detachment of reason, imagination, while it may perhaps function as a purely contemplative power when serving philosophy or science, is clearly to be understood here as artistic and creative. It works upon objects "so as to color them with its own light," employing them as elements in a labor of reconstruction according to its own mode. These new compositions reveal within themselves a principle of integrity conferred upon them by the power which gave them being; it is to the imagination, therefore, that they owe such solidity as they possess; the very term of this quasi-creation lies and remains within the creative power; they are the poet's offspring. In this constructive activity reason does indeed come into play, although its role is suggested only in the bare phrase "as the instrument to the agent." For our own benefit we may amplify this hint by observing that at least simple factual knowledge will be obtained by the poet through reason and — what is far more important — that the end which moves him to work and constitutes his goal will be a proposition or theme, the result of inference; such inference being perhaps quite unconscious as far as the poet is concerned. Nevertheless it remains true that the entire direction of the creative process is contrary to the movement of reason: the task of the artist is one of urgent synthesis which can neither await nor heed the findings of the spirit of rational dissection; it attends to the persuasive similitudes rather than to the scientific differences in things, for in such similitudes lies that which makes possible the poetic architecture. These remarks, to be left for the present in this condition of vagueness and generality, may be summarised by recalling that the general subject under discussion has been the differences between reason and imagination, differences arising from the natural desire of man for completeness in his mode of knowing, and completeness in the object of his knowledge. To know by means of reason alone seems unsatisfying because the vitality and immediacy of sense have been lost, and this deficiency the creative imagination seeks to remedy by coloring thoughts with its own light and composing a new object for undivided contemplation. The second shortcoming of reason, that it can never seize the entire object, but rather seems obliged to take in only aspects of it in shadowy and fragmentary succession, is also countered by the poetic image, which offers the mind an object rich and varied, yet easily assimilated.

The problem of this opposition between reason and imagination might also be attacked by attempting to distinguish clearly the respective products of each, the rational concept and the poetic idea. Both may perhaps be termed similitudes, but the object of which they are the likeness is decidedly not the same. If we examine the rational concept, we see that it may well be considered a similitude, as the mental counterpart of some actual existing object; but, although partly formed by the knower and to some extent dependent, like the poetic image, on a power from within, it is the direct

and faithful likeness of a reality, formed and esteemed as such, and for this reason neither the rational concept nor the work of its formation really deserve to be called imitation. For those who "most properly do imitate," as Sidney says, catching the true significance of Aristotle's doctrine, "borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be: but range only, reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be or should be." This splendid statement is thoroughly supported by Shelley, as we have seen, who makes the findings of reason only the bare materials out of which the poet shall fabricate something new and better.[1]

It being manifest that the poetic image does not attempt to be a faithful likeness drawn from a real object, there is reason to inquire what it does imitate or, if imitativeness does not account for what it is principally, whether it deserves the title of image at all. The answer to this difficulty is by no means easy and had best be approached through two or three preliminary distinctions, which may at first seem over-simple, but which, we hope, will prove their value. The first element of the problem has been already identified as the real object, the historical Hamlet, let us say, and it can never be emphasized too strongly that the poet's interest in this object is only that of an architect in a stone-quarry; he has no intention of reproducing it, of teaching us anything about it, nor of allowing it to influence his plans except only in so far as any material must limit or obstruct the force which seeks to dominate it. He is obliged to use such material for the same reason that a speaker who wishes to convey an utterly new thought must yet employ a language we understand and words possessing a wealth of values and associations already existing in our minds; to this small extent, however, the image he will build is an imitation even of the material original or exemplar.

But it is characteristic of the poet that he is not content to take things as he finds them; if he were, he would express himself in the bald statements of prose or science. It is the divine consideration of "what should be" which draws him on to the task of creating the poetic Hamlet, an ideal character more intelligible, more profound and satisfying than the historical original could possibly be.

While not strictly relevant to our discussion, it is worth emphasizing that this universal tendency of art to turn away from the inadequacies of the real world and to seek something better is unintelligible unless we suppose in the artist some sort of vital faith in a true ideal perfection. At first glance our principle might seem verified in the case of a good many artists, but inapplicable to a host of others, whose work, though of undoubted genius, nevertheless reflects a spirit of pessimism or decadence. But an objection based on such grounds has no true force, serving, indeed, to confirm rather than to destroy the principle it appears to be attacking.

[1] "I am reading *Anastasius*. One would think that Lord Byron had taken his idea of the last three cantos of Don Juan from this book. That, of course, has nothing to do with the merit of this latter, poetry having nothing to do with the invention of facts." To Mary Shelley, Aug. 11, 1821.

