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THE MICROSCOPE OF WIT.
I.A. RICHARDS AND ENGLISH
LITERARY CRITICISM

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in English at Massey University.

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1973.

The Microscope of Wit. I.A. Richards and
English Literary Criticism

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines some aspects of the analytical approach to poetry which is associated with such critics as I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis. It also examines the resemblances between this approach and that which in eighteenth century literary criticism appears as a preoccupation with "propriety" in poetic language.

I.A. Richards is discussed first and at greatest length since he is the most persistently theoretical of the critics with whom this thesis deals, and consequently affords an opportunity for an exposition of the principles which underlie this analytical approach.

This exposition is followed by an account of some fundamental features of the doctrine of "propriety", illustrated chiefly from Dr. Johnson's Shakespeare criticism. It is suggested that key ideas of Richards', such as "complexity" and "realisation" correspond with central ideas in eighteenth century literary criticism. This correspondence reveals itself as an interest in the fact that words in poetry interconnect with each other in complex ways. I.A. Richards' term (developed most thoroughly in Coleridge on Imagination) for such interconnection is "interanimation". The corresponding eighteenth century term is "propriety".

The thesis then examines the literary criticism of T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis and W. Empson. The ideas they hold in common with I.A. Richards are outlined, and then what may be called the distinctive features of their respective approaches are discussed.

The emphasis, throughout the thesis, is upon some methods of analysing poetic language and upon the principles which underlie such methods. The thesis does not attempt to give a complete account of the critics with whom it deals, nor to examine the question of what influence they may have exerted upon each other,

PREFACE

In the following thesis I am, broadly speaking, interested in some methods of analyzing poetic language and in the principles which lie behind such analysis. I examine the work of I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis and W. Empson, whose names are associated with what might be called, for the sake of convenience, the "Cambridge school of criticism".

I begin with an account of I.A. Richards, because he is the most persistently theoretical of the critics I have mentioned, and thus affords the best opportunity for a basic outline. I examine his work at some length, since I disagree with the main conclusions of Dr. J. Schiller's I.A. Richards' Theory of Literature, and, to a lesser extent, with W.H.M. Hotopf's detailed examination of Richards in Language, Thought and Comprehension. A Case Study of the Writings of I.A. Richards. I argue that the notion of "interanimation", developed chiefly in Coleridge on Imagination, is Richards' most useful contribution to thinking about the analysis of poetic language, and that his work before and after Coleridge on Imagination is less satisfactory.

I then try to show the similarities between Richards' notion of "interanimation" and the eighteenth century concept of "propriety of diction", and to suggest that these similarities are fundamental. I rely for evidence chiefly on Dr. Johnson's Shakespearean criticism.

A comparison of Richards with Johnson is, I think, useful because it illuminates the "traditionality" of the modern critics and the "modernity" of the eighteenth century critics. I also hope, though I do not deal at great length with Johnson's Shakespearean criticism, to have done enough to show that the dominant modern view, which finds Johnson unperceptive, needs to be revised.

I then use the core of opinion, which I have argued is common to Johnson and Richards, to look at Eliot, Leavis and Empson. In each case I outline first the presence of that common core, and then discuss the distinctive features which accompany it.

I should like here to add a brief preliminary comment on the "common core" and the "distinctive features".

The eighteenth century doctrine of "propriety of diction" and Richards' concept of "interanimation" both refer to the ideal of interconnectedness in poetic language; in the work of a good poet all the aspects of a given word should interconnect to an unusual degree with all the aspects of the other words in the context. "Aspects" here means the senses, the connotations and the physical qualities of the words. In the language of modern criticism, this is a "complex" use of words, which constitutes a "realization" of whatever the poet is talking about. In the language of eighteenth century criticism, "propriety of diction" ensures that the verbal medium attracts no attention to itself—that it becomes transparent, so that the reader feels he is in the presence not of words, but of things and experiences. That is what I have called the "common core".

The "distinctive features" of modern criticism revolve largely around what one might call the idea of fruitful conflict, whereas the bias of eighteenth century criticism reveals itself in a heavy emphasis upon consonance. One can briefly illustrate this by comparing modern Shakespearean criticism with eighteenth century Shakespearean criticism. For the modern critic, Shakespeare's "bold" use of language is a central point for admiration; words are interconnected in such a way that their "normal" meanings are slightly modified. The old meaning and the new context react upon each other in a way which resembles the process of metaphor, but without any of the formal features of metaphor. This conflict between the old meaning and the new gives Shakespeare's language its vitality, or, to revert to the language I used above, the words are particularly complex (since they involve a subtle interplay between the new context and the old meaning) and thus "realize" their subject.

The eighteenth century critic is less admiring than his modern counterpart; he is anxious (and sometimes over-anxious) to detect the point at which "boldness" becomes "license"—at which the new context so dislocates the old meaning that the word disintegrates. Nevertheless, the eighteenth century and the modern critic have a considerable community of interest in "interanimation", and in related issues. I have tried to bring out this community of interest not only in my chapters on some aspects of "propriety", but also in occasional references, throughout the thesis, to Dr. Johnson.

Richards is the critic with whom I deal at greatest length and I have attempted to trace the development of his ideas. My accounts of Eliot, Leavis and Johnson are briefer and more general, and I do not attempt to describe any development in their critical thinking. In the case of Empson I restrict my discussion to Seven Types of Ambiguity. In view of the fact that the chronology of the works I discuss has not been at the centre of interest, I have arranged all the entries in my bibliography alphabetically.

Since my approach, though it does not enter into the question of mutual influence, involves comparisons between the critics with whom I deal, I have set out a rather detailed table of contents, describing briefly the sections into which I have divided each chapter. I hope that this will make cross-reference more easy.

I would like to thank Professor R.G. Freen, of the English Department at Massey University, for his unstinted assistance and his unvarying patience. I would also like to thank Mrs. Maureen MacDonald for her typing, and Mrs. Margaret Brogden for invaluable help in getting the manuscript into its present form.

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CHAPTER 1

THE MEANING OF MEANING

I.

The Meaning of Meaning is a foray into the problem of language and reality. Its villain is "verbal superstition", the mistaking of verbal fabrications for the real world.¹ Its burden is that we must firmly and consistently distinguish between two uses of language, the referential and the emotive. The former points to the world, the latter arouses or expresses feelings.

The context theory of meaning, used to explain the operation of referential language, should be outlined, because it recurs at later points in Richards' work. The theory is an associationist one, presented in causal terms. A condensed summary from Principles of Literary Criticism offers itself most conveniently for quotation:

On a number of occasions [a] word is heard in connection with objects of a certain kind. Later the word is heard in the absence of any such object. In accordance with one of the few fundamental laws known about mental process, something then happens in the mind which is

1. C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning, tenth edition, 1949, p.36. That Richards, though not the sole author of The Meaning of Meaning, agreed with its main tendencies, I assume throughout.

like what would happen if such an object were actually present and engaging the attention. The word has become a sign of an object of that kind.²

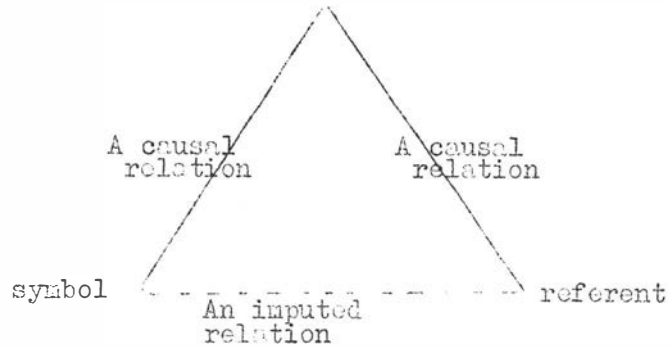
As the phrasing there implies, this account is part of a general theory of signs, which Hotopf summarizes as follows:

whenever an object, which has been experienced together with or just before another object, causes us to think of that other, then it acts as a sign of the other. These objects are then said to form a context; supply one part of the context, and thought of the other follows.³

In The Meaning of Meaning this is illustrated by saying that a match-scraps may become a sign of the ensuing flame.⁴

The context theory insists that there is no direct relation between words and things. The triangle of meaning is offered as a diagrammatic model of referential meaning.⁵

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2. I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, London, 1926, p.127.
 3. W.H.N. Hotopf, Language, Thought and Comprehension. A Case Study of the Writings of I.A. Richards, London, 1965, p.21.
 4. The Meaning of Meaning, pp.52-54.
 5. *ibid.*, p.11; my version of the diagram is simplified.



In referential language uses, the word (symbol) occasions a thought (reference) of an object of a certain kind (referent). Such an occurrence is called a "symbol-situation".

But in most verbal utterances there are two kinds of sign-situation involved:

One is interpreted from symbols to reference and so to referent; the other is interpreted from verbal signs to the attitude, mood, interest, purpose, desire, and so forth of the speaker, and thence to the situation, circumstances and conditions in which the utterance is made.

The first of these is a symbol situation..., the **second is merely a verbal sign-situation like the sign-situations involved in all ordinary perception.**⁶

The words "attitude, mood, interest, purpose, desire" here link directly with the division of meaning into a number of different aspects, or functions. Five functions are enumerated:

- (i). Symbolization of reference;
- (ii). The expression of attitude to listener;
- (iii). The expression of attitude to referent;
- (iv). The promotion of effects intended;
- (v). Support of reference.⁷

6. The Meaning of Meaning, pp.223-4.

7. *ibid.*, pp.226-7.

The fifth function here is little used after The Meaning of Meaning.

It is described as follows:

Besides their truth, or falsity, references have a character which may be called, from the accompanying feelings, Ease or Difficulty. Two references to the same referent may be true but differ widely in this ease, a fact which may be reflected in their symbols.⁸

The first four functions are commonly referred to, in Richards' subsequent writing, as sense, tone, feeling and intention.⁹ In a later essay, "Towards a Theory of Comprehending", a scheme of seven functions appears, in which "indicating" and "characterizing" correspond with "sense"; "realizing" corresponds with "support of reference"; "valuing" and "influencing" correspond with "feeling" and "tone"; and "controlling" and "purposing" correspond with "intention".¹⁰ This suggestion of correspondence is not intended to be exact, but merely to show that there is, in the later schema, nothing essentially new.

Such, then, is a brief summary of Richards' context theory of meaning and the distinction between referential and emotive language.

For present purposes, the only other important point to be remembered from The Meaning of Meaning is that from the basic account

8. The Meaning of Meaning, p.225

9. I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism, London, 1929, pp.181-183.

10. I.A. Richards, Speculative Instruments, London, 1955, p.26.

of meaning are derived a number of rules for determining whether or not a given statement is emotive or referential and, so far as is possible, what sign-situations its references actually involve. These rules are called "Canons of Symbolism".¹¹ By reference to them a word or statement is translated into the various sign-situations which it might possibly involve. The relevance of this procedure to modern analysis of poetry may be most easily pointed to with reference to Empson, whose analysis of,

Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang,

consists of an enumeration of the sign-situations that may lie behind the words, together with an assertion that the line involves all of them.¹² Thus, although "ambiguity", or multiple-meaning is, in The Meaning of Meaning, regarded as one of the villains of the piece, the insistence upon its ubiquity opens a way for a demonstration of the part it plays in poetic language.

11. The Canons of Symbolism , The Meaning of Meaning, pp.87-108.

12. W. Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, Third Edition (Revised), London, 1953, pp.2-3. See also below, p.420.

II.

The foregoing brief outline, of course, raises questions in psychology and philosophy which go beyond the scope and competence of this account, but there are several other points which should immediately be noted.

The first of these concerns the aspect of meaning called "intention". In general this aspect is heavily stressed and the supplement by Malinowski gives it a central place in an account of language as a tool by which we achieve our ends rather than a picture of reality;¹³ but there is no psychological account of it in the language model which is the key-stone of the book. Further, in Practical Criticism and Coleridge on Imagination, Richards is able, though with some hesitancy, to discuss the relations between "sense" and "tone", or "sense" and "feeling", but is unable to deal with "intention" in the same way. "Intention", in fact, is not in the same category as "tone" and "feeling". It may well be a function of reference rather than emotion. Something as purely referential as a railway timetable has an "intention". Richards was to realize this and, in an Appendix to Practical Criticism says that "intention" has the function of controlling the relations between the other three aspects.¹⁴ Later, in Speculative Instruments,

13. For example, The Meaning of Meaning, p.312.

14. Practical Criticism, p.356.

he says: "Purposing, if you ask for a theory about it...can hardly be made more than a puzzle. It is too central."¹⁵ This point becomes of importance in a discussion of Schiller's interpretation of Richards' ideas about poetic language, which lays great stress on "purposing".¹⁶

The second point concerns the widespread misunderstanding of what Richards meant by calling the language of poetry "emotive" rather than "referential". Krieger, for instance, says that Richards made a "complete denial to poetry of the rational and meaningful."¹⁷ Against this should be set out clearly both what Richards was saying, and what he was not saying. He was not saying that poetry does not employ referential language. Again a summarized version of the point from Principles of Literary Criticism offers itself for convenient quotation:

A statement may be used for the sake of the reference, true or false, which it causes. This is the scientific use of language. But it may also be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude produced by the reference it occasions. This is the emotive use of language.¹⁸

15. Speculative Instruments, pp.172-173.

16. See below, p.151.

17. M. Krieger, The New Apologists for Poetry, Minneapolis, 1956, p.142.

18. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.267. Richards' italics. Cf. The Meaning of Meaning, p.239.

What Richards was saying may be illustrated by the following:

Only occasionally will a symbolization be available which, without loss of its symbolic accuracy, is also suitable (to the author's attitude to his public), appropriate (to his referent), judicious (likely to produce the desired effects) and personal (indicative of the stability or instability of his references). The odds are very strongly against there being many symbols able to do so much.¹⁹

To put it in another way, the differences between "referential" and "emotive" uses, "are due simply to the fact that an arrangement of symbols which will re-instate a situation by evoking emotions similar to those originally involved will, as things happen, very rarely be an adequate symbol for it."²⁰ Richards was, in fact, noting no more than what Dr. Johnson noted when discussing the "familiar" style, which he thought should be the staple of epistolary literature:

But it is natural to depart from familiarity of language upon occasions not familiar. Whatever elevates the sentiments will consequently raise the expression; whatever fills us with hope or terror will produce some perturbation of images, and some figurative distortions of phrase.²¹

Johnson's phrase "raising of the expression" is equivalent to Richards' "emotive aspects of language", and his "perturbation of images" is equivalent to Richards' "loss of symbolic accuracy". Both Richards and Johnson are noting an obvious truth: obvious, that is, if one has in mind a rigorous notion of symbolic adequacy.

19. The Meaning of Meaning, p.234.

20. *ibid.*, p.239.

21. Johnson, Rambler (No.152), The Works of Samuel Johnson, Yale University Press, 1969, v, 46.

III.

I agree, therefore with Hotopf's view that those who have attacked Richards' insistence that the language of poetry is emotive, have commonly misunderstood him.²² There is, however, a weakness in these early formulations by Richards which may have lent colour to those who misunderstood him.

This weakness may be described as an implicit assumption that Swinburne is the standard for discussing the language of poetry, and it involves a heavy stress on what Richards was later to call the "tied imagery", which consists of "articulatory imagery" and "auditory imagery", produced by the physical process of speaking and hearing the words, both of these effects being heightened by metrical arrangement.²³ In The Meaning of Meaning it is said, for instance :

One of the chief distinctions...between poetry and strict scientific prose is that in poetry we must consciously attend to the sensory characters of the words, whereas in prose we need not do so. This conscious attention to words as sounds does, however, tend to impede our further interpretations.²⁴

22. Language, Thought and Comprehension, pp.186-187.

23. Principles of Literary Criticism, pp.118-121.

24. The Meaning of Meaning, p.210.

The theme is picked up again a little later, in the remark that the "means by which words may evoke feelings and attitudes are many", followed by a list of means headed by tied imagery and rhythm. It is added here that "rhythms, and especially metres, have to a small degree an hypnotic effect"²⁵:

Emotionality, exaggeration of belief-feelings, the occulting of the critical faculties, the suppression of the questioning —'Is this so as a matter of fact?'—attitude, all these are characteristics of metrical experiences and fit in well with a hypnosis assumption."²⁶

These remarks involve more than a view that strictly referential truth is irrelevant to poetry. They suggest a general relaxing of the mind, of the kind that some modern critics have seen to be deleteriously inculcated by poetry like Swinburne's.²⁷

This under-playing of mental activity in the reading of poetry may partly spring from the view that there are two sign-situations involved in a verbal utterance, as described above by Richards.²⁸ It seems likely that this view of the emotive aspects of meaning, as different in kind from the referential aspect, inhibited a real interest in the relations between the aspects. These relations were to interest Richards more, as his thinking developed, and his ponderings on them in Practical Criticism are an important step on the way to the ideas expressed in Coleridge on Imagination.²⁹

25. The Meaning of Meaning, p.239.

26. *ibid.*, p.240.

27. See, for example, T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, London, 1951, pp.325-327.

28. See above, p.3.

29. See below, pp.90-95.

This separation of the referential and the emotive aspects is further apparent in the comments on metaphor in The Meaning of Meaning. Metaphor is divided into two broad kinds— "emotive" and "symbolic". Richards says of the former:

[it is] used not, as in strict symbolizing, to bring out... a structural feature in a reference, but rather to provide, often under cover of a pretence of this elucidation, new, sudden and striking collocations of references for the sake of the compound effects of contrast, conflict, harmony, inter-inanimation and equilibrium which may be so attained.³⁰

The latter involves "the use of one reference to a group of things between which a given relation holds, for the purpose of facilitating the discrimination of an analogous relation in another group."³¹

Principles of Literary Criticism uses the same formulation as The Meaning of Meaning. A symbolic metaphor is "illustrative or diagrammatical, providing a concrete instance of a relation which would otherwise have to be stated in abstract terms."³² An emotive metaphor is a "semi-surreptitious method by which a greater variety of elements can be wrought into the fabric of the experience."³³

In Practical Criticism, however, there is a change of emphasis. The distinction between the two metaphoric modes is drawn once again, but it is now stressed that one usually finds a combination of the two

30. The Meaning of Meaning, p.240.

31. *ibid.*, p.213.

32. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.239.

33. *ibid.*, p.240.

and that most "descriptions of feelings, and nearly all subtle descriptions, are metaphorical and of the combined type."³⁴

Richards, by this time, had become more interested in the interweaving of the referential and emotive aspects, and therefore unable to separate them.