For, implicit in the cynicism or sensualism of such artists is at least a conviction of the desirability of the spiritual; their attitudes being quite unintelligible unless we suppose in them and in their public, not religious faith, of course, nor anything like it, but the sense of a standard of perfection toward which mankind inevitably strives and which, it may be noted in passing, probably accounts for the fact that works of despair or decadence never win a place among the great classics. There is no intention here of suggesting that this hope need be given definite formulation, or that men have any explicit notion of the ultimate perfection which serves them as a measure, as constant as it is vague, of the inadequacy of their own sphere of existence. In the phrase of St. Augustine, "Inasmuch as we cannot present it to our minds as it really is, we do not know it, but whatever image of it may be presented to our minds we reject, disown and condemn." So that our perception of this ideal, he describes as a "certain learned ignorance; ...for assuredly, if it were utterly unknown it would not be desired, and on the other hand, if it were seen it would not have to be desired and sought for..."[1] Shelley himself, in a note to *Hellas*, makes a valuable pronouncement along these lines. After rejecting orthodox Christian theology as a solution for the problem of evil, he continues:

> That there is a true solution of the riddle and that in our present state that solution is unattainable by us, are propositions which may be regarded as equally certain; meanwhile, as it is the province of the poet to attach himself to those ideas which exalt and ennoble humanity, let him be permitted to have conjectured the condition of that futurity towards which we are impelled by an inextinguishable thirst for immortality.

What is important if we are to understand the nature of poetic imitation is to notice that this ideal perfection constitutes a second source from which the work of art draws its form. It is a second original, so to speak, an ineffable Hamlet towards which the artist's mind aspires just as inevitably as it turns away from the Hamlet of fact and history. Hence, the poetic idea stands in an intermediate position, as it were, deriving its being partly from the real, partly from the ideal. It is essential to note, furthermore, that of the loftier of these two extremes, the mind has no knowledge or experience; its condition being the object of conjecture, not of investigation; and hence there is no alternative for the poet except to speak of it in terms of the world in which we live. The inaccessibility of the ideal explains, on the one hand, why poetry is necessarily a figment of the mind, a dream and brainchild of man, and why, on the other hand we instinctively require that it reveal something of the solidity and probability of real life. No mere reproduction of an historical, inconsequential Hamlet will content us, but neither can we be persuaded of the possibility of perfect man unless there is set before us a living image of that conjectural personage, rendered solid and convincing by expression in terms of all the details and circumstances of life. Because of the limitations of his medium and because of our insuperable ignorance and his, the poet, therefore, does not and cannot

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[1] *Ep.* CXXX, xiv, 27; xv, 28.

convey the ideal itself; it is always something less than that which he gives us, something better than reality yet falling short of the perfection towards which it points.

Returning to our original inquiry as to how the poetic idea deserves the title of image or similitude, it should now be clear that, as compared with the concept, it is both more and less of an image than the latter. Like the concept, it has an original, although an original not easy to describe, since it is neither pure fact nor pure fancy. If poetic idea and concept be judged on the basis of fidelity to their respective originals, the poetic idea is plainly inferior as a likeness, since it attracts attention and esteem to itself, inclining us to become careless of the original. But a second characteristic of the image requires that it should not share in the nature of that which it conveys and, in this respect, the artist's construction is more truly an image than the concept, since his idea is not merely associated, but identified, with a sensible form, and is therefore more fully detached from that which it expresses.

II. ORIGIN OF POETIC EXPRESSION

Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be 'the expression of the imagination'; and poetry is connate with the origin of man. Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in a lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds and motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them. It is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound; even as the musician can accommodate his voice to the sound of the lyre. A child at play by itself will express its delight by its voice and motions; and every inflection of tone and every gesture will bear exact relation to a corresponding antitype in the pleasurable impressions which awakened it; it will be the reflected image of that impression; and as the lyre trembles and sounds after the wind has died away, so the child seeks, by prolonging in its voice and motions the duration of the effect, to prolong also a consciousness of the cause. In relation to the objects which delight a child, these expressions are what poetry is to higher objects. The savage (for the savage is to ages what the child is to years) expresses the emotions produced in him by surrounding objects in a similar manner; and language and gesture, together with plastic or pictorial imitation, become the image of the combined effect of those objects and his apprehension of them. Man in society, with all his passions and his pleasures, next becomes the object of the passions and pleasures of man; an additional class of emotions produces an augmented treasure of expression; and language, gesture, and the imitative arts, become at once the representation and the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony. The social sympathies, or those laws from which, as from its elements, society results, begin to develop themselves from the moment that two human beings co-exist; the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed; and equality, diversity, unity, contrast, mutual dependence, become the principles alone capable of affording the motives according to which the will of a social being is determined to action, inasmuch as he is social; and constitute pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, truth in reasoning, and love in the intercourse of kind. Hence men, even in the infancy of society, observe a certain order in their words and actions, distinct from that of the objects and the impressions represented by them, all expression being subject to the laws of that from which it proceeds. But let us

dismiss those more general considerations which might involve an inquiry into the principles of society itself, and restrict our view to the manner in which the imagination is expressed upon its forms.

In at least the higher animals, the outward manifestation of inner, conscious activity is fundamentally spontaneous and unreasoning. In such a statement, however, there is no clue to the true nature of expression, because it does not tell us why such outward manifestation need exist at all, nor why it seems not merely a relief but even a fulfilment demanded by the very nature of the sentient creature.

An angelic being might sing to itself in spiritual and wordless delight, but no such self-contained utterance could suffice the creature with animal nature. For the latter, any feeling of joy or pain, whether it result from sensation or from the loftiest thought, is inevitably linked with passion and with a stirring of the body which, when intense, must break forth in some sort of physical overflow, like steam from a boiling kettle.[1] This elementary principle will probably account for the most obscure and primitive kinds of expression, simple sounds and movements indicative of pain, anger, or pleasure; but if we take expression as necessarily implying the higher aspect of communication, then such basic manifestations of sense-life are still not true expressions for they have no social quality.

For the true and profound cause of expression in the formal sense, we must consider the nature of man as endowed with both external sense and power of reason. By the very law of his being which requires that any knowledge he gains must come to him through the senses, he can never be content with any object known until he can somehow reach it with his senses. Accordingly, the natural motive underlying all formal expression is the desire to render some thought or feeling a more vivid object of knowledge, whether for self or others, by actually embodying it in, or relating it to, a form that can be heard, seen, or felt.

An emotional assent to the proposition just enunciated is readily granted, for we all know how desirable a support to our thinking is furnished by visible formulation of it in diagrams or pictures[2]; but the obviousness of our doctrine is more apparent than real and some investigation of it is necessary. The essentially human inclination to seek support for our knowledge by finding for it a sensible form has its basic cause in the weak and disjointed condition of the mind. For, although relatively to other animals, man may appear enormously superior in cognitive power, it is yet not difficult for him to admit of intellectual natures far superior to his own. First, it is plain that the inevitable labor and indirection of discursive reasoning are handicaps from which a superior being might be

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1 Indeed retention of the emotion will intensify it, as St. Thomas observes, (*Ia IIae*, q.38, a.2, c.) and he suggests this as one of the reasons for the special attractiveness of the forbidden fruit (*Ad Romanos*, VI, c.v, 20).

2 *Humana cognitio potentior est circa sensibilia*, remarks St. Thomas (*IIa IIae*, q.49, a.1, ad 2.), while giving some sound advice on the training of memory. He recommends the association of thoughts we wish to retain with sensible similitudes of some kind and preferably with such as are strange and striking, so that by this means a permanent impression may be left in the mind.

entirely free, just as better intellects among men seem less subject to them than others. To embrace the truth in one splendid effortless act would be the ideal for an intellectual power, an ideal forever inaccessible to the human mind in the natural order, because it is fated to be in some sort a house divided against itself. In its debility it demands a great number of faculties, revealing its inferiority already in this need for several tools to accomplish what might be achieved by one. Furthermore, the melancholy fate of the mind is to be obliged to feed its highest faculties with what scraps it can garner through its lowest; for, not only is there a distinct hierarchy in its powers, — the external and internal senses being vastly inferior in rank to the intellectual faculties — but it is upon the baser functions that it is thoroughly and ultimately dependent; the certitude of all our knowledge being measured by the certitude of the most primitive form of it. It follows that, although the objects attained by sensation are the most inferior, the knowledge of them is from one standpoint the most perfect, being at once that to which we are most proportioned by nature and that most comparable to infallible angelic intuition.

Our house, then, is not merely divided, but divided against itself, with two factions forever drawing it in opposite directions: the higher, towards objects more excellent in nature, and towards that simplicity of intellect which alone could be proportioned to such objects; the lower, towards realities obscure and inferior in themselves, yet grasped with a certitude and directness enjoyed nowhere else. To pursue the loftier realities, the mind must turn within, thus abandoning the world of sense and that precious immediateness and certainty which sense alone can give; for, just as a printed page is unreadable when held too close to the eye, so concepts within the mind suffer from what might be called a lack of thereness which makes them elusive and ungrateful objects of study. The central proposition of our discussion now follows, namely, that it is natural and inevitable that reason should attempt to set before itself these higher and more abstract realities, conferring upon them that appearance of objectivity which they lack, in an effort to attain them as sense attains the things of sense. For beings constituted like ourselves, this will mean giving them somehow or other a sensible form.[1]

The poetic universe responds, therefore, to a natural desire to reconcile the two opposing tendencies by a fusion in some fashion of sense and intel-