There is a further weakness in The Meaning of Meaning, which runs through Richards' work, and which will be discussed in more detail when we come to examine Richards' thinking after Coleridge on Imagination.³⁵ This weakness is an excessive faith in the powerful knowledge which may be released by a mastery of the laws of language, and it is one of the central topics of Hotopf's critique of Richards. Hotopf contends that Richards over-estimates the benefit to be derived from a heightened awareness of how language works and neglects such obvious ways of increasing understanding as, for instance, a growing familiarity with a given subject.³⁶ Insofar as the study of literature is concerned, Richards' procedure, and his high ambitions, are clearly stated in The Philosophy of Rhetoric. Here he defines "rhetoric", which he sees as the central discipline of the humanities, as "a philosophic discipline aiming at a mastery of the fundamental laws of the use of language",³⁷ and adds that "the

34. Practical Criticism, p.222.

35. See below, pp.167-69.

36. Language, Thought and Comprehension, p.7.

37. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, New York, 1936, p.7.

whole business of Rhetoric comes down to comparisons between the meanings of words".³⁸ English literature, as a subject, or given body of writing, for study, has always been of interest for Richards primarily as a source of material for an enquiry into "the fundamental laws of the use of language". It is hard to think of any other English critic, who might be described as "major", whose interest in literature is so peripheral. This dominating pursuit of an understanding of language which will provide the key to literature, and to life, and the corresponding absence of any deep or prolonged study of a given body of literature, have two consequences for Richards' thinking about the analysis of poetic language. In the first place, it leads him to over-estimate the scope of the analysis of linguistic complexity. This happens, as we shall see, in Coleridge on Imagination. Later, however, there is a certain disillusionment, which appears in the extreme modesty of his recent commentary on a poem by Empson.³⁹ Although Richards developed a satisfactory idea of complexity in the language of poetry, and a satisfactory method of analysis, he seems unsure of their proper scope, at one moment holding out fantastic hopes, at another advocating extreme caution.

38. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.37.

39. See below, p.173.

CHAPTER 2

PRINCIPLES OF LITERARY CRITICISM

I.

The points stressed in the above brief discussion of The Meaning of Meaning are points about language: the context theory of meaning, the four aspects of meaning, and a heightened awareness of the ambiguity of language. In Principles of Literary Criticism there is very little about language, and our first concern is with Richards' general notion of "complexity". To illustrate this notion an extended quotation is necessary:

The extent to which any activity is conscious seems to depend very largely upon how complex and how novel it is. The primitive and in a sense natural outcome of stimulus is action; the more simple the situation with which the mind is engaged, the closer is the connection between the stimulus and some overt response in action, and in general the less rich and full is the consciousness attendant. A man walking over uneven ground, for example, makes without reflection or emotion a continuous adjustment of his steps to his footing; but let the ground become precipitous and, unless he is used to such places, both reflection and emotion will appear. The increased complexity of the situation and the greater delicacy and appropriateness of the movements required for convenience and safety, call forth far more complicated goings on in the mind. Besides his perception of the nature of the ground, the thought

may occur that a false move would be perilous and difficult to retrieve. This, when accompanied by emotion, is called a 'realisation' of his situation. The adjustment to one another of varied impulses—to go forward carefully, to lie down and grasp something with the hands, to go back, and so forth—and their co-ordination into useful behaviour alters the whole character of his experience.¹

Richards was an enthusiastic climber, and perhaps the spectacular nature of the example is a little distracting, but the main features are clear. First, the complexity of response produced by unfamiliarity creates a richer consciousness; second, when this is accompanied by emotion, there is a realisation of the experience. Evidently, this is the point that lies behind Richards' elaboration of "stock-responses".² The "stock-response" is that of the man unthinkingly walking over uneven ground. Conversely, the description of the unfamiliar situation employs words which are recurrent in the school of criticism that Richards helped to found: "complexity", "realisation", "delicacy", "rich and full...consciousness", and so on. Richards' essential point is commonplace enough. His stress on the importance of "novelty" is like that which appears for example, in Johnson's definition of "wit" or Coleridge's definition of the imagination.³ As Richards himself says in the Preface, "one does not expect novel cards when playing so traditional a game."⁴

1. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.109.

2. See below, pp.51-53.

3. See below, p.256 and p.25.

4. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.1.

Two further points about that account of complexity should be made. First, it supposes a high level of discrimination of stimuli. Second, neither here, nor at any other point in Principles of Literary Criticism, is there an account of the complexity of poetic language. The first of these is of importance, because Richards, at certain points, puts forward a view of poetry which involves a low level of discrimination. This view, as we have seen, is prominent in The Meaning of Meaning, and I will refer to it henceforth, for the sake of convenience, as Richards' "hypnotic theory" of poetry.⁵ The second is of importance because Richards' essential achievement, in Coleridge on Imagination, was to formulate the general idea of complexity in such a way that it could be conveniently harnessed to his ideas about the complexity of poetic language.⁶

Having quoted that account of "complexity" we should now outline its obvious bearings on some other key ideas in Principles of Literary Criticism. First, "impersonality", which is defined in terms of complexity of response. Richards describes our reaction to certain poems in the following way:

We cease to be oriented in one definite direction; more facets of the mind are exposed and, what is the same thing, more aspects of things are able to affect us. To respond, not through one narrow channel of interest, but simultaneously and coherently through many, is to be

5. See above, p. 10 for Richards' phrase "hypnosis assumption".

6. See below, pp. 93-94.

disinterested in the only sense of the word which concerns us here...And to say that we are impersonal is merely a curious way of saying that our personality is more completely involved.⁷

The chief stress here is upon the way in which such poems make us feel that we are in close touch with actuality. When we are responding to things or experiences in the complex way just described, "we seem to see 'all round them', to see them as they really are; we see them apart from any one particular interest which they may have for us."⁸

"Impersonality", thus defined, is closely related to Richards' well-known definition of "irony". He offers his definition in terms of two contrasted groups of poems, and says:

A poem of the first group is built out of sets of impulses which run parallel, which have the same direction. In a poem of the second group the most obvious feature is the extraordinarily [sic] heterogeneity of the distinguishable impulses. But they are more than heterogeneous, they are opposed. They are such that in ordinary, non-poetic, non-imaginative experience, one or other set would be suppressed to give as it might appear freer development to the others.⁹

The quality which the second group possesses is called "irony",¹⁰ which is a somewhat technical term, having only a tenuous link with the

7. Principles of Literary Criticism, pp.251-252.

8. *ibid.*, p.252.

9. *ibid.*, p.250.

10. *ibid.*

ordinary use of the word. Richards is here talking immediately of the "equilibrium" which results from the resolution of such opposed impulses, but this equilibrium itself is described in terms of a feeling of increased awareness of actuality, and the account of "irony" blends with the account of "impersonality", which we have already described. The same is true of the account of "synaesthesia" in The Foundations of Aesthetics, of which the closing words are:

In conclusion, the reason why equilibrium is a justification for the preference of one experience before another, is the fact that it brings into play all our faculties. In virtue of what we have called the synaesthetic character of the experience, we are enabled, as we have seen, to appreciate relationships in a way which would not be possible under normal circumstances. Through no other experience can the full richness and complexity of our environment be realised. The ultimate value of equilibrium is that it is better to be fully than partially alive.¹¹

Thus, both "impersonality" and "irony" are defined in terms of a complex response which produces a heightened consciousness of actuality.

The idea of a complex response through many channels is elaborated in Richards' account of the poet's memory. Memory is described as "that apparent revival of past experience to which the richness and complexity of experience is due".¹² As a model of the

11. C.K. Ogden, I.A. Richards and James Wood, The Foundations of Aesthetics, London 1922, p.91.

12. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.103.

working of memory Richards gives, instead of metaphors from telephone exchanges or stores of records, this:

an energy system of prodigious complexity and extreme delicacy of organisation, which has an indefinitely large number of stable poises. Imagine it thrown from one poise to another with great facility, each poise being the resultant of all the energies of the system. Suppose now that the partial return of a situation which has formerly caused it to assume a stable poise, throws it into an unstable condition from which it most easily returns to equilibrium by reassuming the former poise. Such a system would exhibit the phenomena of memory; but it would keep no records though appearing to do so.¹³

We are invited, as an aid to comprehension, to think of this system as a polyhedron "with a large number of facets upon any one of which it can rest".¹⁴

This model is put to use in Chapter XXII, "The Poet's Experience".

The argument of this chapter runs as follows. The poet's experience is unusually rich and complex, because he is unusually able to connect disparate areas of experience. He can do so because his past experience is at easier recall. Richards here quotes Dryden's description of Shakespeare as a man to whom "all the images of nature were still present."¹⁵ One might also here remember

13. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.104.

14. *ibid.*, p.105.

15. *ibid.*, p.181.

Boswell's account of Johnson's mind, which Leavis quotes while describing the vitality of Johnson's poetry:

As he was general and unconfined in his studies, he cannot be considered as a master of any one particular science; but he had accumulated a vast and various collection of learning and knowledge, which was so arranged in his mind, as to be ever in readiness to be brought forth.¹⁶

Or one may equally well recall Eliot's description of the poet's mind as "a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together."¹⁷

In Richards' scheme, recall of a complex structure of impulses will be more frequent than recall of a simple structure. In terms of the imaginary polyhedron, "the broader the facet the more numerous are the positions from which the polyhedron will settle down on that facet."¹⁸

But the complex structure must be organised: "Experience which has this organised character, it is reasonable to suppose, has more chance of revival, is more available as a whole and in parts, than more confused experience."¹⁹ This organisation depends upon "vigilance", which term describes a state in which "the nervous

16. F.R. Leavis, "Johnson and Augustanism", The Common Pursuit, p.101. Cf. Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. G.B. Hill, revised by L.F. Powell, Oxford, 1971, iv, 427-428.

17. T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, London, 1951, p.19.

18. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.182.

19. *ibid.*, p.183.

system reacts to stimuli with highly adapted, discriminating and ordered responses."²⁰ In summary the "point as regards revival can be put conveniently by saying that experiences of high vigilance are the most likely to be available."²¹

Finally an example is given, which is worth noting because it may be set alongside a similar passage by Eliot:

The wheeling of the pigeons in Trafalgar Square may seem to have no relation to the colour of the water in the basins, or to the tones of a speaker's voice or to the drift of his remarks. A narrow field of stimulation is all that [people less vigilant than the artist] can manage, and we overlook the rest. But the artist does not, and when he needs it, he has it at his disposal.²²

Eliot, in a well-known passage, says:

When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.²³

In this insistence upon vigilance as the condition of the complexity of the poet's experience, Richards is clearly offering a picture of

20. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.184.

21. *ibid.*

22. *ibid.*, p.185.

23. Selected Essays, p.287.

the poet which is directly opposed to the stereotype of the poet as dreamer. In this respect he is of that period in which the idea of the poet as "wit" was being vigorously revived.

In the above summary of the ideas of "complexity", "impersonality", "irony", and "vigilance", we have shown the heavy stress which falls upon a high level of discrimination of stimuli, and as a final pointer here we may record Richards' remark that the poet is "pre-eminently accessible to external influences and discriminating with regard to them"²⁴ or, from the reader's point of view, that in reading poetry "we seem to see things as they really are".²⁵ This is not, for Richards, a peripheral point; many of his key statements depend upon it.

I have illustrated it at length because there are other important elements in Principles of Literary Criticism which appear to work in a contrary direction. These are contained in the "hypnotic theory", which, as I have already suggested, involves a low level of discrimination of stimuli or a reduction of "vigilance".

24. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.181.

25. *ibid.*, p.252.

II.

The "hypnotic theory", as developed in Principles of Literary Criticism, centres upon the idea of an equilibrium of opposed impulses, and is thus involved with the view which supposes a high level of vigilance, though it is, in fact, contrary to it. I will look at this involvement in some detail.

I will record first some points at which a low level of discrimination is discussed and show how this relates to the "hypnotic theory" of poetry, and to the idea of equilibrium of opposed impulses.

In Chapter XI, "A Sketch for a Psychology", we are told that "experience has two sources which in different cases have very different importance".²⁶ When we are responding to things in the outside world "our behaviour in all probability will only be appropriate...in so far as it is determined by the nature of the present and past stimuli and we have received from those things and things like them."²⁷ When, however, we are "satisfying our needs and desires a much less strict connection between stimulus and response is sufficient."²⁸

We are given some examples of this less strict connection:

26. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.87.

27. *ibid.*

28. *ibid.*

A baby howls at first in much the same way, whatever the cause of his unrest, and older persons behave not unlike him. Any occasion may be sufficient for taking exercise, or for a quarrel, for falling in love or having a drink.²⁹

This is a low level of discrimination indeed, and Richards clearly has in mind our conduct during our less aware moments. And yet this idea of a loose connection between stimulus and response, this inhibition of awareness for satisfaction of a need, heavily colours some areas of his discussion of poetry.

This can be seen in Richards' disagreement with Coleridge about the action of metre. He quotes Coleridge's well-known description of the effect of metrical rhythm:

It tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention. This effect it produces by the continued excitement of surprise, and by the quick reciprocations of curiosity still gratified and still re-excited, which are too slight indeed to be at any one moment objects of distinct consciousness, yet become considerable in their aggregate influence. As a medicated atmosphere, or as wine during animated conversation, they act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed.³⁰

Richards praises this description but with such reservations that it seems odd that he should have singled it out in the first place. Coleridge obviously is here saying specifically of metre what he had said of imaginative poetry in general, that it heightens both thought

29. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.87.

30. *ibid.*, p.143. Cf. Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross, Oxford, 1958, ii, 51.

and feeling in the reader.³¹ That it does both is, of course, crucial to Coleridge's claims for poetry. But Richards argues as follows:

[metre works] not as Coleridge suggests, through the surprise element..., but through the absence of surprise, through the lulling effects more than through the awakening. Many of the most characteristic symptoms of incipient hypnosis are present in a slight degree. Among these [are] susceptibility and vivacity of emotion, suggestibility, limitations of the field of attention and marked differences in the incidence of belief-feelings closely analogous to those which alcohol and nitrous oxide can induce....³²

As was suggested earlier, to alcohol and nitrous oxide one might, amongst poets, particularly add Swinburne. The lulling process here described is in odd contrast with the vigilance stressed elsewhere—unless one is to argue that what is produced by the poet's heightened vigilance in turn decreases the reader's vigilance.

With this treatment of Coleridge on metre, may be compared Richards' treatment of Coleridge on imagination. Richards gives an edited quotation from Coleridge:

imagination...reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities... the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement.³³

31. Cf. Biographia Literaria, ii, 12.

32. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.143.

33. *ibid.*, p.242. Biographia Literaria, ii, 12.

He uses this to buttress his claim that the essential significance of poetry lies in its reconciliation of opposed feelings. Here too he is neglecting Coleridge's stress on awareness, on mental activity.

The connection between the above account of metre, and the description of situations where there is a low level of discrimination of stimuli may be stressed by a further quotation from Chapter XI:

To this partial independence of behaviour (from stimulus) is due the sometimes distressing fact that views, opinions and beliefs vary so much with our differing moods. Such variation shows that the view, belief or opinion is not a purely intellectual product, is not due to thinking in the narrower sense, of response that is governed by stimuli, present or past, but is an attitude adopted to satisfy some desire, temporary or lasting.³⁴

The "hypnotic theory" is geared to the idea of equilibrium of opposed impulses and hence is promoted to a central place in Principles of Literary Criticism. This is done by asserting that the equilibrium, or reconciliation, is primarily brought about by the "tied imagery", heightened by rhythm. "Tied imagery", which we have already briefly mentioned,³⁵ is described as follows: "The chief of these [the tied images] are the auditory image—the sound of the word in the mind's ear—and the image of articulation—the feel in the lips, mouth, and throat, of what the words would be like to speak."³⁶ It is further said that these "forms of tied imagery

34. Principles of Literary Criticism, pp.87-88.

35. See above, p.9.

36. Principles of Literary Criticism, pp.118-119.

might also be called verbal images, and supply the elements of what is called the 'formal structure' of poetry."³⁷ They form, that is, the material upon which metre operates.

The inaccessibility of the "tied imagery" to inspection is immediately stressed. Richards, attacking a crudely representational theory, insists that the "tied imagery" does not operate by any resemblance to sensation:

What gives an image efficacy is less its vividness as an image than its character as a mental event peculiarly connected with sensation. It is, in a way which no one yet knows how to explain, a relict of sensation and our intellectual and emotional response to it depends far more upon its being, through this fact, a representative of a sensation, than upon its sensory resemblance to one.³⁸

The relation between image and sensation is "at present hidden from us in the jungles of neurology."³⁹ Richards is making the same sort of point that Johnson made when he denied Pope's claim that metrical effects are capable, in themselves, of subtle expressiveness.⁴⁰

Richards' thinking here is also in line with that of The Meaning of Meaning; just as there it was pointed out that there is no direct relation between word and thing, so here it is pointed out that there is no direct relation between "tied image" and sensation.⁴¹

37. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.121.

38. *ibid.*, pp.119-120.

39. *ibid.*, p.120.

40. Lives of the Poets, ed. G.B. Hill, Oxford, 1905, iii, 230-232.

41. See above, p.2.

This account of the "tied imagery" looks directly forward to the key chapter on the "imagination". He discusses the experiences occasioned by the resolution of opposed impulses, and adds:

These opposed impulses from the resolution of which such experiences spring cannot usually be analysed. When, as is most often the case, they are aroused through formal means, it is evidently impossible to do so.⁴²

The "formal means" are the tied imagery and the metre, and Richards is here attributing to them what he sees as the most crucial effect of poetry. At this point he adduces Coleridge: "To point out that 'the sense of musical delight is a gift of the imagination' was one of Coleridge's most brilliant feats."⁴³ This gift, translated into Richards' language, is the "power of combining all the several effects of formal elements into a single response," and the mode of operation is "most intricate and most inaccessible to observation."⁴⁴

Both Richards and Coleridge claim a central place for metre, but the difference is that for Coleridge metre heightens vigilance, whereas for Richards it has an hypnotic effect— a very large difference, as Richards was to realize.⁴⁵

42. Principles of Literary Criticism, pp.250-251.

43. *ibid.*, p.245.

44. *ibid.*

45. See below, pp.95-97.

III.

Having outlined the way in which the "hypnotic theory" takes a central place in Principles of Literary Criticism, we should now suggest why Richards wished so heavily to emphasize the importance of the tied imagery and its inaccessibility to observation.

The chief reason is that, wishing to deny that poetry uses language referentially, which, as we have suggested, is in itself a fair denial, he is led into an attempt to place the heaviest possible emphasis on those elements which are at the farthest remove from reference. The reason, in turn, for this, is his wish to defeat those who go to poetry looking for a "message", a thought, idea, belief or opinion, which may be extracted from it. Hotopf regards this, rightly I think, as the chief motive in Richards' insistence that poetry is composed of "pseudo-statements", or that it is non-referential.⁴⁶ Richards has always wanted to insist, in varying formulations, that the "meaning" of a poem is the process of involvement that one goes through in the reading of it, and not something that can be extracted and contemplated in separation. In Principles of Literary Criticism message-hunting is called the "substitution of an intellectual formula for the poem or work of art."⁴⁷

Richards' chief way of attacking the message-hunters is to assert that poetry does not make statements but arouses "attitudes":

46. W.H.N. Hotopf, Language, Thought and Comprehension. A Case Study of the Writings of I.A. Richards, London, 1965, p.173.

47. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.275.

"it is in terms of attitudes, the resolution, inter-animation, and balancing of impulses—Aristotle's definition of Tragedy is an instance—that all the most valuable effects of poetry must be described."⁴⁸

In Science and Poetry, which is largely a popularisation of Principles of Literary Criticism, the terms "attitudes" and "pseudo-statements" occur together:

A pseudo-statement is a form of words which is justified entirely by its effect in releasing or organizing our impulses and attitudes (due regard being had for the better or worse organizations of these inter se); a statement, on the other hand, is justified by its truth, i.e. its correspondence, in a highly technical sense, with the fact to which it points.⁴⁹

It may be, incidentally, remarked again here that, in denying that poetry is referential, Richards consistently uses a rigorous notion of reference.

The formal definition of "attitudes" occurs in Principles of Literary Criticism. They are "imaginal and incipient activities or tendencies to action."⁵⁰ This stress upon bodily response rests on Richards' suggestion that "every perception probably includes a response in the form of incipient action. We constantly overlook the extent to which all the while we are making preliminary adjustments, getting ready to act in one way or another."⁵¹ This is illustrated by a

48. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.113.

49. I.A. Richards, Science and Poetry, London, 1926, p.59.

50. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.112.

51. *ibid.*, p.107.

brief account of how Richards was caused to leap out of his chair by a leaf falling on his head, as he sat out of doors reading of a centipede that bit Captain Slocum as he was sailing across the Atlantic. The stress on bodily response appears also in Science and Poetry, where it is said, for instance: "Emotions are what the reaction [to a poem], with its reverberation in bodily changes, feels like. Attitudes are the impulses towards one kind of behaviour or another which are set ready by the response."⁵²

Such, then, is the key motive for Richards' setting the "tied imagery", the direct effects of sound, articulation and metre, into a central place in his account of the functioning of poetry. This primacy of the direct effects is the basis of the "hypnotic theory", which lies in uneasy relation with the view that poetry involves a high level of awareness.

With the ultimate motives for the doctrine of "pseudo-statements" we are not directly concerned, since our business is with Richards' enquiries into the complexity of poetic language, but the obvious factors may be mentioned. Richards is attempting to cope, in the field of aesthetics, with the problems occasioned by the general collapse of belief in Christian dogma. In Principles of Literary Criticism this attempt appears as the following proposition:

52. Science and Poetry, p.19.

clear and impartial awareness of the nature of the world in which we live and the development of attitudes which will enable us to live in it finely are both necessities, and neither can be subordinated to the other. They are almost independent, such connections as exist in well-organised individuals being adventitious.⁵³

Poetry is important because it "conclusively shows that even the most important among our attitudes can be aroused and maintained without any belief entering in at all."⁵⁴ The theological beliefs which once, for many people, buttressed the Christian ethic, may have been undermined, but the ethic may, Richards suggests, be fully justified on experiential grounds. At many points this may be persuasive, but it seems that Richards refuses to face squarely up to the difficulties. To say that someone may readily, without, in some sense, "believing" in, for instance, the immortality of the soul, adopt the "attitude" which accompanies such a belief, seems a somewhat unreal claim. No matter how subtly one translates a statement such as "the soul is immortal" into a series of "pseudo-statements" designed to express or arouse an "attitude", it still, ultimately, claims to say something about the nature of reality; something which one may accept, reject, or remain undecided about, but which one cannot simply wish away.⁵⁵

53. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.282.

54. Science and Poetry, p.61.

55. See below, pp.108-111.

IV.

I have described the "hypnotic theory", noted its central place in Principles of Literary Criticism, and suggested the motives for its appearance there. I will now examine briefly how Richards manages to gloss over its odd contrast with the view which sees poetry in terms of heightened vigilance.

He does so by a consistently ambiguous use of one of his basic terms—"impulse". This ambiguity has been described at length by Hotopf, who calls the two uses of the word the microscopic use and the macroscopic use.⁵⁶ The macroscopic use is that which appears, to take examples from ordinary usage, in phrases like "an impulse to laugh" or "an impulse to flee". Hotopf calls it macroscopic because it involves far more than is covered by the microscopic use, which means a passage of electrical and chemical change along a nerve fibre. Hotopf criticizes this ambiguity on the grounds that Richards, by unfair use of it, manages "to refer to 'large abstractions' and minute events, [and] so...is able to combine large theoretical significance with a stress on actual experience as the touchstone of value."⁵⁷

For our purposes, the upshot of the ambiguity is that when Richards is talking of the "realizing" power of poetry, its power to make the reader feel in touch with actuality, he needs the microscopic sense, but when he is propounding the doctrine of equilibrium of opposed impulses, he shifts the emphasis to the macroscopic sense.

56. Language, Thought and Comprehension, pp.43-44.

57. *ibid.*, p.45.

The microscopic use is relevant to the illustrative situations which we have already quoted. The poet, listening, for example to the speaker in Trafalgar Square has observed not only the drift of the speech, but the flight of the pigeons, the colour of the water in the fountains, the tone of the speaker's voice, and so on.⁵⁸ His vigilance has enabled him to receive an unusually wide variety of stimuli, or, in plain language, he is unusually attentive and receptive. This, it will be recalled, makes him, also, unusually retentive of experience. That the response should be minute and detailed, and not automatic, is also the basis of the general account of complexity with which we opened our discussion of Principles of Literary Criticism.⁵⁹ The poet is open to a large number of incoming "impulses" (microscopic sense).

That in the doctrine of equilibrium the emphasis is on the macroscopic sense, is evident in Richards' most memorable example—Aristotle's account of tragedy. Here, Richards claims, are reconciled two elemental "impulses": Pity, the "impulse" to approach, and Fear, the "impulse" to turn away.⁶⁰

Richards' definition of the term "impulse" makes it clear how this ambiguity arises. An "impulse" is the "process in the course of which a mental event may occur, a process apparently beginning in a stimulus and ending in an act."⁶¹ The microscopic sense concentrates on the receiving part of the process, the macroscopic sense on the reacting part.

58. See above, p.21.

59. See above, pp.14-15.

60. Principles of Literary Criticism, pp.245-246.

61. *ibid.*, p.86.

I have argued that this ambiguity allows Richards to combine the "hypnotic theory" with the theory which pre-supposes a high degree of awareness in poet and in reader. It also allows him to harness to poetry the general theory of value which is set forth in Principles of Literary Criticism.

The simple basis of this theory of value is contained in the remark that anything "is valuable which will satisfy an appetency without involving the frustration of some equal or more important appetency."⁶² Throughout the chapter called "A Psychological Theory of Value" in which this remark occurs, "impulse" is used synonymously with "appetency". That last quotation, for instance, is followed by a sentence beginning, "There are certain evident priorities among impulses..."⁶³ "Satisfaction" is a key word in this chapter. The highest values, for instance, are said to be attained by "those fortunate people ... [whose] free, untrammelled activity gains for them a maximum of varied satisfactions and involves a minimum of suppression and sacrifice."⁶⁴

To this macroscopic use of "impulse" Richards then attaches the claim that poetry arouses "attitudes". From this junction it follows that poetry affords opportunities of attaining the highest values, because it can satisfy a greater number of simultaneous, and even opposed, impulses. It can do so because "the different

62. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.48.

63. *ibid.*

64. *ibid.*, p.53.

impulses which have to be reconciled are still at an incipient or imaginal stage", and the poetic situation is not "complicated by the irrelevant accidents which attend overt responses."⁶⁵

Such then is the way in which the "hypnotic theory", through its connection with the theory of "pseudo-statements", with the theory of equilibrium, and the general theory of value, is ingrained into the structure of Principles of Literary Criticism.

V.

That there are, in effect, two theories of poetry in Principles of Literary Criticism may be illustrated by the fact that Richards, without realizing what he is doing, postulates two kinds of poetry which correspond to the two theories. The representatives of the two kinds are Swinburne and Hardy.

In a discussion of the varying importance of the sense of the words in poetry Swinburne is quoted:

There glowing ghosts of flowers
 Draw down, draw nigh;
 And wings of swift spent hours
 Take flight and fly;
 She sees by formless gleams
 She hears across cold streams
 Dead mouths of many dreams that sing and sigh.⁶⁶

65. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.112.

66. *ibid.*, p.129.

Richards comments: "Little beyond vague thoughts of the things the words stand for is here required. They do not have to be brought into intelligible connection with each other."⁶⁷ In contrast with this some few lines of Hardy are quoted:

"Who's in the next room? —who?

I seemed to see

Somebody in the dawning passing through

Unknown to me."

"Nay: you saw nought. He passed invisibly."⁶⁸

Generalising from this, Richards suggests that Hardy "would rarely reach his full effect through sound and sense alone,"⁶⁹ and that, in his case, more "important are the further thoughts caused by the sense, the network of interpretation and conjecture which arises therefrom."⁷⁰ Richards sees this as a fundamental difference and adds:

A temptation to which few do not succumb is to suppose that there is some "proper relation" for these different parts of the experience, so that a poem whose parts are in this relation must thereby be a greater or better poem than another whose parts are differently disposed ...A dog is not a defective kind of cat, nor is Swinburne a defective kind of Hardy.⁷¹

As we shall see, however, Richards' thinking became increasingly geared to poetry which demands a "network of interpretation and conjecture"; the kind of poetry which operates through a minimal

67. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.129.

68. *ibid.*

69. *ibid.*

70. *ibid.*

71. *ibid.*, pp.129-130.

action of the sense and a maximal action of the direct effects gradually disappeared from his field of serious interest.⁷²

This suggestion that there are two different kinds of poetry corresponds to a similar division in Richards' account of metre. Richards stresses the hypnotic action of metre, and in this respect we have already seen him disagreeing with Coleridge.⁷³ This action is, in terms of the whole structure of Principles of Literary Criticism, by far the more important because of its connections with the doctrine of equilibrium and with the general theory of value. But, Richards adds, in his chapter on "Rhythm and Metre", "metre has another mode of action not hitherto mentioned."⁷⁴ He uses the term "movement"⁷⁵ to describe this mode of action and speculates about primitive connections between metre and dancing. As an example he gives:

And now the numerous tramplings quiver lightly
Along a huge cloud's ridge; and now with sprightly
Wheel downward come they into fresher skies.⁷⁶

Here, there is said to be "a very close connection between the sense and the metrical movement."⁷⁷ Further examples of this type of connection are given, and Richards then adds:

72. See below, pp.95-97.

73. See above, pp.24-25.

74. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.144.

75. *ibid.*

76. *ibid.*

77. *ibid.*

Nor is it always the case that the movement takes its cue from the sense. It is often a commentary on the sense and sometimes may qualify it, as when the resistless strength of Coriolanus in battle is given an appearance of dreadful ease by the leisureliness of the description,

Death, that dark spirit, in's nervy arm doth lie
Which being advanc'd declines, and then men die.
Movement in poetry deserves at least as much study as
onomatopoeia.⁷⁸

Clearly, in Richards' account of this second mode of action of metre, the emphasis is very far away from anything suggested by the idea that metre has a "lulling", incipiently hypnotic tendency. In its suggestion that a profitable area of study is the interweaving of the emotive aspects with the sense, it is moving in the same direction as the comment on Hardy. At the same time, the fact that Richards classes it, in importance, only with onomatopoeia, and gives the hypnotic effect the central place, indicates that his position is still very different from that contained in the account of metre in Coleridge on Imagination.⁷⁹

These comments on metre, finally, afford a convenient opportunity to re-stress a distinction which has already been made. In saying that Richards, in his remarks on Hardy and on that action of metre which may be called "movement", is opening the way towards a greater emphasis on the importance of sense, and its relations with

78. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.145.

79. See below, pp.95-97.

other aspects of meaning, I am not saying that he is abandoning the claim that poetry is non-referential. In the lines quoted above, for instance, words like "trampings", "quiver" and "sprightly" are not used referentially. There are, in Johnson's words, "figurative distortions of phrase" and there is "some perturbation of images".⁸⁰ Richards never abandons this position. What is open to change is Richards' view of the role played by "sense". From the point of view of a theory of the complexity of poetic language, and a method of analysing that complexity, such a change is necessary and important.

That a change was imminent is indicated by the following remark from Science and Poetry:

A good deal of poetry and even some great poetry exists (e.g. some of Shakespeare's Songs, and, in a different way, much of the best of Swinburne), in which the sense of the words can be almost entirely missed or neglected without loss.⁸¹

Here the word "even" confesses that this is, at least, an exceptional state of affairs. But Science and Poetry also permits us to recapitulate those features of Richards' thinking which encourage the lingering on of the "hypnotic theory", and a consequent neglect of the mental activity which poetry involves. An intrinsically loose connection between sense and the emotive aspects of meaning is implied by the idea that poetic experience has two streams, an

80. See above, p.8.

81. Science and Poetry, pp.22-23.

"intellectual" stream and an "active, or emotional" stream.⁸² In these terms Richards says that our "thoughts are pointers and it is the other, the active, stream which deals with the things which thoughts reflect or point to".⁸³ This separation of reference and emotion corresponds with the similar separation which we have noted in The Meaning of Meaning, where the referential and the emotive functions of language are said to involve two different kinds of sign-situation.⁸⁴ It also corresponds to the general fact, elaborated by Hotopf, that Richards employs two different psychological theories for the referential and the emotive functions.⁸⁵

If we may anticipate for a moment, we can see how much Richards was to change, by comparing his above comment on the two "streams" with the following, from Coleridge on Imagination, which stresses the primacy of sense: "The patterns of our thought represent, in various ways, the world we live in. The patterns of our feelings represent only a few special forms of our commerce with it."⁸⁶ And, if we may anticipate even further, we can find, in Richards' recent reissue of Science and Poetry, an acknowledgement of the difficulties caused by the basic separation of the referential and the emotive aspects:

82. Science and Poetry, p.13.

83. *ibid.*, p.14

84. See above, p.3.

85. Language, Thought and Comprehension, p.47.

86. Coleridge on Imagination, p.89.

The author [i.e. Richards] does, it is true, mention "innumerable connections" between his "intellectual" and his "active or emotional" streams and speak of their separation as no more than "an expoditor's artifice". But the whole layout of the account fights against a sufficient recognition of these mutual influences; and it is this I must now try to redress.⁸⁷

VI

Thus far, with regard to Principles of Literary Criticism we have looked at the theory of poetry which supposes complexity, produced by a high level of awareness, and at the "hypnotic theory", which has contrary tendencies. We have also looked at the uneasy relation between them, and at the potential for change of emphasis. I shall suggest now why changes were necessary, with particular reference to those changes required by a theory of the complexity of poetic language, and a technique for its analysis. But first, obvious general objections to the "hypnotic theory" may be mentioned.

We have seen how the "hypnotic theory" is, through the assertion of the central importance of tied imagery, connected with the doctrine of equilibrium, and hence with the general theory of value. The weakness here is that the general theory of value is, in its application to poetry, fundamentally suspect. The point is decisively made by Hotopf, who points out the dubiety of claiming that "impulses", in the sense of needs and desires, may be "satisfied" by the kind of incipient or imaginal action involved, in Richards' view, in the

87. Poetries and Sciences, London, 1970, p.93. I have changed Richards' special system of notation to inverted commas in this quotation. See my footnote on p.160, below.

reading of poetry.⁸⁸ To take an obvious instance, a sexual "impulse" may well be aroused by a poem, but it can scarcely be "satisfied" by one.

Richards himself seems to be implicitly aware of the difficulty, because when he is presenting his general theory of value he talks straightforwardly of the "satisfaction of appetencies", but when he is applying it to poetry he uses, not "satisfaction", but words like "balancing", "reconciliation", "adjustment", "resolution", and so on.⁸⁹

That weakness, important as it is, does not directly concern us, since we are not evaluating the theory of the value of poetry presented in Principles of Literary Criticism. But it relates, because it involves the ambiguous use of the word "impulse", discussed earlier, to a general weakness which concerns us more. This is the awkwardness of the language of "stimulus" and "response", of "actuality" and "desire", of "perceived" and "perceiver", which colours the whole of the book. "Impulse", as he defines it, is a useful term for Richards because it enables him, albeit unjustifiably, to slide from stimulus to response and back again as the needs of the moment dictate; but it brings him intolerable difficulties. As we shall show, as his insights into the complexity of poetic language develop, he has to re-formulate the general theory of complexity in

88. Language, Thought and Comprehension, pp.48-49.

89. See, for example, Principles of Literary Criticism, p.112, p.113 and p.251.

terms of a creative account of the mind, rather than a stimulus-response account.⁹⁰ It is only by doing so that he is able to bring the general theory and the theory of language usefully together.

A further important factor necessitating change is that Richards' stress on the importance of the tied imagery, together with his account of the way in which the tied imagery functions, places the chief way in which poetry works beneath the scope of analysis. It is only, he suggests, through an "accident", that the "ironic" group of poems listed in his chapter "The Imagination", reveal for inspection their complex action.⁹¹ In the majority of cases this complex action is supposed to go on in the neurological jungle of the tied imagery.

But an inspection of the poems reveals no reason to believe that they are in any way peculiar, nor does Richards give any such reason. I shall pause to consider some of them, partly in order to show this, and partly to show the path along which Richards' hint that they are complex ("ironic") leads.

Richards' essential statement about the two groups of poems runs as follows:

A poem of the first group is built out of sets of impulses which run parallel, which have the same direction. In a poem of the second group the most obvious feature is the extraordinary heterogeneity of the distinguishable impulses. but they are more than heterogeneous, they are opposed.⁹²

90. See below, pp.85-89.

91. Principles of Literary Criticism, pp.250-51.

92. *ibid.*, p.250.

My point is that the complexity of the second group offers itself very readily for analysis as complexity of meaning of the kind which we have seen Richards pointing out in his contrast of Hardy with Swinburne; the "network of interpretation and conjecture" caused by the sense of the words.⁹³

One of the complex group is Marvell's The Definition of Love, and here, to begin with, it is noticeable that Richards' term "irony" might easily be extended into its normal sense. This immediately leads one to feel that his term, therefore, would apply to any poem in what Dr. Leavis calls "the line of wit";⁹⁴ and Eliot had, of course, produced his well-known definition of "wit", which resembles Richards' definition of "irony", before Principles of Literary Criticism was written.⁹⁵

The irony of Marvell's poem hinges on the fact that the exalted nature of the love described is not entirely a matter of inclination; it is necessity which bars it from a more earthy fruition. While, therefore, giving its exalted nature due recognition, Marvell is acknowledging that it is not quite as simple as that. The situation, in general, is common and readily recognisable, and it is no defect in the poem that Marvell does not explicitly state the nature of the barriers between the woman and himself. The point about their inclinations is made clear in,

93. See above, p. 37.

94. F.R. Leavis, 'The Line of Wit', Revaluation, London, 1936, pp. 10-41.

95. Selected Essays, p. 303.

And yet I quickly might arrive
Where my extended Soul is fixt.