[1] The whole matter might be looked at from the other direction (that of the object). True philosophy does not permit us to consider the object of human knowledge to be sensible things merely as sensible, nor platonic essences remote from sense, but rather the natures or quiddities of sensible things. The object of man's knowledge being the intelligible universal in the particular sensible, it is to be expected that his power of knowledge will be proportioned to it and, accordingly, that it will be an intellect wedded to sense, unable to think without phantasms and, what is to the point here, the better able to think the more it turns to the phantasm. "*Unde natura lapidis, vel cujuscumque materialis rei, cognosci non potest complete et vere nisi secundum quod cognoscitur ut in particulari existens* (because that *is* its nature — to exist in a particular): *particulare autem apprehendimus per sensum et imaginationem.*" And this is why, as St. Thomas has already observed, every man tries to form images of whatever he is seeking to understand, "*in quibus quasi inspiciat, quod intelligere studet*" — a phrase which brilliantly conveys the grounds for the special pleasure found in the contemplation of a work of art (Cf. *Ia*, q.84, a.7, c.).

lect, through the creation of an object in which we shall be able to apprehend the universal with the directness of simple sensation. It is an attempt by man, and in some measure a successful one, to have his cake and eat it too: to enjoy the result of his power of intellectual abstraction without the sacrifice of sensation which it normally entails. By a construction of the mind, opposed elements are brought together and the resulting poetic object is therefore hybrid in character. The term hybrid here, aside from its association with living things, is probably the very best possible and should be taken quite literally. What it means is that the product of this union, while able to exist in its own right, will not belong to the species of either parent; it will not be reducible either to an abstract nature nor to an object of sense; we will be able neither fully to understand it nor fully to feel it. But our nature is hybrid too, in a way, and so it becomes something vitally human for us, something not merely able to satisfy us as nothing else can, but even to arouse all that is best in us. For poetry on the one hand calls us away from an illusory idealism and restores us to

> ...the very world, which is the world
> Of all of us, — the place where in the end
> We find our happiness or not at all.

and at the same time offers us a foretaste, a glimpse, of that celestial abode where we shall

> ...feel, who have laid our groping hands away;
> And see, no longer blinded by our eyes.[1]

To return now to the passage in Shelley which has prompted these observations: it is impossible not to admire the unerring poetic sense which has led him to assign to his art a cause partly natural and partly artificial. Besides the passive and inevitable response to external influences whereby man emits expression as the Aeolian lyre answers to the impulse of the wind, there is that "principle within the human being" which can achieve "an internal adjustment" of thought and feeling. And he has done well in choosing the example of the child dancing and singing for joy; for there both principles are plainly at work, the mere physical disturbance entailed by keen emotion, and the desire of the child to feel the delight it is feeling, to touch and see its own joy by the skipping of its feet and the laughter of its voice.

"In relation to the objects which delight the child, these expressions are what poetry is to higher objects." Poetry, Shelley implies, is not merely connate with the origin of man in the sense that it comes into being with the foundation of even the most primitive community, but also in showing itself very early in the life of the individual. Poetry is not some high intellectual attainment, the final flowering of the educated and civilised spirit; it is something "felt in the blood, and felt along the heart," an activity founded in an urge profoundly natural, and the more difficult to fix and determine because of its essentially dual aspect. His investigation of

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[1] RUPERT BROOKE, *Sonnet (Suggested by some of the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research)*. (By kind permission of Dodd, Mead and Co. Canada, Ltd.)

its primal source, while on the right track, does not seem to go far enough, perhaps because it considers expression as imitation before accounting for it as mere fact. The ultimate generative force which accounts for poetry must be sought in that deep desire of the mind, not merely for true knowledge, but for knowledge in a form as objective and satisfying as the stones by the wayside. Mere knowledge will not do, however elevated in quality or irrefutable in certainty; the abstract world of pure science with its inhuman perfection seems permanently inadequate for creatures of sense; and those among us who are most human, the poets, being moved most irresistibly by this natural longing for satisfying knowledge, will not be content with anything known until they have made it over again in their own way, giving it a form that can be seen and felt. The image, therefore, is not a mere instrument for the poet, but a thing desired and sought for itself. It is essentially the poetic idea, knowledge incarnate in a certain sensible form, in contrast to the idea of science which can attach itself to this form or that. A poet's ideas simply are not until they are singing within him; they have no shape anterior to their expression and hence their form of expression is inevitable.

Still another reason for the impulse towards art is suggested by our author when he describes the child as seeking to prolong, through sensible manifestation of its pleasure, its own consciousness of the cause of that pleasure. Although no attempt is made to exploit this idea, it seems to deserve more than mere mention, for it illustrates again how poetry, although occasioned by the animal side of human nature, rises to the intellectual plane. It is scarcely necessary to point out that, whereas a child may prolong its physical reception or physical manifestation of pleasure merely in order to continue the actual sensation it is enjoying, the poet's desire to give permanence to his experience is on a quite different level. No poem on falling in love, surely, is written in order that its author may endure the actual sensations of that experience over and over; the stability and duration which it is sought to confer on the event have, in this case, an ideal quality, as is made clear by the fact that the same immortality will be desired for moments of profound grief or despair. Obviously, it is as the voice of an intellectual being that poetry manifests this inclination, of a being capable of apprehending and desiring the universal, and which is seeking to raise its life and feelings to a sphere where they will no longer be the prey of time and change, while retaining for them all the charm and power of sensible expression.

In the concluding section of this paragraph Shelley emphasizes again how essentially human a thing is poetry. Even in the infancy of society the order which it observes is "distinct from that of the objects and impressions represented ... all expression being subject to the laws from which it proceeds." It is the order of human nature, then, which it seeks to represent, not the order of the external universe, — this being its great point of difference from science. Consequently, other things being equal, poetry cannot fail to improve as civilisation advances; for, as human nature becomes richer and more varied, so will artistic expression acquire a cor-

responding complexity; "an additional class of emotions produces an augmented treasure of expression." And, although at first sight this might not seem true, it will follow that even external nature will be more deeply known and appreciated by the civilised poet, for the reason that, having so much more which demands to be said, he must range farther and search more profoundly for adequate symbols and images. A comparison of typical passages from an early tribal masterpiece like *Beowulf* with a few lines from almost any great modern poet would offer a convincing illustration of this principle.

III. CHIEFLY ON METAPHOR: ITS NATURE AND FUNCTION

In the youth of the world, men dance and sing and imitate natural objects, observing in these actions, as in all others, a certain rhythm or order. And, although all men observe a similar, they observe not the same order in the motions of the dance, in the melody of the song, in the combinations of language, in the series of their imitations of natural objects. For there is a certain order or rhythm belonging to each of these classes of mimetic representation, from which the hearer and the spectator receive an intenser and purer pleasure than from any other; the sense of an approximation to this order has been called taste by modern writers. Every man, in the infancy of art, observes an order which approximates more or less closely to that from which this highest delight results; but the diversity is not sufficiently marked as that its gradations should be sensible, except in those instances where the predominance of this faculty of approximation to the beautiful (for so we may be permitted to name the relation between this highest pleasure and its cause) is very great. Those in whom it exists to excess are poets, in the most universal sense of the word; and the pleasure resulting from the manner in which they express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from the community. Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension, until words, which represent them, become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thought instead of pictures of integral thoughts; and then, if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse. These similitudes or relations are finely said by Lord Bacon to be "the same footsteps of nature impressed upon the various subjects of the world"—and he considers the faculty which perceives them as the storehouse of axioms common to all knowledge. In the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry; and to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good which exists in the relation subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression. Every original language near to its source is in itself the chaos of a cyclic poem; the copiousness of lexicography and the distinctions of grammar are the works of a later age, and are merely the catalogue and the forms of the creations of poetry.

In this paragraph Shelley's thought seems to fall under three heads: first, he studies poetry in its origins and thereby arrives at a definition of beauty which carries with it a definition of the poet; next he deals with the poet's special mode of expression, which is by means of metaphor, and this in turn leads him to his final topic, the nature and origin of language.

His explanation of the progress of art from a primitive to a more highly developed condition is not so clear as it might be, but seems to rest on a basic principle which is suggested plainly enough. All forms of art are attempts at orderly expression; the primitive and original forms, however,

fall far below that perfect order more nearly realised by work of high culture. In short, an absolute harmony or order is taken as at least conceivable; in tribal or folk art this is present in a crude and inchoate form; in the works of advanced civilisation it finds a much greater perfection, the reason for the difference lying in the possession by the refined and mature intellect of a power of consciously discerning an "approximation to this order." Such ability to judge is taste, the confident knowledge that a work is, or is not, in close relation to ideal harmony; and, although by itself it may not make the poet, Shelley is unquestionably right in implying that taste is one of his indispensable gifts. The remark might be added that artistic judgment is at least more sure and deep in the poets themselves than in their critics or their public, as is proved by the innumerable instances of a bold disregard of contemporary judgment by great artists being confirmed by the more universal decision of posterity. Good taste, then, cannot be the simple effect of experience and cultivation but must imply some share in the native endowments of the poet.

We may now notice Shelley's definition of beauty which, although given only in a hasty parenthesis, reveals considerable profundity. From the context it is plain that an order is necessarily involved, that is, something calling for comprehension and making its primary appeal to intelligence. But the order in this case also causes pleasure of an intense and lofty kind, apart from which it might remain an order, exerting a purely intellectual appeal, but would never deserve to be termed beautiful. The beautiful, however, is now stated to be the actual relation between an intellectual delight and the object which causes it. How the relation itself could be beauty is not easy to see, but perhaps a parenthetical remark is being read too closely and its author should be taken to intend the more acceptable meaning that the beautiful is the object itself under a certain aspect, in other words, as related to pleasurable apprehension by the mind; the object is seen, not as the good, but as the true, causing instant pleasure by reason of its striking order.[1]