But for the accidents of fate there would soon be a meeting of more than minds. This theme is carried on through stanza eight where the geometrical metaphors are also puns on the language of clandestine assignation ("oblique", "angle"), and these puns prepare the way for a similar activity in the final stanza:

Therefore the love which us doth bind,
But Fate so enviously debars,
Is the conjunction of the mind,
And opposition of the stars.

"Conjunction", in the ordinary sense of "union", may have two meanings. First: "We both have a mind to make love, but, unfortunately, can't." Second: "Ours is a case of a marriage of true minds." These two meanings echo the central irony of the poem. Further, especially in view of the slightly rakish feel of the puns in stanza eight, it seems likely that "conjunction" also carries the meaning "sexual union", common at the time. In this case, "of the mind" takes on a slightly different sense and the meaning of the line is, "We are compelled to restrict ourselves to merely imagining making love". The movement of sense is complicated, but it is managed with a fine ease. The same is true of "rare" in the first stanza. It is easily carried, at the time, the derogatory sense of "precious", so that again there is reference to the basic irony; Marvell is glancing at the possibility that, in making such high claims for his love, he may be partly indulging in "precious-ness".

Richards' list makes it clear that the reflection of "irony", in

his sense, into complexity of sense is by no means restricted to "metaphysical" poetry. Patrick Spens shows similar features. For convenience, we may restrict ourselves to the final four stanzas:

O our Scots nobles wer richt laith
 To weet their cork-heild schoone;
 But lang owre a' the play wer playd.
 Their hats they swam aboone.

O lang, lang, may thair ladies sit
 Wi' their fans into thair hand,
 Or eir they se Sir Patrick Spense
 Cum sailing to the land.

O lang, lang, may the ladies stand
 Wi' thair gold kems in their hair,
 Waiting for their ain dear lords,
 For they'll se thame ne mair.

Have owre, have owre to Aberdour,
 It's fiftie fadom deip:
 And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spense,
 Wi' the Scots lords at his feet.

The complexity of feeling here consists of a mixture of contempt and pity, sorrow and anger. The little joke about the cork-heeled shoes and the floating hats touches a sardonic note. Cork-heeled shoes were a luxury article, and this implies that the lords were effete land-lubbers. They contrast with the narrator whose description of the whole thing as a "play" marks him as a dour, dry character. The note struck about the lords and their fancy shoes is carried on in the reference to the futility of the fans and golden combs of

their waiting wives. But the ineffectuality is also pathetic; a feeling of pity is brought out by the reference to the combs in their hair. The last stanza opens on a simple and magnificent organ-tone of doom, but the play of feeling at the close is complex. "At his feet" has several shades of meaning which interweave with each other. The lords are dead and buried along with Sir Patrick; for whatever they did they have paid the extreme penalty, and blame is therefore superfluous. They are also "at his feet" in obeisance (cf. "at the King's right knee", in the sixth line of the poem). They are lesser men than he, and are acknowledging it, which gains our sympathy for them, and this feeling is re-inforced because they are also "at his feet" asking forgiveness for the "ill deed" done to Sir Patrick and for having been such ineffectual sailors. There is simultaneously present a strong sense of their guilt and a strong impulse to forgive them.

As with Marvell's poem it is hard to see what is exceptional about complexity of meaning of this kind, even allowing for the fact that complexity is a much more familiar notion now than it was when Richards compiled a list of poems supposed to be exceptions to the rule that complexity of feeling operates beneath the level of observation. The same may be said, to take from the list a poem from another period, of Scott's Proud Maisie:

Proud Maisie is in the wood,
 Walking so early,
 Sweet Robin sits on the bush,
 Singing so rarely.

"Tell me, thou bonny bird.
 When shall I marry me?"

"When six braw gentlemen
 Kirkward shall carry ye."

"Who makes the bridal bed,
 Birdie, say truly?"

"The gray-headed sexton
 That delves the grave duly."

"The glow-worm o'er grave and stone
 Shall light thee steady;
 The owl from the steeple sing,
 'Welcome, proud lady!'"

The complex of feelings here is more peculiar, and therefore more difficult to describe in general terms, than in the two preceding poems. It revolves around the fact that though the prophecy is deadly, it is made by a sweet robin singing on a bush. To look at the verbal details, the owl also "sings", an odd word to use of an owl's cry, but completely justified. The complexity may best be described by spelling out the attitude to Maisie adopted by both robin and owl: "We sing because we are indifferent to your fate; we do not particularly care for you. We are also singing because your pride is not sufficiently important to us to provoke our anger; we have seen many such, and remain serene. Nonetheless, we are also singing because your pettiness does offer a justifiable opportunity

for a sad smile over your inevitable downfall." The owl also sings as part of the funeral rite, in which rite the glow-worm also figures, and implies: "Although not particularly concerned for you as an individual, we do that which common humanity requires we should do for anyone; to that extent we are saddened by your death." The total attitude, though it sounds intolerably complicated when an attempt is made to describe it in detail, is easily recognisable. It is an attitude often aimed at by moralists, and is compounded of detachment, a slight touch of contempt, absence of animus, and a steadiness free from any preaching note. Judgement is made without any of the unpleasant emotional concomitants that usually attend it, and made, therefore, with a touch of sadness.

That is a clumsy attempt to spell out what Scott suggests so economically and deftly. The important point is that it is a matter of complexity of meaning of a kind that one would expect in any good dramatic poem. It is evident that, having given the essential clue, Richards would have to turn his attention increasingly to complexity of meaning and that, in doing so, he would have to abandon the "hypnotic theory", with its stress on the primacy of the tied imagery. This process may have been accelerated by the experience that lies behind the next book that we shall examine, Practical Criticism, where Richards was disturbed, and with good reason, by the low level of vigilance of the average poetry reader of the time. The effect of poetry on many of his "protocol" writers appears to have been more than incipiently hypnotic.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL CRITICISM

I.

My discussion of Practical Criticism falls into three parts. I shall consider, first, the development of the view which sees poetry as involving a high degree of vigilance; second, Richards' work on the language of poetry, which, though incomplete in comparison with the account given in Coleridge on Imagination, constitutes an important step forward, and, third, the lingering on of unhelpful elements from the earlier work.

The most obvious features in the development of the view which sees poetry as creating an unusual degree of awareness are the discussions of "stock-responses" and of "sentimentality". Richards' basic claim is that "good poetry owes its value in a large measure to the closeness of its contact with reality and ...may thereby become a powerful weapon for breaking up unreal ideas and responses."¹

The subject of stock-responses had already been broached in Principles of Literary Criticism, and we will begin our account there. Richards says:

1. I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism, London, 1929, p.251.

The normal child under the age of ten is probably free from them, or at least with him they have no fixity or privileged standing. But as general reflection develops the place of the free direct play of experience is taken by the deliberate organisation of attitudes, a clumsy and crude substitute. 'Ideas', as they are commonly called, arise. A boy's 'Idea' of Friendship or of Summer or of his Country is not, though the name would seem to imply it, primarily an intellectual affair. It is rather an attitude, or set of attitudes, of tendencies to act in certain fashions rather than others. Now reflection, unless very prolonged and very arduous, tends to fix the attitude by making us dwell in it, by removing us from experience.²

By way of illustration Richards analyses a poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox:

After the fierce midsummer all ablaze
 Has burned itself to ashes and expires
 In the intensity of its own fires,
 Then come the mellow, mild, St. Martin days
 Crowned with the calm of peace, but sad with haze.
 So after Love has led us, till he tires
 Of his own throes and torments, and desires,
 Comes large-eyed Friendship: with a restful gaze
 He beckons us to follow, and across
 Cool, verdant vales we wander free from care.
 Is it a touch of frost lies in the air?
 Why are we haunted with a sense of loss?
 We do not wish the pain back, or the heat;
 And yet, and yet, these days are incomplete.³

2. I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, London, 1926, p.202.

3. *ibid.*, pp.200-201.

One may accept Richards' description of stock-responses, and agree with his dismissive comment on the poem, and yet find his commentary less than satisfactory. Its unsatisfactoriness springs from Richards' pre-occupation with the doctrine of equilibrium. He asks why the poem is popular and replies:

The explanation is, probably, in the soothing effect of aligning the very active Love-Friendship groups of impulses with so settled yet so rich a group as the Summer-Autumn simile brings in. The mind finds for a moment an attitude in which to contemplate a pair of situations (Love and Friendship) together, situations which are for many minds, particularly difficult to see together.⁴

This seems less than fair to the poem. Whatever one may feel about its defects, its last four lines are not aiming at a soothing effect. Nor are the love and friendship situations put together; one follows the other, and neither is seen by the poet to be entirely satisfactory. Richards has been somewhat unfair to the poem because he wishes to claim that it is merely a superficial reconciliation of opposed impulses.⁵ The second feature of Richards' commentary is more satisfactory but, in the context of Principles of Literary Criticism, it seems almost an accident:

The heavy regular rhythm, the dead stamp of the lines, the obviousness of the descriptions ('mellow, mild, St. Martin'; 'cool verdant vales') their alliteration, the triteness of the close, all these accentuate the impression of conclusiveness.⁶

4. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.201.

5. *ibid.*, pp.201-202.

6. *ibid.*, p.201.

More satisfactory because Richards' comments on the triteness of the language would elicit general agreement, but possessing an accidental air because there is, in Principles of Literary Criticism, no enquiry into poetic language. There is, certainly, not even a hint of a connection between complexity of language and the defeat of stock-responses, a connection which is the basis of Coleridge on Imagination.⁷ How much connection there is between the two in Practical Criticism I shall discuss later,⁸ but first I will illustrate how stock-responses and sentimentality are, in Practical Criticism, more firmly elaborated in terms of the general idea of complexity. As in the earlier book, the "chief cause of ill-appropriate, stereotyped reactions" is said to be "withdrawal from experience".⁹ There are, according to Richards, several ways in which this might happen, but the ones he wishes particularly to stress are, first, "through convention and inculcation, as when a child, being too easily persuaded what to think and to feel, develops parasitically";¹⁰ second, "intellectually, as when insufficient experience is theoretically elaborated into a system that hides the real world from us."¹¹

But in both cases the basic process is the same and is defined in terms of simplification as against complexity. We substitute ideas for experience and "even the most elaborate idea falls short of

7. See below, pp.93-94.

8. See below, pp.73-74.

9. Practical Criticism, p.246.

10. *ibid.*

11. *ibid.*

the complexity of its object".¹² Further, "we may call up our idea by the mere use of a word".¹³ This is in direct descent from the emphasis, in The Meaning of Meaning, on the dangers of "word-magic" — the substitution of symbolic phantoms for reality.¹⁴

The danger is to be avoided in one of two ways. Either by "scientific" thinking:

a thorough attempt to compare all the aspects of an object or situation, to analyse its parts, to reconcile one with another all its various implications, to order it in one coherent intellectual fabric with everything else we know about everything connected with it....¹⁵

Or by having at our disposal "a wide available background of relevant experience",¹⁶ which enables us to unite "aspects of experience that ordinarily remain unconnected".¹⁷ On this view, "the secret of genius is perhaps nothing else than this greater availability of all experience coupled with larger stores of experience to draw upon".¹⁸ This clearly rests upon the cluster of ideas that we have seen in Principles of Literary Criticism, and which are there drawn together in the account of the poet's memory.¹⁹

12. Practical Criticism, p.247.

13. *ibid.*, p.246.

14. See above, p.1.

15. Practical Criticism, p.249.

16. *ibid.*

17. *ibid.*

18. *ibid.*, pp.249-250.

19. See above, pp.18-22.

Sentimentality, as discussed in Practical Criticism, has a similar relation with the general idea of complexity.

Richards begins with various possible senses of the word "sentimental" and then offers the remark that a "response is sentimental if it is too great for the occasion".²⁰ Clearly this does not lead very far, and Richards goes on to develop a more complex definition which employs the psychologists' use of the word "sentiment", meaning "a more or less permanent arrangement in the mind: a group of tendencies towards certain thoughts and emotions organised around a central object".²¹ Two kinds of inappropriateness in such groups of tendencies are outlined. First when the object changes but the tendencies persist, as when a man continues "living in a certain house although increase in motor traffic has made life there almost insupportable";²² second, when the situation remains the same but the sentiment changes, as when a man turns painful war-time experiences into a subject for nostalgic reverie.²³ These two forms of distortion are used to offer the following definition:

A response is sentimental when, either through the over-persistence of tendencies or through the inter-action of sentiments, it is inappropriate to the situation that calls it forth. It becomes inappropriate, as a rule, either by confining itself to one aspect only of the many that the situation can present, or by substituting for it a factitious, illusory situation that may, in extreme cases, have hardly anything to do with it. We can study these extreme cases in dreams and in asylums.²⁴

20. Practical Criticism, p.258.

21. *ibid.*, p.260.

22. *ibid.*

23. *ibid.*, pp.260-261.

24. *ibid.*, p.261.

It is the simplification by confinement to one aspect which, less extreme and more common, is the more important. It is, clearly, a type of stock-response, and like the victims of stock-responses, the "sentimentalist, in brief, is not distributing his interest widely enough".²⁵ Again the root idea is the idea of complexity, of the heightened and enriched consciousness produced by receptivity to an unusually wide variety of stimuli.

Richards' stress upon multiplicity of response, is important because his recurrent dwelling upon it enables him, eventually, to translate Coleridge's key term "fusion" into the idea of multiple interconnection.²⁶ This translation is the most important single move in Richards' bringing together of the general idea of complexity and his account of linguistic complexity.

II.

I will now leave discussion of complexity, as a general idea, and look at Richards' work on poetic language in Practical Criticism. This work shows certain hesitations, and one reason for this is Richards' suspicion of analysis, which I will illustrate briefly before looking at the work itself.

25. Practical Criticism, p.270.

26. See below, p.90.

As we have seen, the views of poetry in The Meaning of Meaning and, though to a lesser extent, Principles of Literary Criticism, inevitably generate suspicion of analysis, because they suppose that the essential action of poetry lies beneath the level of observation.²⁷ In Practical Criticism, where there is increased emphasis on the importance of meaning which is open to analysis, there is still a cautionary strain, of which the following is representative. Richards sees analysis as cure for insensitive reading, but remarks of the cure:

[it] might be worse than the disease. The risk of supposing that the feelings which the logical expansion of a poetic phrase excites must be those which the phrase was created to convey is very great. We easily substitute a bad piece of prose for the poem.²⁸

This cautionary strain is also present in Coleridge on Imagination, where, for instance, it is remarked that no amount of analysis can convey the precise feel of a poem and that we always run the risk of mistaking our analytical instrument for the phenomena that it is attempting to describe.²⁹ In later books, especially Speculative Instruments and So Much Nearer, it is noticeable that references to Empson tend to be sceptical, while those to his imitators are disparaging. The following is typical:

27. See above, p.44.

28. Practical Criticism, p.216. Cf. p.39.

29. I.A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, second edition, London, 1950, p.97.

Within my lifetime—I seem almost to recall a specific beginning—a practice of expressing whatever a line of passage could possibly yield under squeezing has grown up. At first the practitioners were few and some of them (Laura Riding and William Empson, for example) early became renowned for powerful grasp; but competition soon jacks up standards. There are fashions in reading as well as in writing. Perhaps questions of relevance are now due for more searching discussion.³⁰

There is, of course, much truth in all of this. But it also relates to that feature of Richards' work which I touched upon at the close of my account of The Meaning of Meaning.³¹ When carried away by the feeling that the key to the laws of language is within reach, Richards can throw caution to the winds and embark upon projects beyond the scope of his analytical technique. When not in this mood he tends to be overcome by the multitude of difficulties in the way of analysis. As I suggested earlier, this is probably because Richards never himself used analysis in extended literary work, with the consequence that he undervalues its usefulness.

The other hesitations in the work on language in Practical Criticism will be dealt with as they arise. The work is based essentially on the four aspects of meaning: sense, tone, feeling and intention. It has already been noted that "intention" is neglected because of its centrality and, therefore, its difficulty;

30. I.A. Richards, So Much Nearer, New York, 1968, pp.199-200. Cf. p.100. Cf. also I.A. Richards, Speculative Instruments, London, 1955, p.184.

31. See above, pp.12-13.

its function is to control "the relations among themselves of the other three functions".³² Hotopf has adversely commented on Richards' reliance on these few basic terms: "One misses very much the illumination that the distinguishing of varied uses by linguistic philosophers has given to language. Richards' 'uses' are a few old flags set above a mass of percipience".³³ This is not entirely fair, since all depends on what one wishes to do. Richards himself notes this in an essay on the problems of translation, particularly from Chinese into English, where, borrowing from Charles Morris, he suggests seven aspects of language:

The linguist ... will set up one schema ...; the pedagogue ...will set up another. What schema will a translator set up to serve as a theory of the sorts and inter-relations of meanings to guide him in his own task?³⁴

He goes on to suggest that a translator will need "a schema as parsimonious as adequacy will allow",³⁵ and anyone who has attempted translation will agree that too elaborate a classification will put a stop to the work altogether. As far as literary criticism is concerned a "schema" as simple as Empson's in The Structure of Complex Words, which uses only two basic terms ("mood" and "implication")

32. See above, p.6.

33. W.H.N. Hotopf, Language, Thought and Comprehension. A Case Study of the Writings of I.A. Richards, London, 1965, p.250.

34. Speculative Instruments, p.25

35. *ibid.*

permits of a subtlety of analysis which most literary critics would feel to be more than adequate.³⁶

I will look first at Richards' discussion in the chapter 'Figurative Language'. In comparison with the earlier books, the greater emphasis on the importance of sense is apparent:

In most poetry the sense is as important as anything else; it is quite as subtle, and as dependant on the syntax, as in prose; it is the poet's chief instrument to other aims when it is not itself his aim. His control of our thoughts is ordinarily his chief means to the control of our feelings, and in the immense majority of instances we miss nearly everything of value if we mis-read his sense.

But to say this—and here is the distinction we have to note—is not to say that we can wrench the sense free from the poem, screw it down in a prose paraphrase, and then take the doctrine of our prose passage, and the feelings this doctrine excites in us, as the burden of the poem.³⁷

Here, again, one notices that feature of Richards' work over which I have expressed agreement with Hotopf; the chief motive in the doctrine of "pseudo-statements" was to defeat those who seek messages or ideas from poetry.³⁸ Richards' thinking did not, in this respect, undergo any basic change. But Hotopf neglects the

36. W. Empson, The Structure of Complex Words, London, 1952, pp.15-17.

37. Practical Criticism, p.191.

38. See above, p.29.

change that went on within the basic framework of ideas. It has already been suggested that the change might be described as a movement away from Swinburne, and it is around Swinburne that a large part of the discussion of sense, in Practical Criticism, revolves.

The context is a discussion of poem IX³⁹ and of comments on it by the protocol-writers, one of whom sharply describes it as "Swinburne-cum-water",⁴⁰ annoyed by the slack way in which the senses of the words are handled. Richards takes up the defence on Swinburne's behalf:

He is indeed a very suitable port in whom to study the subordination, distortion and occultation of sense through the domination of verbal feeling. But the lapses of sense are very rarely so flagrant, so undisguised, that the reader, swept on by the swift and splendid roundabout of the verse, is forced to notice them.⁴¹

It is noticeable that even the defence presents Swinburne as a good source of case-material for the analyst, rather than as a poet. By way of illustration Richards quotes from Atalanta in Calydon:

Before the beginning of years
 There came to the making of man
 Time, with a gift of tears;
 Grief, with a glass that ran.⁴²

39. Practical Criticism, p.118.

40. *ibid.*, p.129.

41. *ibid.*, p.195.

42. *ibid.*

Richards does not mention Eliot, but he is, whether intentionally or not, defending Swinburne against Eliot's criticism. In his essay upon Swinburne, which is a part of his whole early critical programme, Eliot had said of the same chorus:

This is not merely 'music'; it is effective because it appears to be a tremendous statement, like statements made in our dreams; when we wake up we find that the 'glass than ran' would do better for time than for grief, and that the gift of tears would be as appropriately bestowed by grief as by time.⁴³

It is, in fact possible to argue that the transposition is not entirely pointless (man's subjection to time, for instance, is an essential source of tears, and grief makes time hang heavily) and Richards does so.⁴⁴ But his general comment has an apologetic sound:

Some connection [between the words], though it may be tenuous or extravagant, can almost always be found in Swinburne, perhaps because of his predilection for the abstract and the vague. Vague thoughts articulate one with another more readily than precise thoughts.⁴⁵

And the phrasing here may be used to make the obvious point that Richards, in the same chapter, himself gives the soundest possible general grounds for agreeing with Eliot's view that Swinburne's use of language is less than satisfactory:

43. T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, third edition, London, 1951, p.326.

44. Practical Criticism, p.196.

45. *ibid.*

The enjoyment and understanding of the best poetry requires a sensitiveness and discrimination with words, a nicety, imaginativeness and deftness in taking their sense which will prevent Poem IX...from receiving the approval of the most attentive readers. To set aside this fine capacity too often may be a damaging indulgence.⁴⁶

The reader of Swinburne, by Richards' own account, "swept on by the swift and splendid roundabout of the verse", neglects such niceties. And this comment on the rhythm serves to recall that Richards is rapidly, in Practical Criticism, moving away from a hypnotic account of metre. This is clear in his remark on Poem XII, a rather empty and inflated description of clouds. When, Richards says, there is,

high-sounding grandiloquent diction and a very capably handled march of verse, when, above all, the movement is familiar and 'hypnotic', when there is nothing to force the reader to work at it, we feel safe in going ahead, the poetic function slips loose and private poems result.⁴⁸

The defence of Swinburne is a rather desperate rear-guard action, which may easily be defeated by Richards' own arguments.

In general, then, subtlety of sense receives more attention in Practical Criticism than Richards has given it hitherto. Of more particular interest than this, however, are some other points that are made in the discussion of Poem IX. These occur in the discussion⁴⁹

46. Practical Criticism, p.198.

47. *ibid.*, p.195.

48. *ibid.*, p.160.

49. *ibid.*, pp.196-197.

of the metaphor in:

Unless the sea were harp, each mirthful string
Woven of the lightning of the nights of Spring.⁵⁰

Amongst other objections, the protocol writers had criticized "woven", on the grounds that strings are not "woven", and the whole on the grounds that it is a mixed metaphor, since the harp is said to be made of sea and lightning.⁵¹ With regard to the latter point, Richards attempts a rule: "Mixtures in metaphors (and in other figures) may work well enough when the ingredients that are mixed preserve this efficacy, but not when such a fusion is invited that the several parts cancel one another."⁵² Richards' account is condensed, and he does not explain what he means by "parts", but the implications can be drawn out. As a bare possibility the metaphor is not nonsense; the lines of waves on the sea are most visible near a shore, and a curving shore may be thought of as resembling the shape of a harp. Lightning may readily be thought of as a line in the sky and, hence, not ridiculously, as a string. But the metaphorical action is very bare and single, since none of the usual further implications of the words are employed. The context cancels out the implications of rapidity, explosiveness, brightness and so on which are part of the "meaning" of "lightning". The same is the case with "sea". Richards then applies the rule to "woven", and arrives at a similar conclusion. The power to generate certain feelings,

50. Practical Criticism, p.118.

51. *ibid.*, p.127.

52. *ibid.*, p.196.

that 'woven' in a proper context certainly possesses, is damped and cancelled as it blends with the sea and lightning ingredients, nor is there anything else in the passage that it can seek help from in preserving an independent existence.⁵³

Richards is here, in fact, appealing to that principle which eighteenth century critics called "propriety"— the principle, simply, that words in poetry should fit in, or interconnect, as richly as possible with the other words in the context.⁵⁴ It is, of course, a principle that may be abused and, when we come to discuss the doctrine of "propriety", we shall consider to what extent it was abused by Dr. Johnson.⁵⁵ But it is no accident that Richards should comment, while discussing his protocol-writers' objections to the sea-harp metaphor: "It is clear that the spirit of Dr. Johnson has happily not altogether vanished from literary criticism".⁵⁶ Unfortunately, it had vanished to the extent that Richards, in The Philosophy of Rhetoric, could see only the eighteenth century abuses of the doctrine of "propriety", failing to point out its essential similarity with his own theory.⁵⁷ Richards makes the following generalisation from his discussion of "sense" in poetry:

53. Practical Criticism, p.197.

54. See below, pp.204-206.

55. See below, Chapter VII.

56. Practical Criticism, p.127.

57. See below, pp.134-135.

Is the pull exerted by the context (and in these cases the whole of the rest of the poem is the context) sufficient to overcome what may be described as the normal separate feeling of the questionable word?.... Or does the word resist, stay outside, or wrench the rest of the poem into crudity or confusion? To triumph over the resistances of words may sometimes be considered the measure of a poet's power (Shakespeare being the obvious example), but more often it is the measure of his discretion.⁵⁸

Johnson's notes on Shakespeare are an extended enquiry into the points at which Shakespeare's triumphs in this respect are questionable.

What is valuable, in the discussion of sense, for Richards' further thinking is simply the notion of interconnection of "parts" of words. His use of the word "fusion", in his rule about mixed metaphor, indicates that it has not yet occurred to him to think in terms of multiplicity of interconnection, but he has moved a long way from the view expressed in the following, from The Meaning of Meaning:

the use of metaphor involves the same kind of context as abstract thought, the important point being that the members shall only possess the relevant feature in common, and that irrelevant or accidental features shall cancel one another.⁵⁹

Richards now stresses the function of the several parts. Further, these are parts of meaning and, therefore, accessible to analysis.

58. Practical Criticism, pp.212-213.

59. C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning, tenth edition, London, 1949, p.214.

If we look more **closely** into Richards' work on language in Practical Criticism we can see why it was difficult for him to arrive at the idea of multiplicity of interconnection. The section I shall look at (his discussion of the relations between sense and feeling) is also of intrinsic interest.

It is important to note that his intention here, as in the bulk of Practical Criticism, is primarily pedagogic:

the most curious and puzzling cases of mutual dependence between different kinds of meaning occur with sense and feeling. They are, as a rule, inter-linked and combined very closely, and the exact dissection of the one from the other is sometimes an impossible and always an extremely delicate and perilous operation. But the effort to separate these forms of meaning is instructive, and can help us both to see why misunderstandings of all kinds are so frequent, and to devise educational methods that will make them less common.⁶⁰

As will appear in the course of the analysis, Richards seems, in fact, to be pursuing literary critical rather than pedagogic aims, and this division of intention may partly explain the confusion that hangs over some parts of his discussion of the problem.

Richards says there are three broad types of relation between sense and feeling in poetic language: (1) "where the feeling is generated by and governed by the sense": (2) where "the word first

60. Practical Criticism, p.209.

expresses a feeling, and such sense as it conveys is derived from the feeling": (3) where "sense and feeling are less closely knit: their alliance comes about through the context". The third type is said to be "the usual condition in poetry", and Richards devotes most of his attention to it.⁶¹

A source of difficulty throughout the discussion is the way in which Richards uses the word "feeling". He confesses that he uses the word vaguely: "Under 'Feeling' I group for convenience the whole conative-effective aspect of life—emotions, emotional attitudes, the will, desire, pleasure-unpleasure, and the rest."⁶² This produces more inconvenience than convenience, because Richards really needed to distinguish between "feeling" as in, say, "This feels smooth", and "feeling" as in, say, "I feel pity for him". The situation is similar to that produced by the ambiguous use of the microscopic and macroscopic uses of "impulse", and it has a similar consequence; Richards carelessly bundles together the idea of a heightened awareness through receptivity to a multiplicity of stimuli and the idea of an equilibrium of opposed feelings.⁶³

In order to see how this is done, and to bring out its implications, I shall look at Richards' discussion of the third type of relation between sense and feeling with reference to the final stanza of Poem X, a pleasantly whimsical account, by G.H. Luce, of the triumph, decline and fall of a cloud on a summer's day:

61. Practical Criticism, pp.210-212.

62. *ibid.*, p.181, footnote.

63. See above, p.33.

O sprawling domes, O tottering towers,
 O frail steel tissues of the sun—
 What! Have ye numbered all your hours
 And is your empire all fordone?

Richards' analysis concentrates on the second line, and I will reproduce it in full not only for the purpose of pursuing my argument, but also to recall the nature of Richards' contribution to modern criticism; his insistence on the close scrutiny of what the words in a poem are doing and his showing how such a scrutiny might proceed. His analysis here is excellent, and runs as follows:

'Tissue', to begin with the noun, has a double sense; firstly, 'cloth of steel' in extension from 'cloth of gold' or 'cloth of silver', the cold, metallic, inorganic quality of the fabric being perhaps important; secondly, 'thin, soft, semi-transparent' as with tissue-paper. 'Steel' is also present as a sense-metaphor of Aristotle's second kind, when the transference is from species to genus, steel a particular kind of strong material being used to stand for any material strong enough to hold together, as it appears, the immensity of the cloud-structure. The colour suggestion of 'steel' is also relevant. 'Frail' echoes the semi-transparency of 'tissue', the diaphanousness, and the impending dissolution too. 'Of the sun' it may be added runs parallel to 'of the silk-worm', i.e., produced by the sun.⁶⁴

64. Practical Criticism, p.215.

This is an analysis of the senses of the words—the "fibrillar articulations and correspondences of the sense", as Richards calls them. He restricts his attention to the sense because, when we attempt to analyse words in poetry, we "can track down their equivocations of sense to some extent, but we are comparatively helpless with their ambiguities of feeling."⁶⁵ The analysis, that is, is something of a second-best; we cannot analyse feelings in complex language, therefore we must be content with an analysis of the sense. The relative importance of sense and feeling appears in the following comment on "frail steel tissue of the sun": "the sense here is intricate, and...when it is analysed out it shows a rational correspondence with the feeling which those readers who accept the line as one of the felicities of the poem may be supposed to have experienced."⁶⁶ "Feelings" are still of the first importance.

Although complexity of sense is receiving much more attention, Richards is still far from the position indicated by the quotation we have already cited from Coleridge on Imagination: "The patterns of our thought represent, in various ways, the world we live in. The patterns of our feelings represent only a few special forms of our commerce with it."⁶⁷

65. Practical Criticism, p.213.

66. *ibid.*, pp.214-215.

67. Coleridge on Imagination, p.89. See above, p.41.

The reason why the main emphasis in the analysis of Luce's poem, remains on feelings, is that Richards' loose employment of the word permits a lingering trace of the doctrine of equilibrium.

This is indicated by his comment on "sprawling" in the stanza quoted above which he takes as his initial example when giving his general account of the third type of relation between sense and feeling:

Its sense (in Poem X) may be indicated as an absence of symmetry, regularity, poise, and coherence, and a stretched and loose disposition of parts....The feeling of 'sprawling' here is a mixture of good-humoured mockery and affected commiseration.⁶⁸

"Feeling" here means "attitude to subject", and Richards seems to be referring to the idea of a reconciliation of opposed impulses; in this case mockery and pity. This suggestion that the doctrine of equilibrium is still at the back of his mind may be supported by looking at his comment, elsewhere, on the line of Luce's poem in which the shadow of the cloud, moving in the wind, is said to "sidle up the garden stair". Richards remarks:

"sidle" gives the accidental, oblique quality of the movement of the shadow, and gives it in a single word by means of a single particularising scene. Condensation and economy are so often necessary in poetry in order that emotional impulses shall not dissipate themselves—that all means to it are worth study.⁶⁹

68. Practical Criticism, p.211.

69. *ibid.*, pp.200-201.

It has already been remarked that the tone of Luce's poem is lightly whimsical or ironical, and this reinforces Richards' appeal to the doctrine of equilibrium. The quality conducive to equilibrium is called, it will be remembered, "irony", and its technical sense easily overlaps with the ordinary sense, as I noted during my examination of Marvell's The Definition of Love.⁷⁰

However, in the analysis of "frail steel tissue of the sun", "feeling" does not mean "attitude to subject". Richards' analysis of the complexity of the senses of the words does nothing to explain their feeling, if we take "feeling" to mean "attitude to subject". It is only in the word "frail" that the feeling of "good-humoured mockery and affected commiseration" appears—the cloud is something of a back-slider, failing to live up to its promises—and Richards does not even mention this function of the word. What his analysis brings out so well is the way in which the multiplicity of meaning "realises" the object by calling up a vivid impression of the cloud. "Feeling", in this case, means no more than it does in phrases like "I've really got the feel of it now", implying a grasp which is surer than any given by a merely abstract understanding. This is what "feeling" means in the generalisation that Richards draws from his analysis: "most readers will admit that, as a rule, the full sense, analysed and clearly articulated, never comes to the consciousness; yet they may get the feeling perfectly".⁷¹ That situation is also described in the remark that when a "phrase strikes

70. See above, p.45.

71. Practical Criticism, p.214

us as particularly happy, or particularly unfortunate, we can usually contrive, by examining the fabric of the sense into which it fits, to find rational grounds for our approval or dislike".⁷² "Frail steel tissue of the sun", as analysed by Richards, is simply a "happy phrase", and it contains no "feelings" of the kind which could come under the head of "attitude to subject" and so find a place in the doctrine of equilibrium.

The line does contain oppositions, or contrast-effects, which sharpen the impact, as Richards brings out when he notes the inorganic, metallic nature of "steel" and the organic quality of "tissue of the sun"; this is of some importance, and the point eventually finds a place in Richards' account of the function of disparity between tenor and vehicle, in The Philosophy of Rhetoric.⁷³ But such contrasts are not of the kind needed for the doctrine of equilibrium.

Richards is using the term "sense" as loosely as he is using the term "feeling". That "steel" is strong, metallic, inorganic, of a certain colour; that "tissue" is thin, soft, semi-transparent; that "Steel tissue" reminds one of cloth-of-gold; that "tissue" reminds one of tissue-paper, and so on, may all be said to be a matter of the "senses" of the words. But "feeling" is also intimately involved, in that the words evoke a high degree of sensory detail; Richards' analysis seems to be almost an enumeration of the properties of the

72. Practical Criticism, p.213.

73. See below, pp.144-145.

objects. Richards thinks that his analysis is merely of the "senses" of the words, because he takes "feeling" to mean "attitude to subject", and he seems to be unaware that he has in fact given a convincing analysis not merely of the "senses" (which are in some vague correspondence with the overall "feeling") but of the total effect of the line. In Coleridge on Imagination he drops the doctrine of equilibrium with its accompanying stress on "feeling", and is consequently able to offer similar analyses not merely as pedagogic devices or as substitutes for a more preferable but impossible analysis of "feeling", but as a central feature of his theory of poetry.⁷⁴ In Practical Criticism the doctrine of equilibrium is, as we have seen, inhibiting a fruitful development of Richards' work on poetic language.

The more important general point is that the confusion here tends to conceal the fact that there are, in Richards' work as a whole, two distinct versions of complexity. The first version, which takes "feeling" to mean "attitude to subject", involves the notion of "irony", or complexity of attitude. The second version, which Richards describes in the phrase "fibrillar articulations and correspondences of the sense",⁷⁵ does not necessarily involve complexity of attitude. In this second version the words bring heightened awareness of, or realise, their objects through multiplicity of meaning.

74. See below, pp.91-94.

75. See above, p.71.

That this two-fold division is important may be illustrated by referring to Empson's Seven Types of Ambiguity. Empson's first two types correspond to the second version above, while his remaining five types all involve, in varying levels of consciousness, "complexity of attitude".⁷⁶ Further, Empson notes that his first type (and his second type is merely an extension of this) "covers almost everything of literary importance".⁷⁷ Empson himself, in a discussion with F.W. Bateson in the 'Critical Forum' in Essays in Criticism, makes this same broad distinction of two versions of "ambiguity".⁷⁸ However, the types which involve complexity of attitude occupy the bulk of the book, and this is a fair reflection of the pre-occupations of modern criticism of the analytical school, with its heavy emphasis on "complexity of attitude" and its relative neglect of the other and, as Empson confesses, more important, type of complexity. This pre-occupation and neglect correspond with the increased interest in the poetry of "wit" which has marked modern criticism, since it is in the poetry of Donne and his followers that "complexity of attitude" is most readily found. It has been easy to fall into the assumption that complexity of language which "realises" objects and experience must be accompanied by "complexity of attitude", and, conversely, that poetry of simple attitudes can

76. See below, p.422.

77. W. Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, third edition (revised), London, 1953, p.3. For Empson's definition of the second type of ambiguity, see p.48.

78. Essays in Criticism, iii (1953), 362.

only attain a low degree of realisation. This has been especially so where the simple attitude happens to be one which the dominant modern taste finds uncongenial, as in the case of the attitude which used to go under the name of "the sublime". This case particularly involves Milton and his eighteenth century followers.⁷⁹

It seems unlikely that books on critical theory have much effect on taste—they follow it rather than dictate it—but Practical Criticism has been an influential work and it may be that the failure to distinguish there between the two distinct versions of complexity that have just been described, helped to reinforce assumptions that were already congenial. As we shall see, the stress on the importance of "complexity of attitude" disappears from Richards' thinking in Colebridge on Imagination, but that book never seems to have had the currency of Richards' earlier work.