So far we may be fairly sure of having caught Shelley's mind on the nature of beauty; but a little later in this paragraph another statement is made which seems to obscure rather than clarify what he has said above: "To be a poet," he observes, "is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good which exists in the relation subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression." Even grammatically this sentence is not unmistakably clear, it being uncertain whether the two final clauses are to be taken as each constituting a definition of both the true and the beautiful, or as two separate definitions, one of the true and the other of the beautiful. However we read these words, they remain difficult to reconcile with what has already been determined. A definition of the true as the relation subsisting between

[1] All of which would appear in close enough accord with the remarks of ST. THOMAS: *Pulchrum addit supra bonum quemdam ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam; ita quod bonum dicatur id quod simpliciter complacet appetitui; pulchrum autem dicatur id cujus ipsa apprehensio placet.* — *Ia IIae*, q.27, a.1, ad 3.

existence and perception is by no means out of the question; but a definition of either the true or the beautiful as the relation between perception and expression seems quite baffling in this context, since it implies an entirely new point of departure.[1]

The really important ideas of this paragraph are found in its second half, which treats of the nature and necessity of metaphor in poetry and of its share in the creation of language. Here Shelley reveals a deep insight into the causes of his art, suggesting far more than he says. Our duty will be to attempt to expose the principles underlying his observations so as to make it possible to bridge gaps which his mind seems to cross intuitively and without effort.

"Their language is vitally metaphorical." In the phrase itself a metaphor is implied which, upon analysis, might tell us that metaphor is not only the necessary, but the natural, means of expression for poets and, as founded in nature itself, can impart the life and force of nature to their utterance. To understand how this is so we may recall what has been said already concerning the origin of human expression. The pressure of passion demands an outlet; but, in the rational animal, expression must answer to the requirements of a dual nature and hence cannot remain on the obscure level of sense. The utterance that man requires must bring relief to spirit as well as to flesh, by translating passion into a more orderly and intelligent form. The true speech of mankind, then, will be neither of sense alone nor of intellect alone and will find its adequate vehicle only in the image, the sole instrument whereby meaning can be given sensible form and the two powers drawn to its undivided contemplation. "Strong passion," Shelley remarks in a letter, "expresses itself in metaphor borrowed from all objects alike remote or near, and casts over all the shadow of its own greatness."[2]

Its appeal as a vividly sensible object is, accordingly, a basic reason for the effectiveness of metaphor; so that to speak of an abstract metaphor or poetry would not even be intelligible. This point is strikingly illustrated in the work of Shelley himself, who, although famous for his devotion to abstract ideas, and although appearing at times to cultivate an unsubstantial and rarefied style out of a desire to spiritualize his message as much as possible, nevertheless constantly bears witness to the inevitable inclination

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[1] Certain citations might be made to show that SHELLEY does not possess his own thought too clearly: In notes surviving from the rough draft of this portion of the essay he gives evidence of uncertainty as to the relation of the true and the beautiful: "It is by no means indisputable that what is true, or rather that which the disciples of a certain mechanical and superficial philosophy call true, is more excellent than the beautiful." — *Peacock's Four Ages*, etc., (ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith), p.87. Again, in another passage of *The Defence*, where he is apparently describing the creative process, he says: "The imagination, beholding the beauty of this order, created it out of itself according to its own idea;..." whence it would seem the "order" is perceived as beautiful before any expression of it takes place. But it is possible too that he has in mind some quite profound theory whereby, to use scholastic language, the object has splendor and significance, not in the *species impressa*, but only in the *species expressa*. Translated into the language of subjectivism, I suppose this view would become similar to that of CROCE.

[2] To Leigh Hunt, Livorno, Aug. 15, 1819.

of the poetic mind to give tangible and visible semblance to its conceptions. In the preface to *Prometheus* he invites us to note that the imagery to be employed "will be found in many instances to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind," but a glance at almost any section of the poem will reveal that what the poet actually does is to draw from the world of the senses a powerful imagery with which to render vivid the operations of mind. Here is a characteristic line,

> ...the thought
> That pierces the dim universe like light.

And the true direction of his tactics is manifest in the splendid passage:

> Hark! the rushing snow!
> The sun-awakened avalanche! whose mass,
> Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there
> Flake after flake, in heaven-defying minds
> As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth
> Is loosened, and the nations echo round,
> Shaken to their roots, as do the mountains now.

Sometimes, to be sure, his images are chosen with such subtle taste and presented so unobtrusively as to deceive us for a moment into thinking he has caused the invisible influence of an ideal to flow directly into our minds:

> Common as light is love,
> And its familiar voice wearies not ever.

But a second glance is all that is required to reveal that the abstract now exerts force simply because it has been made visible and audible.

Such citations are hardly needed to establish a point so indisputable but they are worth making if only in order that we may have some actual metaphors before our eyes as we pursue this discussion. A treatise on the nature of poetry can hardly sin by excess of quotation: good science should be reluctant to relinquish its hold on the object and should turn to it frequently for confirmation or new direction. Studies in aesthetics which present themselves in close and solid pages of print, with never an opening in which poetry itself might be able to indicate a path to its own secrets, should be objects of suspicion. The position of the investigator in this field, as has already been suggested, is not a favorable one, and an accurate and humble regard for the facts is his only salvation.