As a final point in my account of Richards' thinking about sense and feeling at this stage, I will add a remark from Mencius on the Mind, which makes clear why he thought that "feeling" in the sense of "attitude to subject", may remain relatively untouched by an analysis of the "sense". Discussing the relations between sense and feeling in words, Richards says:

79. See below, pp.304-307.

When a word has been much used with a sense that is naturally associated with a strong and rich emotive reverberation, it frequently carries this gesture over to senses that give no natural support for any such stirrings....The chief danger...is that we may insist upon giving a word a far more elaborate sense than it really has, in order to justify its gesture, because we have not noticed what other senses it may have on other occasions from which its stirring qualities derive.⁸⁰

Whatever else may be said about this, it clearly implies a relatively low level of language-use—a level involving little "vigilance". It is because of his interest in linguistic duplicity that Empson, in The Structure of Complex Words, rejects Richards' point, insisting that the feeling smuggled in by a different sense must also bring that sense along with it and that, consequently, such uses do involve complexity of sense.⁸¹ Empson's argument is persuasive, but that does not, of course, raise the level of this use of language. Richards is, it may be noted, still giving high praise to Swinburne in this part of Mencius on the Mind.⁸² and one recollects his postulation of two kinds of poetry in Principles of Literary Criticism. In Swinburne's poetry "little beyond vague thoughts of the things the words stand for is...required. They do not have to be brought into intelligible connection with one another", whereas in Hardy's poetry,

80. I.A. Richards, Mencius on the Mind, London, 1932, p.105.

81. The Structure of Complex Words, pp.56-57.

82. I.A. Richards, Mencius on the Mind, London, 1932, p.99.

"more important are the further thoughts caused by the sense, the network of interpretation and conjecture which arises therefrom."⁸³ Clearly, it is in Swinburnian poetry that the process described in Mencius on the Mind may most readily occur. When, as in reading Hardy, the mind is actively engaged in interpretation of interconnections of the sense, there is much less chance of feelings being illicitly brought in. Richards, in short, in Mencius on the Mind, is still able to base his discussions of poetic language on Swinburnian poetry.

III.

I would like, finally, to note two general features of Practical Criticism: Richards' intention in writing the book, and his continued use in it of the language of stimulus and response.

His continued use of the language of stimulus and response can be illustrated from his discussion of stock-responses. He continually implies a situation in which there is a hard-fact world, given, out there, to which we respond with varying degrees of appropriateness. This is apparent for instance in his remark that a stock-response "hides the real world from us", or in his comments on the way in which subjective needs distort reality.⁸⁴ His claim

83. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.129. See above, p.37.

84. Practical Criticism, pp.246-247.

is that good poetry breaks down stock-responses and thereby attunes us to reality. His evident difficulty is that what is presented in, say, a play by Shakespeare is not, in any normal sense of the word, "real". There is nothing unusual about the difficulty, and Richards gives the usual answer; good poetry heightens our capacity for appropriate response. This answer assumes an ideal situation; a man may, clearly, read poetry for a life-time without any discernible improvement in his response to "reality", and nobody improves as much as they might, but the ideal is a valid one. What is unsatisfactory is that Richards' language of stimulus and response leads him to make his answer in terms of the doctrine of equilibrium, which is, as we have seen, at the same time, being undermined by other important elements in his thinking.

His account of appropriate responsiveness is conducted with reference to Confucius' concept of "sincerity".⁸⁵ For Confucius, as translated by Legge, sincerity "is that whereby self-completion is effected, and its way is that by which man must direct himself", and in "self-completion the superior man completes other men and things also...and this is the way by which a union is effected of the external and the internal".⁸⁶ Richards glosses this with: "Being more at one within itself the mind thereby becomes more appropriately

85. Practical Criticism, pp.283-291.

86. *ibid.*, p.284.

responsive to the outer world".³⁷ This is in direct descent from The Foundations of Aesthetics, where it is said of synaesthetic experiences (i.e. experiences characterized by equilibrium of impulses):

our individuality becomes differentiated or isolated from the individualities of things around us. We become less 'mixed into' other things. As we become more ourselves they become more themselves, because we are less dependant upon the particular impulses which they each arouse in us.⁸⁸

The discussion of Confucius revolves around the same ideas: "The completed mind would be that perfect mind...in which no disorder, no mutual frustration of impulses remained", and, that being the ideal, the human organism must effect a "re-ordering of its impulses so as to reduce their interferences with one another to a minimum".⁸⁹ As moral exhortation this would elicit general agreement, though, no doubt, disagreement would quickly arise as to the order of priority of "impulses", in cases of "interference"; but in its application to poetry it is open to the objections raised against the doctrine of equilibrium in my discussion of Principles of Literary Criticism,⁹⁰ and, as we have seen, various elements in the doctrine are, in any case, being undermined by the development of Richards' own thinking.

One of the striking things, it may incidentally be said, about Richards' quotations from Confucius is that they might suggest an account of the mind in creative terms, rather than in terms of

87. Practical Criticism, p.287.

88. p.79.

89. Practical Criticism, p.285 and p.286.

90. See above, Chapter III, Section II.

appropriate response to stimuli: "In self-completion the superior man completes other men and things also".⁹¹ In Coleridge on Imagination Richards employs a "creative" account, which enables him to abandon the doctrine of equilibrium, and offers an opportunity for bringing neatly together his work on language and his view of poetry as heightener of awareness.⁹² In Practical Criticism this aspect of Legge's version of Confucius simply fails to interest him.

My final point about Practical Criticism is that its over-all intention engenders some confusion as to the way in which poetry heightens awareness.

It has already been remarked that Richards' avowed intention, in analysing the relations between sense and feeling in words, is pedagogic. He thinks that training in such analysis might, if cautiously undertaken, lead to improved reading, and this is a reflection of one of the chief aims of the whole book. In the introduction Richards says: "It is as a step towards...training and technique in discussion that I would best like this book to be regarded".⁹³ What he has in mind may be summarized as follows. The various opinions of the students who expressed views on the poems

91. See above, p.80.

92. See below, pp.93-94.

93. Practical Criticism, p.9.

in Practical Criticism illustrate a variety of possible approaches to the poems, and, also, show these approaches at varying levels of sophistication.⁹⁴ This array of views constitutes material for the study of the genesis and development of opinions in what Richards calls the "middle" subjects. These are the subjects (such as ethics, metaphysics and religion) which resemble literary criticism in that they are neither, on the one hand, like mathematics, nor, on the other hand, like commerce and law.⁹⁵ Of the benefit to be derived from such an array of views, Richards says:

When the first dizzy bewilderment has worn off, as it very soon does, it is as though we were strolling through and about a building that hitherto we were only able to see from one or two distant standpoints. We gain a much more intimate understanding both of the poem and of the opinions it provokes. Something like a plan of the most usual approaches can be sketched and we learn what to expect when a new object, a new poem, comes up for discussion.⁹⁶

The intention, as with the analysis of the relations between sense and feeling in words, is to increase understanding of the ways in which language works. Richards' argument by analogy will not bear close scrutiny. His procedure may well increase understanding of each view of the poem, but is as likely to damage our own understanding of the poem as to improve it. To read a poem while holding in mind the various other reactions that it might provoke seems a certain way of

94. Practical Criticism, p.9.

95. *ibid.*, pp.5-6.

96. *ibid.*, p.9.

destroying the fullness and genuineness of one's own response. The process in the reading of poetry which provides a more accurate analogy with viewing a building from a number of points, is the process of understanding the relation between the parts of the poem—of understanding its coherence.

The kind of awareness involved in an attempt to understand how a poem provokes a variety of opinions is different from the kind of awareness involved in the reading of poetry as poetry, and Richards is in danger of confusing the two. At some points in his later work Richards does fall into the confusion, because of his tendency to treat poetry primarily as case-material for the study of language.⁹⁷ Coleridge on Imagination, though it is, in my view, Richards' most interesting contribution to literary criticism, is not entirely free from this confusion. I would like next to examine this book in detail.

97. See below, pp.113-115.

CHAPTER 4

COLERIDGE ON IMAGINATION

I.

We now turn to Coleridge on Imagination and will look first at Richards' account of the mind in terms of creativity, or activity. This occupies Chapter 3, which is, in effect, the first chapter, the previous two consisting mostly of castigations of those who have failed to perceive how penetrating a psychologist Coleridge was. Coleridge was ahead of his time, Richards says, but the key psychological ideas in his account of the mind contain "little ... which a modern psychologist ... will treat now as other than a commonplace".¹ These ideas are familiar and may be stated briefly. There are no sense data, only facta; our perceptions are creations. In these acts of creation we are also creating ourselves, because the "subject (the self) has gone in to what it perceives, and what it perceives is, in this sense, itself"; hence "the subject is what it is through the objects it has been".² This equates with the assumption of the "modern psychologist", which is "the governing condition of his science", that "the activities of the self ... are results of past activities".³

1. I.A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, Second Edition, London, 1950, p.60.

2. *ibid.*, p.57.

3. *ibid.*, p.61.

Coleridge further proposed that we must become aware of this creative process, by an act of "realizing intuition", and that, even further, one should become aware, by means of the "inner sense", of one's awareness. This is an act of self-knowledge, and is the first postulate of philosophy.⁴ The problems raised in philosophy and psychology by Coleridge's ideas are beyond the scope and competence of this essay. To the question of different levels of awareness, insofar as it affects Richards' ideas about poetic language, we shall return in due course.⁵

The creative process itself is the "primary imagination", which creates the everyday world with which we are all familiar.⁶ The relation of the "secondary imagination" and the "fancy" to the foregoing ideas is dealt with in Chapter 4. The "secondary imagination" is also creative, since it breaks down, reforms and unifies the products of the "primary imagination". The "fancy" works, through the agency of memory, with the products of the "primary imagination", but merely sets them into new arrangements, without essentially modifying them.⁷

4. Coleridge on Imagination, p.45.

5. See below, p.115.

6. Coleridge on Imagination, p.58.

7. *ibid.*, pp.58-59.

The importance of the "secondary imagination" is this:

it gives us not only poetry in the limited sense in which literary critics concern themselves with it - but every aspect of the routine world in which it is invested with other values than these necessary for our bare continuance as living beings: all objects for which we can feel love, awe, admiration; every quality beyond the account of physics, chemistry and the physiology of sense-perception, nutrition, reproduction and locomotion; every awareness for which a civilized life is preferred by us to an uncivilized.⁸

The essential mark of a genius is the possession of a high degree of "secondary imagination", or "'an unusual intensity of the modifying power'".⁹ Richards illustrates this power with a quotation from Coleridge:

The Heaven lifts up my soul, the sight of the ocean seems to widen it. We feel the same force at work, but the difference, whether in mind or body that we should feel in actually travelling, horizontally or in direct ascent, that we feel in FANCY.

For what are our feelings of this kind but a motion IMAGINED, with the feelings that would accompany that motion, less distinguished, more blended, more rapid, more confused, and, thereby, co-adunated.¹⁰

In effect, though Richards does not point this out, the "secondary

8. Coleridge on Imagination, pp.58-59.

9. *ibid.*, p.74.

10. *ibid.*, p.73.

imagination" reformulates his earlier version of the poet's memory; it re-forms the products of the "primary imagination" in such a way that they are freely available for transfer to other experiences, and consequently the poet is unusually able to find connections between disparate areas of experience.¹¹ This is particularly evident in the poet's gift for metaphor, of which, "The Heaven lifts up my soul" is an example. Here lies the force of Coleridge's remark that "association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resembling states of feeling than on trains of ideas".¹²

Here also lies Coleridge's insistence on increased liveliness of thought, as well as of feeling, in the imaginative process - the co-presence of "judgement ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement".¹³ The consequences of a relaxing of thought are made clear in the following distinction between "fancy" and "imagination":

You may conceive the difference in kind between the Fancy and the Imagination in this way, that if the check of the senses and the reason were withdrawn, the first would become delirium, and the last mania.¹⁴

In the first case, the consequence would be incoherent recall of past

11. See above, pp.18-22.

12. Coleridge on Imagination, p.68.

13. Biographia Literaria, ii, 12.

14. Coleridge on Imagination, p.74.

experience, in the second, extreme distortion of reality by an emotion that has run out of control. In one of Coleridge's examples, "an unusual intensity of the modifying power, ... detached from the discriminative power, might conjure a platted straw into a royal diadem".¹⁵

Such are the key ideas upon which Richards' subsequent account of the complexity of poetic language, and an accompanying method of analysing it, depend. Before we look at the account and the method, one further point should be made. Richards believes that Coleridge's "views of the mind as an activity are a new charter of liberties".¹⁶

Coleridge does not introduce a "split between the ingredients of the mind":

In his best analyses he transposes feelings, thoughts, ideas, desires, images and passions with a freedom which descriptive psychology has only recently regained. He treats all these elements in the psychological inventory as forms of the activity of mind - different, of course, and with different functions - but not to be set over against one another in two groups either as products to be opposed to the processes which bring them into being, or as presentations to be set against the reverberations they arouse and which shift them about.¹⁷

This "charter of liberties" is very welcome to Richards because it

15. Coleridge on Imagination, p.74.

16. *ibid.*, p.66.

17. *ibid.*, p.56.

frees him from feeling that he has, in order to progress with a theory of complexity in poetic language, to settle first such problems as the relations between sense and feeling in words. He can, in elaborating his theory, simply treat the inter-connection between the various aspects of meaning as part of the creative activity which a poem induces in the reader. It may be added, however, that the problem had been of service to him, because the investigation of it had helped him to develop his ideas about the ways in which poetic language works.¹⁸

II.

In his account of the complexity of poetic language Richards' essential move is to translate the idea of "co-adunation" into multiplicity of inter-connection, or, as he terms it, "inter-inanimation", or "inter-action".¹⁹ With respect to language, the distinction between "fancy" and "imagination" is re-phrased as follows:

the structure or constitution of poetic meanings may vary from extreme federalism ... to the strictest centrality - from a case ... where the meanings of the

18. See above, pp.68-75.

19. Coleridge on Imagination, p.79.

separate words are almost completely autonomous (and their grouping is for a purpose which does not concern them) to the case ... where the several units of meaning surrender almost all their local independence in a common co-operative purpose.²⁰

Richards is using the notion, which we have met in Practical Criticism, of "transactions between the parts of the sense",²¹ but it now takes a central place in a general account of poetry, instead of being an incidental pedagogic device.

The distinction, as regards complexity of language, between "fancy" and "imagination" is illustrated by discussion of two passages which Coleridge himself had used as examples.

- I. Full gently now she takes him by the hand,
 A lily prison'd in a gaol of snow,
 Or ivory in an alabaster band;
 So white a friend engirts so white a foe.
- II. Look! how a bright star shooteth from the sky
 So glides he in the night from Venus' eye.²²

In "prison'd" and "gaol of snow" Richards notes an "absence of interaction between the parts of the comparison", and expands the point as follows:

In contrast to the implied efforts or will to escape of the prison'd hand, a lily would be the most patient of

20. Coleridge on Imagination, p.81.

21. See above, pp.68-69.

22. Coleridge on Imagination, p.77 and p.82. Venus and Adonis 11.361-364 and 11.815-816.

captives. And anything less resembling a gaol of snow than Venus' hand could hardly be chosen - except in two uncombined 'points of likeness distinguished', two accidental coincidences, namely that the gaol and the hand are both enclosures and both white.

But Venus' hand is not a static enclosure, and the whitenesses will seem less compatible the more we consider them.²³

It may be immediately, though incidentally, remarked, that this bears a striking resemblance to the style of analysis one finds in eighteenth century editions of Shakespeare; this will be later illustrated at length.²⁴ In contrast with the first passage, in the second, 'the more the image is followed up, the more links of relevance between the units are discovered':

The separable meanings of each word, Look! (our surprise at the meteor, her's at his flight), star (a light-giver, an influence, a remote and uncontrollable thing), shooteth (the sudden, irremediable, portentous fall or death of what had been a guide, a destiny), the sky (the source of light and now of ruin), glides (not rapidity only, but fatal ease too), in the night (the darkness of the scene and of Venus' world now) - all these separable meanings are here brought into one.²⁵

The analysis here resembles that of "frail steel tissue of the sun"

23. Coleridge on Imagination, pp.78-79.

24. See below, pp.204-206.

25. Coleridge on Imagination, p.83.

in Practical Criticism, with the important difference that Richards is no longer worrying about the relations between sense and feeling.²⁶ The various "meanings" listed in his commentary could be called "feelings" as much as "senses", as was remarked of the list of "meanings" in the analysis of "frail steel tissue of the sun". Certainly, most of them are not "senses" that one would find listed in a dictionary.

The relation between the "interanimation" of the meanings here, and the creative account of the mind is contained in the following:

as the reader's mind finds cross-connexion after cross-connexion between [the meanings], he seems, in becoming more aware of them, to be discovering not only Shakespeare's meaning, but something which he, the reader, is himself making. His understanding of Shakespeare is sanctioned by his own activity in it. As Coleridge says: "You feel him to be a poet, inasmuch as for a time he has made you one - an active creative being".²⁷

A further summarizing remark by Richards may be added:

Shakespeare is realizing, and making the reader realize - not by any intensity of effort, but by the fulness and self-completing growth of the response - Adonis' flight as it was to Venus, and the sense of loss, of increased

26. See above, pp.68-69.

27. Coleridge on Imagination, pp.83-84.

darkness, that invades her.²⁸

This is a reformulation of the view which we have outlined in the form it takes in Principles of Literary Criticism and Practical Criticism, where the value of poetry is seen in its heightening of awareness through complexity of response. It is noticeable that in the key example, here, and in the analysis of it, there is no mention, either implicit or explicit, of complexity of attitude.²⁹ Now that Richards can talk simply in terms of "activity" or "creativity" or "interanimation" he can comfortably drop the doctrine of equilibrium. More important, he has now brought together his work on language and his theory of the value of poetry, with neatness and simplicity.

In this account of poetic language the emphasis falls heavily on the importance of sense, and I will quote in full the remark that I partly reproduced in my discussion of Practical Criticism:

the peculiar reference of thoughts to the things-they-are-of gives them modes of interaction with one another which are lacking in the case of feelings. And this interplay is studied as their logical compatibility or incompatibility, and other relations. The patterns of our thought represent, in various ways, the world we live in. The patterns of our feelings represent only a few special forms of our commerce with it.³⁰

28. Coleridge on Imagination, p.83 .

29. See above, pp.75-77.

30. Coleridge on Imagination, p.89. See above, p.41.

Richards' recent re-issue of Science and Poetry, under the new title Poetries and Sciences, confesses that the defect of the original issue had been the failure to stress the importance of the sense in poetic language.³¹ As we have seen, there was a change of emphasis in Practical Criticism, but not to the extent that we now find in Coleridge on Imagination. As I have said before, this does not mean that Richards abandons the essential point of his doctrine of "pseudo-statements".³² He continues to insist that poetry does not present extractable ideas, or beliefs, but now the process which is the poem is seen to be largely an activity of thought, whereas previously it was seen chiefly as an emotional activity. Even in Practical Criticism Richards' interest in complexity of sense was prompted by the idea that it shows "a rational correspondence" with the "feeling".³³

His position now may be further described with reference to his views on metre. He completely accepts, indeed accentuates, the Coleridgean account of metre, with which we saw him in essential disagreement in Principles of Literary Criticism.³⁴ The central

31. I.A. Richards, Poetries and Sciences, London, 1970, p.93.

32. See above, p.29.

33. See above, p.71.

34. See above, pp.24-25.

idea is that the "movement of the verse becomes the movement of the meaning".³⁵

Practical Criticism contains anticipations of this, partly, perhaps, because Richards was disturbed by some widely canvassed views about metre in his students' protocols, as when he remarks that, after the insistence on conformity to a metrical pattern, "the notion that poetic rhythm is independent of sense, is the most hurtful".³⁶

His own view in Practical Criticism is:

The movement or plot of the word-by-word development of the poem, as a structure of the intellect and emotions, is always, in good poetry, in the closest possible relation to the movement of the metre, not only giving it its tempo, but even distorting it - sometimes violently.³⁷

That the position in Coleridge on Imagination is essentially the same is clear in such remarks as: "The perceived relations between temporal parts of an utterance, which seem to the ear to constitute good metre, derive from relations between parts of its meaning".³⁸ But the idea of "movement" is now given much more significance and precision by its reference to the idea of "interanimation"; rhythm is a moving; pattern of subtly inter-connected aspects of meaning. It is

35. Coleridge on Imagination, p.119.

36. I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism, London, 1929, p.231.

37. *ibid.*, p.230.