In this spirit let us permit Shelley himself to lead us a step further by asking what is the reason for the gentle yet irresistible power of the final line quoted from him above. It is surely beyond a doubt that the images here are chiefly precious thanks to a new comprehension they bring, a new understanding of the depth and breadth of love. This is the second great principle to be noted in the study of metaphor: that, if we are inclined to reject metaphors lacking in appeal to sense, so also are we inclined to reject those which lack significance for intellect. "Every expression in a poem ought to be in itself an intelligible picture."[1] The natural object

[1] SHELLEY, to Thomas Medwin, Pisa, April 16, 1820.

to which the poet directs our eyes in forming his simile takes on force and value only when over it has been cast the shadow of great passion, that is, when it has been given new relevance to our life. Mere representation may excite admiration for its skill or fidelity, but can win only a detached and passing consideration. The line Tennyson is said to have called his best,

The mellow ouzel fluted in the elm

is a pretty little *tour de force*, stirring pleasantly the membrane of the ear, but simply trivial when set beside the utterances of really great art. For the genuine poet, the similitudes which count are those which bind natural to human things, similitudes which are true analogies and which because of this valid relationship can give meaning to human experience. Poetry is not pointless picture-making, nor a fanciful juxtaposition of natural and mental objects.

Four seasons fill the measure of the year:
There are four seasons in the mind of man:

declares Keats boldly, and there is neither falsehood nor superficiality in the poet speaking of a "winter of our discontent" or of a time of year for us "when yellow leaves, or few, or none, do hang upon the boughs . . ."

The metaphor, then, which may be thought of as the poem in miniature, stands, like it, midway between the mind and an original, in order to bring us a new understanding of the latter, and it is interesting to note how this fact can reconcile the apparently opposed tempers and inclinations of certain great artists, some of whom are inclined to take the real and familiar, others the imaginary and fanciful, as their point of departure. In either case great poetry may result, although in one instance the art has the effect of making everyday things seem new and significant, in the other that of giving to the remote and wondrous the reality of common daylight; or, in Shelley's beautiful language, poetry either "spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things." The most celebrated exemplification of this contrast is found, of course, in Coleridge and Wordsworth and is expressed by the former in the famous passage concerning the plan of the Lyrical Ballads.[1]

The observation by Lord Bacon, to which Shelley refers with approval, that the faculty of perceiving similitudes is "the storehouse of axioms common to all knowledge," suggests another line of inquiry whereby we may catch a glimpse of the relation between poetry and science and at the same time see why Shelley is led to associate metaphor with the origin of language.

It may be recalled that the mere power of perceiving similitudes is common to all minds, those of higher order being distinguished from the rest simply by the possession of this power in an eminent degree. Merely to see a resemblance and to enjoy it, however, is not to form a metaphor. All the mind does at such times is to experience the gratification of beholding two things in one, so to speak; an achievement naturally delightful to intellect. It is this sort of pleasure even a child will feel upon finding

1 Cf. *Biographia Literaria*, chap. xiv.

that the potato on its plate has a grotesque resemblance to a human face. In one object two separate forms are apprehended, but no effort is made to identify them nor to turn this superficial likeness to a higher purpose.

Similitudes, in the form of parallel cases and comparable phenomena are also the concern of science. The grasping of these likenesses in the primitive stages of human experience leads to the genesis of those first principles upon which all reasoning must rely, and in this sense it is true that the faculty which perceives them becomes the source of axioms common to all knowledge. But the explicit and positive function of similitudes in scientific thinking is to make possible an argument from them to some common principle; for example, from the similarities observable in the behavior of man and the higher brutes it might be concluded that both have an internal faculty of imagination. But it is to be noted that in science only those resemblances are heeded which seem able to lead the mind to the attribution of a common nature. The medical man, called to attend the mayor of Hamelin, might possibly have observed that

> Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
> Than a too-long-opened oyster,

but would doubtless have put aside the comparison at once as having nothing in it to advance his purpose. Furthermore, even when he had fixed upon the similarities between this case and others which seemed to permit a diagnosis, he would be careful not to go beyond the evidence. His ultimate goal, as scientific thinker, being the objective truth, he would in all he did submit himself to the facts and distinguish carefully between the known and the conjectural.