38. Coleridge on Imagination, p.120.

also, of course, now very neatly tied in with Richards' general theory of poetry. How far Richards has travelled may be shown by setting the statement that "the movement of the verse becomes the movement of the meaning", alongside his earlier view that "movement in poetry deserves at least as much study as onomatopoeia".³⁹

This is not to say that Richards has abandoned the view that the "tied images", or direct sensory qualities of words, are important; their importance is still stressed,⁴⁰ but his central interest has now been shifted into the realm of meaning. The changed importance, in Richards' scheme, of the "tied images" is a corollary of the disappearance of the doctrine of equilibrium, in which they played an important part.⁴¹

Such is the central material of Coleridge on Imagination. Since certain problems raised by it, and by the uses to which Richards puts it, are to be dealt with at some length, I should immediately record my opinion that it is an impressive achievement. The nature of its impressiveness can be indicated by a quotation from the closing paragraphs of Seven Types of Ambiguity, published four years before Coleridge on Imagination:

I suppose that all present-day readers of poetry would agree that some modern poets are charlatans, though

39. See above, p.39.

40. Coleridge on Imagination, p.88.

41. See above, p.31.

different people would attach this floating suspicion to different poets; but they have no positive machinery, such as Dr. Johnson thought he had, to a great extent rightly, by which such a fact could be proved The result is a certain lack of positive satisfaction in the reading of any poetry; doubt becomes a permanent background of the mind, both as to whether the thing is being interpreted rightly and as to whether, if it is, one ought to allow oneself to feel pleased. Evidently, in the lack of any machinery of analysis, such as can be thought moderately reliable, to decide whether one's attitude is right, this leads to a sterility of emotion such as makes it hardly worth while to read the poetry at all.⁴²

This, in some ways, is over-stated, but it focuses the need felt at the time. Richards developed a "machinery of analysis, such as can be thought moderately reliable", which has much in common with the analysis employed by Dr. Johnson, with the addition that it is more comprehensive, more subtle, more firmly based in a general theory of poetry, and without the excesses which characterized the eighteenth century doctrine of propriety. The idea of inter inanimation resembles the doctrine of propriety in its concern with the ways in which words in a poem fit together, and here a further point by Empson comes aptly:

It is not that such machinery is unknown so much that it is unpopular; people feel that, because it must

42. W. Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, Third Edition (Revised), London, 1953, pp.255-256.

always be inadequate, it must always be unfair.⁴³

Richards' contribution was a recall to what seems elementary - a reminder rather than a discovery; but it was a timely reminder, and to re-state in modern terms a "machinery of analysis" of the Johnsonian type required a great and sustained effort of enquiry.

My use, above, of Empson's comments assumes that the proper function of analytic machinery of this kind is to help in distinguishing good poetry from bad. This is not what Richards intended it for, and most of our remaining discussion of Coleridge on Imagination consists of examination, and criticism, of the uses to which Richards thought it could be put. These uses are connected with some of Richards' central interests, but perhaps the chief reason why he failed to stress the usefulness of analysis in inculcating sound habits of judgement is that he himself seems to have had no general literary judgements which urgently needed expression. This is hardly surprising, since his time had been amply occupied in critical and linguistic theory. It is in critics like Johnson and Leavis that one finds analysis being used to refine and enforce judgements issuing from a sustained acquaintance with English poetry in its full extent.

Every critical idea, of course, is open to abuse. In the eighteenth century there were real Dick Minims, as well as a Dr. Johnson or a Warburton, and modern criticism has not failed to

43. W. Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.255.

produce its quota of Dick Minims. Johnson, too, made his mistakes, and his work on Shakespeare is generally thought to enshrine some of the worst of them. That work is, of course, far from perfect, but, as I shall later argue, it is essentially a useful model of the kind of thing that analytical criticism ought to be, and it is far healthier than the holy chorus of adulation which currently passes for "Shakespeare Criticism".⁴⁴ It is, in short, far from a defect in Richards' analytical method, that its proper use is intimately involved with value-judgements.

Before considering some of the problems raised by Coleridge on Imagination, it may be helpful to illustrate the ideas so far outlined by looking at some examples other than the brief ones given by Richards. This may help to clarify the implications of the ideas, and is especially in place since Richards himself is rather parsimonious with examples. What is to be illustrated is, first, Coleridge's remark, quoted earlier:

The Heaven lifts up my soul, the sight of the ocean seems to widen it For what are our feelings of this kind but a motion IMAGINED, with the feelings that would accompany that notion, less distinguished, more blended, more rapid, more confused, and, thereby, co-adunated.⁴⁵

And, second, Richards' idea that this action of the imagination, at the

44. For example, see below, pp.205-207.

45. Coleridge on Imagination, p.73. See above, p.87.

level of language, produces a great degree of "interanimation".⁴⁶

I will look first at the description of the Brangwen farm at the beginning of Lawrence's The Rainbow:

The farmers knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels. The rain sucked up in the day-time, nakedness that comes under the wind in autumn, showing the birds' nests no longer worth hiding. Their life and inter-relations were such; feeling the pulse and body of the soil, that opened to their furrow for the grain, and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire, lying hard and unresponsive when the crops were to be shorn away. The young corn waved and was silken, and the lustre slid along the limbs of the men who saw it.⁴⁷

The imaginative process is particularly clear in words like "sucked up", "slid", and "desire". The feelings we actually have in the experiences pointed to by the words are here present but are "more blended, more rapid, more confused, and, thereby, co-adunated". The life of the farm is "realized" by an "unusual intensity of the modifying power".⁴⁸ "Interanimation" is prominent in, for instance, "the lustre slid"; the reader begins by taking "lustre" as the sheen of the corn; with "slid" he feels that touch is involved,

46. Coleridge on Imagination, p.79. See above, p.92.

47. D.H. Lawrence, The Rainbow, Penguin, 1966, p.8.

48. See above, p.87.

and so takes "lustre" as "smoothness to the touch", and this is re-inforced by "along the limbs". At "who saw it" he has to interpret back again in visual terms, and the net result is a blending of visual and tactile effects; the men see the corn so keenly that they feel it, and this gives "slid along the limbs" the sense of a tremor running along the muscles. There is, to generalize, a varying exploitation of the possibilities of the words as the reader moves through the sentence, and it is a case, to use Richards' political analogy which we have already quoted, of extreme centralism.⁴⁹ This is but one instance of the way in which sexual feelings are, in the description as a whole, transformed and transferred, and the description clearly exemplifies the way in which the imagination humanizes the world, investing it with all the qualities for which we can feel "love, awe, admiration".⁵⁰

As a less obvious example I will look at a stanza which has a widely attested power to move and which does not feel particularly complex:

My love is like a red red rose
 That's newly sprung in June:
 My love is like the melodie
 That's sweetly play'd in tune.⁵¹

49. See above, pp.90-91.

50. See above, p.87.

51. R. Burns, My Love is Like a Red Red Rose.

The second-person mode of address in the next stanza ("As fair art thou, my bonny lass") leads the reader to take "love" in the first stanza as referring, primarily, not to the woman but to the poet's feeling, because it seems natural to assume that he is talking to her throughout the poem and therefore would not refer to her in the first stanza in the third person. In the comparison of the rose with the feeling of love "the more the image is followed up the more links of relevance between the units are discovered".⁵² Its unfolding is the heart opening, and its redness is that of blood; the general sense of beauty and naturalness are obviously relevant, and, more particularly, the sense of surprise at the sudden appearance ("newly sprung") of this beauty, which implies something spontaneous and outside the man's control. It is here that "June", which otherwise might appear an inert rhyme-word, is effective; it cancels any feeling of frailty in the newly sprung flower. The summer strength of this flower might be brought out by a comparison with Perdita's,

pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phoebus in his strength (a malady
Most incident to maids).⁵³

However, there is also a strong natural pull towards taking "my

52. See above, p.92.

53. The Winter's Tale, IV.iv.122-125.

love" as referring to the woman, as well as to the poet's feeling, and it is, in fact, a case of Empson's second type of ambiguity, in which there are two different senses but one resultant meaning.⁵⁴ Here, the implications of unfolding, blood, beauty, naturalness, spontaneity, spring freshness with summer strength, are as relevant to the woman as to the feeling. One might say that the woman matches the poet's feeling. Such, then, is the complex activity which lies behind this apparently simple song, the remarkable vividness and vitality of which familiarity never seems to dull. The activity of the imagination which is the condition of the verbal complexity, lies in the "co-adunation" of the poet's feelings about the woman and about the flower.

To repeat a point made earlier, I will add finally that in neither the passage from Lawrence nor the stanza from Burns, is there any complexity of attitude.⁵⁵

III.

Having outlined and illustrated Richards' theory of complexity and his analytic method, I will now look at some problems raised

54. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.48.

55. See above, p.94.

by them, and by the uses to which he wants to put them. The tendency of these uses is indicated by his claim that "the study of the modes of language becomes, as it attempts to be thorough, the most fundamental and extensive of all enquiries".⁵⁶ This is a development of the intention of Practical Criticism, which has already been illustrated by Richards' remark that it is "as a step towards ... training and technique in discussion that I would best like this book to be regarded".⁵⁷ For the sake of convenience, the preoccupation indicated here will be called Richards' "philosophical" interest, as opposed to his literary interest. The upshot, for our purposes, is Richards' confusion of two kinds of reading; first, the reading of poetry as poetry; second, the reading of poetry as material for a study of the modes of language.

Examination of Richards' intention begins best with his discussion of a couplet from Coleridge:

To thee do all things live from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of thy living soul.⁵⁸

Richards calls this "a concrete example of that self-knowledge, which ... was for [Coleridge], both 'speculatively and practically', the principle of all his thinking".⁵⁹ Coleridge is here, to use the

56. Coleridge on Imagination, p.231.

57. Practical Criticism, p.9. See above, p.82.

58. Coleridge on Imagination, p.152. Dejection : An Ode, ll.135-136. Richards quotes Coleridge's earlier version of the lines.

59. Coleridge on Imagination, p.152.

language which appears at the opening of our account of Coleridge on Imagination, not only aware of the creativity of the mind, but also aware of his awareness.⁶⁰ Richards admires the metaphor of the eddy because it presents a "fact of mind",⁶¹ and avoids falling into either of the two doctrines which may be derived from that "fact of mind", each one being only a partial representation of it. This, it will be seen, is an example of Richards' insistence that poetry does not deal in ideas or doctrines. The "fact of mind" here is that which is generally described as a relation between a subject and an object, or a perceiver and a thing perceived, and the metaphor of the eddy presents this relation with great subtlety, imaging concretely the "co-alescence" of the subject with the object.⁶²

The two seemingly opposed doctrines into which this "fact of mind" may be translated are the "realist" and the "projective". The former says :

The mind of the poet at moments, penetrating 'the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude', gains an insight into reality, reads Nature as a symbol of something behind or within Nature not ordinarily perceived.⁶³

The latter says that the "mind of the poet creates a Nature into which

60. See above, p.86.

61. Coleridge on Imagination, p.162.

62. Cf. *ibid.*, p.44.

63. *ibid.*, p.145.

his own feelings, his aspirations and apprehensions, are projected".⁶⁴ To refer back for a moment to the passage from The Rainbow,⁶⁵ the "realist" view would be, "The Brangwen farm is like that; Lawrence has penetrated to the deeper reality". The "projective" view would be, "The Brangwens are merely projecting their own sexual feelings onto the farm". For Richards, the two views would be distortions, effected for different ends, of the "fact of mind" which is conveyed by the imaginative complexity of Lawrence's language.

The language in which "facts of mind" are presented must be complex, and the final import of poetry, for Richards, is as follows: "It is the privilege of poetry to preserve us from mistaking our notions either for things or for ourselves. Poetry is the completest mode of utterance".⁶⁶ The function of his analytic method is to increase our sensitivity to that mode of language which conveys "facts of mind" rather than doctrines:

The study of this wrenching, of the translation of imaginative acts into doctrines, is that mode of tracing the source of philosophy in 'facts of mind', which, in Coleridge's view of 1801, was to make the theory of poetry 'supersede all the books of metaphysics and all the books of morals too'.⁶⁷

64. Coleridge on Imagination, p.145.

65. See above, p.101.

66. Coleridge on Imagination, p.163.

67. *ibid.*, p.143

Richards himself, of course, is not without a Coleridgean ambition, and one of Hotopf's main theses is Richards' exaggeration of ambiguity in philosophical writing—an exaggeration springing from Richards' desire to show that various central philosophical insights are "imaginative", and that translations of them into doctrines are distortions.⁶⁸

Richards' ambition is also connected with another of his recurrent pre-occupations—the decline of religious belief. If a man says, "The soul is immortal", the "realist" view sees it as true, while the "projective" view sees it as merely a projection of certain obvious needs and desires. If the man, however, says it in the "imaginative" mode, Richards can see it as a "fact of mind", of which both "realist" and "projective" views are distortions. In describing this particular function of the "imaginative" mode, Richards himself uses "projective" language, but claims that he does so only because one has to use the language of one view or the other, unless one is to write poetry oneself.⁶⁹ A quotation from The Philosophy of Rhetoric is convenient here, because it makes the point briefly and fully:

Does the Divine Comedy, or the Bible tell us something which we must accept as true if we are to read it aright?

68. W.H.N. Hotopf, Language, Thought and Comprehension. A Case Study of the Writings of I.A. Richards, London, 1965. See for example, pp.138-139.

69. Coleridge on Imagination, pp.18-19.

These are questions that we cannot possibly answer satisfactorily unless we are clear as to the ways in which metaphoric utterances may say or tell us something. Mr. Eliot remarks somewhere of the Divine Comedy that the whole poem is one vast metaphor. It is. And, if so, what is it that we might believe in it? Is it the tenor or the vehicle or their joint presentation; or is it 'that tenor and vehicle are thus and thus related there'.⁷⁰

The final alternative ("that tenor and vehicle are thus and thus related") refers, as I understand it, to "interanimation". In this view, the important question is not "Is it true?" but "Is it realized?" The drift of Richards' argument is, to put it roughly, towards the identification of "beauty" and "truth"; and the last sentence of the following, from Coleridge on Imagination, shows that "goodness" is very ready to be added:

The saner and greater mythologies are not fancies; they are the utterance of the whole soul of man and, as such, inexhaustible to meditation. They are no amusement or diversion to be sought as a relaxation and an escape from the hard realities of life. They are these hard realities in projection, their symbolic recognition, co-ordination and acceptance. Through such mythologies our will is collected, our powers unified, our growth controlled.⁷¹

Richards' use of the word "mythology" here is not intended to be slighting, since he claims, of course, that "scientific" views of the

70. I.A. Richards, The Philosophy of Rhetoric, New York, 1936, p.134.

71. Coleridge on Imagination, p.171.

world are also "mythologies", in that they are produced by the creativity of mind, and not by perceptions of a given, hard-fact, reality.⁷²

All this, intended as oil on troubled waters, turned out to be fuel for the fire. Leavis angrily accused Richards of a "lick-spittle" attitude to science;⁷³ Hotopf has pointed out the confusion in Richards' argument that science is "mythology",⁷⁴ and a religious believer might easily be moved to remark that Richards is trying to replace faith not only with tactful reading, but with tactful conduct, because Richards adds that the difference between scientific mythologies and poetic mythologies is that the former have a completer claim upon our actions: "We step out of the way of the oncoming motor-bus. But our response to poetry is restricted and conditional".⁷⁵ "Poetry" here includes the "greater mythologies", and the consequences are obvious: Thomas More's beliefs about God should have had a lesser claim on him than his beliefs about what the edge of the axe would do to his neck. To adapt Orwell's formula, Richards says that all views of the world are mythological but that some views are more mythological than others.

72. Coleridge on Imagination, p.177.

73. Scrutiny, iii (1934-35), 388. Dr. Leavis is quoting Douglas Garman.

74. Hotopf, pp.82-83.

75. Coleridge on Imagination, p.175.

If, however, one leaves such delicate areas as Dante and the Bible, the problem of faith disappears, and Richards' views are such as most students of literature would find easily acceptable. To say of, for instance, Anna Karenina, that its "truth" is not literal but one of "realisation"; that it is a "projection" of the "hard realities of life", rather than an escapist fancy, and that through reading it "our will is collected, our powers unified, our growth controlled", is only to say what is usually said about Tolstoy. But Richards' application of his theory to Christian literature is unfair. He claims to be using "projective" language, as in the quotation about Dante and the Bible, merely as a matter of convenience, but his theory of "facts of mind" asserts that if a man says, in language of imaginative power, "the soul is immortal", there is a co-alescence of subjective and objective elements and that these cannot be separated without distorting the meaning. A believer might consequently reply: "Exactly, that is why my belief in the objective element is a matter of faith, not of knowledge. And your translation of the matter into 'projective' language, which you claim is a matter merely of convenience, is an avoidance of the whole issue".

Such are the applications which Richards envisages for his theory of complexity, and he hopes that if his views are accepted, criticism will be "freed for the inexhaustible enquiry into the nodes of mythology and their integration 'according to their relative worth and dignity' in the growth of our lives".⁷⁶

76. Coleridge on Imagination, p.184.

My chief interest here is not in the general objections which may be raised against Richards' programme, but in the kind of reading needed for an "enquiry into the modes of mythology" ("modes" meaning "linguistic modes"), and its difference from the ordinary reading of poetry.

In their accounts of the response evoked by "imaginative" poetry, both Coleridge and Richards emphasize "ease" as a feature of the process. The "realizing" activity is characterized "not by any intensity of effort, but by the fulness and self-completing growth of the response".⁷⁷ The point is further developed in Richards' attack on the "cross-word puzzler's" approach to poetry:

the detective intelligence, or the Cross-word Puzzler's Technique, are not proper methods in reading poetry
; there is another way of 'looking into' abstruse poetry - a receptive submission which will perhaps be reflected in conjectures but into which inferences among these conjectures do not enter.⁷⁸

Hotopf has noted this element in Richards' thinking: "Many times Richards refers to a sort of effortless, exhilarating, continuing activity of the mind, which is set off by some instance of another's imagination. He seems to take it as hallmark of the Imagination".⁷⁹

77. Coleridge on Imagination, p.83. See above, p.93.

78. *ibid.*, pp.215-216.