In contrast to the humble servitude of the scientist the poet's freedom seems almost god-like, the secret of this freedom lying in the fact that his objective is not dictated to him by nature but is of his own choosing. For the poet does not inhabit a cosmos of which he is doomed to be the mere cautious and doubtful observer. His world is rather all

> the mighty world
> Of eye, and ear, — both what they half-create
> And what perceive;

It is a universe which is not, of course, — as these lines indicate — wholly of his own fabrication. His vehicle of expression, the very medium of his art, for one thing, is something he must accept, with the limitations which it imposes; human nature also has its "unalterable forms" to which he must be loyal. Yet within these limits the infinity of intellect asserts itself and no bounds can be set to the different kinds of works the artist may choose to undertake. Even in the arts nearest to the useful, like that of architecture, for example, this vast indefiniteness is apparent. In spite of the fact that he must work in materials few and intractable, and must serve such rigid human ends, who will venture to predict all the possible varieties of structures of which the architect is capable? As for the poet, whose art is the highest and most intellectual, and whose

medium the most plastic of all, his freedom is such that it is small wonder he is sometimes deceived into thinking his own the most exalted of human pursuits.[1]

Since it is carried on in view of a goal or purpose freely chosen, the artistic consideration of a similitude will not be bound to a scientific regard for fact. The poet will point to likenesses or even make outright identifications simply as it suits his end; that end being, as we have seen, the expression of some phase or aspect of the limitless stress and surge of human passion. The language employed will be that of metaphor and image, as most proportioned to human nature, but the poet's choice of similitudes will be governed by the single consideration of their suitability for the purpose he has in view; and hence he may disregard the degree to which they are based in fact and may thus gather them "from all objects, alike remote or near." We may sometimes think, upon meeting with a poor metaphor, that the ground for our disfavor is an improbability with reference to fact; but such is really not the case. If the similitude represented had contributed forcefully to the artist's purpose, any improbability in it would have passed without comment. We cannot enjoy the incompatible mixture of images in the following:

> . . . his snow-white brows
> Went arching up, and like two magic ploughs
> Furrow'd deep wrinkles in his forehead large,
> Which kept as fixedly as rocky marge;

But if the effect is grotesque and unpleasing, it is not because the objects concerned are never found together in nature, but simply because they have not been made to come together by the art of the poet in support of a single artistic effect.

> Her skin was like the grape
> Whose veins run snow instead of wine,

brings together elements at least as unlikely but achieves a union of them in one brilliant result.

It should be plain now what relation exists between the poet as creator of metaphor and as creator of language itself. The breadth of his glance, "from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven," and the quasi-infinity of his subject-matter, which is human conduct in all its endless variability and subjection to the accidents of fortune, are such that the poet's message must be unique; for no two minds could possibly share, much less express, precisely the same poetic experience.[2] It is therefore "the forms of things unknown" which his imagination seeks to "body forth" and so it follows that his language must be not only vitally metaphorical, but vitally original; he not merely is permitted to choose his metaphors from far and near but is compelled to find such as have never been used before. Hence the tend-

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[1] "If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosopher and Experimentalist would soon be at the ratio of all things, and stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again."—BLAKE.

[2] See below, chap. V, p.154, for further discussion of this point.

ency seen in so many great artists to escape somehow from the limitations of conventional speech, either by an attempt to recover the artless and effective form which the language possessed in its origins, or by elaborating a new and highly personal diction — the latter tendency finding extreme form in writers like Milton or James Joyce, whom a modern critic recently compared as both having used a language "based on English." This natural urge to give new force and freshness to speech by the discovery of metaphors can be pursued in cruder fashion by the community as a whole, as Shelley suggests when he states that "Every original language near to its source is in itself the chaos of a cyclic poem," and it may perhaps be conceded that the vast majority of our words, even though no longer possessing a metaphorical value, originated in this way.

But we are not obliged to follow him in maintaining that words which have lost their figurative value and those which, as the arbitrary symbols of reason, have never had it, are thereby "unfit for all the nobler purposes of human intercourse." The statements of philosophy may appear cold indeed when set beside the vital utterance of poetry, but it must be remembered that the infinite variety of the latter is owing to the nature of its object, which is below the level of the intelligence. The philosopher, in Blake's epigram, is likened to the dog which lets go of the bone to grasp at its shadow in the brook only to lose both; while the poet is content to hold firmly to the reality. But the truth is that neither the one nor the other ever have their hands on it: more properly the poet might be compared to a man tasting some exotic fruit and attempting to tell us what it is; the best he can manage is to say what it is like; that it resembles this and reminds him of that and so on interminably, each new comparison a delightful hint of the nature of the reality but never actually attaining it, for the reason that it is a sensation and not wholly communicable. The scientific thinker has really seized upon something and has made it his own; hence he can tell us in fixed and final terms what he understands. Unfortunately, although his concept may be irrefutably true, it too is partial and unsatisfying, at least for the vast majority of men. We shall have occasion later to treat more precisely of the relative dignity of poetry and speculative science, but for the present it should be clear that, while the terminology of the latter may be abstract and bloodless, in this domain no other is possible, and, if the value of language rest in its power of conveying truth, the discourse in which this serves cannot be considered among the less noble of human enterprises.

IV. POETIC INTUITION

But poets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting: they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion. Hence all original religions are allegorical, or susceptible of allegory, and, like Janus, have a double face of false and true. Poets,