79. Hotopf, p.71.

"Ease" is likewise central in Coleridge's views because it is intimately linked with the pleasure which poetry gives:

that sort of pleasurable emotion; which the exertion of all our faculties gives in a certain degree; but which can only be felt in perfection under the full play of those powers of mind which are spontaneous rather than voluntary, and in which the effort required bears no proportion to the activity enjoyed.⁸⁰

In Richards' case the emphasis upon the "ease" of response to poetry is a modification of his account of the "instantaneity" of that response, in Practical Criticism, where, it is said that the reader's apprehension of a complex meaning takes place in a flash, whereas the conscious analysis of that meaning may be a laborious process.⁸¹ In Coleridge on Imagination, Richards puts more emphasis upon the interpreting activity.

But this activity is very different from the activity required by Richards' philosophic interest, which needs poetry merely as material for an enquiry into the nodes of language. Richards, in Speculative Instruments, gives a convenient description of the kind of attention required for this enterprise. The first need is for "an abundant provision of examples of skilled and less skilled interpretations, specimens of minds at work in the inter-actions of words".⁸² Practical

80. Coleridge on Imagination, p.113.

81. Practical Criticism, p.214.

82. I.A. Richards, Speculative Instruments, London, 1955, p.51.

Criticism is, in fact, a collection of such examples from poetry;
Interpretation in Teaching is an equivalent collection from prose.

Study of this material requires the following:

Vigilant field observation; responsive immersion in the actual, in its full concreteness, before, during, and after the passage of the abstractive processes which yield perception; endlessly returning, self-correcting care for the how as well as for the what and the why and the whither of the concern; an unwinking lookout for analogues in all respects however remote, and avid curiosity about all modes of analogy and parallelism; and, above all perhaps, an itch to see how things look from other angles.⁸³

The striking feature here is the conspicuous absence of "ease", of any kind.

We have already seen that Richards tends to confuse these two kinds of reading.⁸⁴ One consequence of this is Schiller's misinterpretation of Richards, which relates particularly to Richards reference to "an itch to see how things look from other angles", and which will be later described at length.⁸⁵ The consequence which immediately concerns us is that Richards is led into stating an important part of his theory of poetry, in Coleridge on Imagination, in terms of the kind of reading required by the philosophic interest,

83. Speculative Instruments, p.51.

84. See above, pp.82-84.

85. See below, pp.150-158.

and this has exposed him to valid criticism from Hotopf. I will examine how this happens, and how important Hotopf's objections are.

In the first place, it seems surprising that Richards should confuse the two kinds of reading. Not only are the differing degrees of difficulty evident even to cursory examination, but they also seem to correspond to the two levels of "awareness" sketched in Richards' initial account of the creative activity of the mind.⁸⁶ Further, the necessary distinction seems to be virtually made in the quotation above from Speculative Instruments, where "receptive immersion" seems to correspond to the phrase "receptive submission" in Coleridge on Imagination.⁸⁷

The point of confusion, however, lies in the importance which Richards attaches to Coleridge's lines,

To thee do all things live from pole to pole
Their life the eddying of thy living soul.⁸⁸

The peculiarity of these lines is that their subject-matter is philosophical (the relation between subject and object), and they consequently compel the reader to that second level of awareness which, according to Coleridge, is "the first postulate of philosophy", and which constitutes self-knowledge.⁸⁹

86. See above, p.86.

87. Coleridge on Imagination, p.216. See above, p.112.

88. *ibid.*, p.152. See above, p.105.

89. See above, p.86.

Richards, as we have seen, claims that this self-knowledge is also self-creation.⁹⁰ He also claims that self-creation is the final end of poetry, and his emphasis upon these particular lines makes him appear to be claiming that all poetry achieves that end, in the same way that it is achieved in these lines of Coleridge.

Hotopf, however, points out that "the self-forming, that comes from the self's awareness of itself embroiled in its experience, is limited only to poems specifically dealing with this",⁹¹ and adds:

clearly Coleridge's emphasis upon being aware of what one is doing at the moment one is doing it, is relevant [to the study of philosophy] in a way it does not seem to be relevant in connection with poetry.⁹²

Hotopf's point seems valid; the awareness involved in realisation of the "what" of the poem (an awareness produced by imaginative activity) does not in itself involve awareness of the "how" of the poem, unless the "how" happens also to be the subject of the poem. Hotopf's criticism appears seriously to invalidate Richards' claim that poetry gives self-knowledge and, thereby, self-creation.

It may be suggested, however, that Richards' confusion here is incidental rather than radical. To say that the reading of poetry brings self-knowledge, and self-creation, is a traditional claim

90. See above, p.85.

91. Hotopf, p.89.

92. *ibid.*, p.90.

which could be illustrated from many critics, and some versions of it will be discussed in our examination of eighteenth-century criticism.⁹³ One of the most memorable brief formulations of the claim appears in George Herbert's lines on the reading of the Scriptures:

Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,
And comments on thee: for in ev'ry thing
Thy words do find me out, & parallels bring,
And in another make me understood.⁹⁴

The context puts any accusatory implications in "find me out" into a secondary position, the main implication being that which appears in such phrases as, "He has found himself". Herbert's lines do not necessarily imply a formal account of the mind in creative terms, but they contain the essential point that Richards' theory needs: the most important understanding to be derived from poetry is that self-understanding which seems to be a finding of the self. This understanding involves awareness of the "what" but not of the "how" of a poem, and it readily accommodates itself to Richards' account of the realising powers of complex language.

93. See below, pp.239-248.

94. George Herbert, The Holy Scriptures II, 11.9-12.

IV.

Richards also wishes to use his theory for making large propositions about the history of English poetry, and this involves the claim that, roughly speaking, eighteenth-century poetry is radically unpoetic. Examination reveals that it is an unjustifiable use, whatever the final merits of the view which it is buttressing. The question merits illustration at some length because this view of eighteenth century poetry constitutes something of an orthodoxy in the school of criticism which Richards helped to establish.⁹⁵

I will consider first Richards' comparison of passages by Gray and Blake, in which he makes an attempt at "comparative studies of poetic structures".⁹⁶ It is an example, that is, of the enquiry into the different modes of language, which Richards claims that Coleridge's thinking has made possible. From Gray he takes the opening of the Elegy:⁹⁷

The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
 The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
 The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
 And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

95. See below, pp.188-191, and p.363.

96. Coleridge on Imagination, p.200.

97. *ibid.*, p.202.

From Blake:

Memory, hither come,
 And tune your merry notes:
 And, while upon the wind
 Your music floats,
 I'll pore upon the stream,
 Where sighing lovers dream,
 And fish for fancies as they pass
 Within the watery glass.⁹⁸

Richards describes the difference between them as follows: in Gray's lines "it is clear that almost all the rest can be properly regarded as dependant from and controlled by the prose-sense";⁹⁹ in Blake's lines the words have senses, but "this is not to say that the whole poem derives simply from the articulation of these senses (as was almost the case with Gray)".¹⁰⁰ Blake's language exhibits a greater degree of "interanimation", or inter-action between the different aspects of meaning; the "senses of the words here come to them as much from their feelings (to use this term as a convenient abbreviation for 'the rest of their powers upon us') as their feelings come from their senses".¹⁰¹

There are two objections to this account. The theoretical

98. Coleridge on Imagination, p.203.

99. *ibid.* :

100. *ibid.*, p.205.

101. *ibid.*, pp.205-206.

objection is that Richards is again beginning to puzzle about the relations between sense and feeling, as he had been doing in Practical Criticism.¹⁰² As we have seen, one of the advantages that using Coleridge had for Richards, was the removal of this puzzle, because he now needs only to describe the interweaving of the parts of the meanings, without establishing questions of precedence between the parts.¹⁰³ To ascribe a greater degree of interanimation to an equality of precedence between sense and feeling is to bring back the old puzzle.

The practical objection is that Richards, very obviously, ignores the complexity of Gray's language and exaggerates the complexity of Blake's. He says of the latter:

For example, tune may be read as 'sing, utter' or as 'accord, bring into order', the stream may be the 'mere river' or 'the stream of life, or time, or desire', and glass may show merely the translucency of the water or turn it into an image-making reflection of things, as a crystal we gaze into.¹⁰⁴

My main point is that Richards ignores the complexity of Gray's lines, not that he exaggerates it in Blake, but it might be noted that "utter" and "accord" in Richards' analysis are redundant, and that

102. See above, pp.68-75.

103. See above, p.90.

104. Coleridge on Imagination, p.204.

the further meanings of "stream" and "glass" are merely those which might feature in any allegorical or metaphorical use of the words. Further, it is not possible to examine Richards' claim that there is, in Blake's lines, equality of precedence between sense and feeling, because there is no evidence given to support it.

More important is his failure to analyse Gray's lines. Analysis of it easily brings out the fact that the "lowing herd", for instance, is also a funeral procession, attending the death of the day, so that "slowly" means "sadly" as well as "tiredly", and the "lowing" takes on a mournful note. But the latter, like the ploughman, are returning home for the night, hence the feeling of sadness is modified. With the ploughman, similarly, the feeling of homecoming is blended with the feeling of dreariness carried by the phrase "weary way". This dreariness relates to the monotony of the peasant life, which is dwelt upon at length later in the poem. In view of that later development, and in connection with the death of the day, the "weary way" is "the journey of life" and "homeward", therefore, also means "death". This touches upon the complex of feelings that appears in the final stanza of the poem, where death is not only the "abode" of the young poet, but also "the bosom of his Father", and where there is, consequently, the same link between death and homecoming. This complexity readily lends itself to description in Coleridgean terms; the scene of the opening of the poem is "realized" in terms of a set of feelings about death,

and thus shows "an unusual intensity of the modifying power".¹⁰⁵

This is not, of course, to say that Gray writes like Blake. My point is that the difference cannot be explained, or described, by Richards' method of analysis. In terms of complexity, or inter-
inanimation, Gray, in this poem, is to be set with Blake, not against him. Further, as I have noted, the assertion that in Blake sense and feeling have a different order of precedence is not supported, nor is it easy to see how it might be supported. Richards later confesses as much when he re-names the old "aspects of meaning" ("sense", "feeling", "tone" and "intention") "respects" and says: "It seems to me unlikely that the participations of the respects have, in poetry, any fixed precedence".¹⁰⁶

The view of eighteenth century poetry implicit in the comparison of Gray with Blake is explicitly stated in Richards' postulation of a national decline in the ability to use language:

With the eighteenth century, the variety of the modes of metaphor in speech and in writing rapidly declined.

Dr. Johnson, for example, can show, at times, strange obtuseness in distinguishing between degrees of metaphor.

It was this which made Donne seem artificial, absurd, unimpassioned and bewildering to him.¹⁰⁷

Further, the bulk of the examples of "fancy" with which Richards

105. See above, p.87.

106. Speculative Instruments, p.42, footnote.

107. Coleridge on Imagination, p.194.

illustrates his account of "interanimation" are taken from Dryden's Annus Mirabilis,¹⁰⁸ and this re-inforces the general attitude he takes to eighteenth century poetry in Coleridge on Imagination.

The theme is later taken up again in Richards' comparison of Donne with Dryden, in an essay in The Language of Poetry, and it is convenient to look at this immediately.¹⁰⁹

This essay is a development of the ideas we have seen in Coleridge on Imagination. Of some lines from Donne's First Anniversary, Richards says:

there is a prodigious activity between the words as we read them. Following, exploring, realizing, becoming that activity is, I suggest, the essential thing in reading the poem. Understanding it is not a preparation for reading the poem. It is itself the poem. And it is a constructive, hazardous, free creative process, a process of conception through which a new being is growing in the mind.¹¹⁰

On the other hand, it is said of some lines from Dryden's Ann Killigrew:

No doubt there are interactions between the words but they are on a different level. The words are in routine conventional relations like peaceful diplomatic

108. Coleridge on Imagination, pp.94-95.

109. "The Interactions of Words", The Language of Poetry, ed. Allen Tate, 1942, pp.65-87.

110. *ibid.*, p.76.

communications between nations. They do not induce revolutions in one another and are not thereby attempting to form a new order. Any mutual adjustments they have to make are preparatory, and they are no important part of the poetic activity.¹¹¹

One reason for this, Richards says, is that: "Public declamation - the style of reading which the Ode suggests as right - does not invite close attention to the meaning".¹¹² Richards' comments on Dryden's poem are all adverse, though they are offered as limiting criticisms, not as outright condemnations. He has no doubt that Dryden succeeded in doing what he was trying to do, but thinks his attempt is of intrinsically limited interest. As with the earlier comparison of Gray and Blake, Richards sees here "two very different types of the interactions of words in poetry".¹¹³

It is true that Dryden's poem is not like Donne's but Richards' analysis shows inadequacies in explaining the difference similar to those we saw in the comparison of Gray with Blake. He exaggerates Donne's complexity:

For who is sure he hath a Soule, unlesse
It see, and judge, and follow worthiness;

"sure" is more than "confident, without doubts about it"; it means "safe, firm, immovable", because seeing, judging

111. "The Interactions of Words", The Language of Poetry, p.76.

112. *ibid.*, p.78.

113. *ibid.*, p.74.

and following worthiness are themselves the very possession of a soul, not merely signs of having one.¹¹⁴

"Sure", I think, means no more here than it does in almost any occurrence; "I am sure of it", in reply to a query, exhibits the same "activity".

More important is Richards' neglect of the complexity of Dryden's lines, which I will briefly illustrate:

Thou youngest virgin-daughter of the skies,
 Made in the last promotion of the blest;
 Whose palms, new pluck'd from Paradise,
 In spreading branches more sublimely rise,
 5 Rich with immortal green above the rest:
 Whether, adopted to some neighbouring star,
 Thou roll'st above us, in thy wandering race,
 Or, in procession fixt and regular,
 Mov'd with the heaven's majestic pace;
 10 Or, call'd to more superior bliss,
 Thou tread'st with seraphims the vast abyss:
 Whatever happy region is thy place
 Cease thy celestial song a little space.¹¹⁵

This is "declamatory", but it is much more than merely so. In the first place, the movement is very closely attuned to the meaning, as is particularly evident in the fourth and eleventh lines. Here one may profitably recollect Richards' own account of metre, in Coleridge

114. "The Interactions of Words", The Language of Poetry, p.82.

115. *ibid.*, p.75.

on Imagination, as a movement among meanings.¹¹⁶ The more important point, however, is the inter-action between the different kinds of motion described in the lines; the words from which the long sentence springs are "rise", "roll'st", "wandering", "procession", "mov'd", "pace", and "tread'st", and there is a climax in the eleventh line, where the movement described is both stately and magical. The impressiveness of this line depends partly on the local effect, which is somewhat like Marvell's description of the fawn, in his Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn, which "trod as on the four winds", but much of its power comes from its relations with the movements described in the other key words. That the movement in this line is stately and magical relates also to the word "sublimely" in the fourth line, since the feeling which informs the whole passage comes under the head of the "sublime". The lines, like Gray's, exhibit an "unusual intensity of the modifying power",¹¹⁷ and to see them as merely "declamatory" is to miss the point; the sound and rhythm are in the closest relation with the inter-actions of meaning.

As in the comparison of Gray with Blake, the natural use of Richards' analytic method would be to place Donne and Dryden, for all their differences, together. If it were to be used for making distinctions, they would be between Donne and Dryden on the one

116. Coleridge on Imagination, p.119. See above, pp.95-96.

117. See above, p.87.

hand, and inferior poets of the metaphysical and neo-classical schools on the other. Richards is attempting to use the theory for work which falls outside its scope.

V.

An examination of Richards' misuses of his theory also brings to attention a general feature of his approach to analysis; there is a combination of great hesitancy about what can be done at present, combined with high hopes of what may be accomplished in the future. It seems clear that both the hesitancy and the hopes are exaggerated.

The high hopes are, in part, the reason for the ambitiousness of the uses which we have been describing. Richards' hope is that, inconclusive as his analyses are, they point the direction in which a spectacular development might occur. He feels that "in view of the immense improvement in our powers that we owe here to Coleridge, it would be idle to set bounds now to what may be possible".¹¹⁸ At the same time, he points out that if we are asked "whether the doctrine of Imagination can supply conclusive arguments"¹¹⁹ about the status of a given poem our answer "must be a firm No".¹²⁰

118. Coleridge on Imagination, p.127.

119. *ibid.*, pp.125-126.

120. *ibid.*, p.127.

It is, I suppose, imaginable that the degree of realization, or the status as a mode of language, of a given poem might, eventually, be conclusively demonstrated. However, even if it could be demonstrated with mathematical certainty, what would have been achieved? It is now, for example, universally agreed that Shakespeare is a supreme writer in the imaginative mode. The demonstration of it is not mathematical, but no one has any doubt of it. But to understand that it is so, as against merely knowing it, is a different matter, and one in which there is no place for short-cuts. The reader will know nothing worth knowing about King Lear until he has been thoroughly engaged in a reading of that play. Essentially Richards' high hopes embody a desire to arrive without having travelled. To recollect, say, Keats's lines, from On Sitting Down to Read "King Lear" Once Again -

for, once again, the fierce dispute
Betwixt damnation and impassioned clay
Must I burn through -

is sufficient to make the point. What conclusive arguments about the linguistic mode of King Lear could serve any useful purpose without this essential prerequisite? It may be said that Richards assumes this prerequisite, and that the conclusive arguments about the linguistic mode are additional; but for a man who had read King Lear as Keats read it such arguments, though interesting, would be marginal.

What is faulty in Richards' procedure is the over-estimation

of what refinement of the analytic method might accomplish. No-one would deny that such a refinement, if accompanied by sufficient literary experience, would be valuable.

In Richards' case, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that there is insufficient literary experience, and here lies the paradoxical reverse of the coin of his high hopes; his under-estimation of what analysis can do now. One does not find in Richards that deliberateness of judgement, enforced by analysis, that one finds in, say, Johnson's Shakespeare criticism, where the analytic method, though in itself less refined than Richards', is more effective because it is in the service of prolonged literary experience.

I will now look briefly at Richards' excessive caution about analysis.

Richards calls his analytic method a "speculative instrument",¹²¹ and the phrase anticipates the title of his later collection of essays, Speculative Instruments. The point of so calling it is to prevent us from forgetting "that we are not trying, in our descriptions, to say what happens, but framing a speculative apparatus to assist us in observing a difference" —the difference being, of course, between "fancy" and "imagination".¹²²

I have suggested that there are general factors behind Richards'

121. Coleridge on Imagination, p.73.

122. *ibid.*, p.87.

cautiousness, but there is also a more specific motive. Richards' own summary of his key move in his account of complexity in Coleridge on Imagination runs as follows:

In place of 'the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others and by a sort of fusion to force many into one', I have used phrases which suggest that it is the number of connexions between the many, and the relations between these connexions, that give the unity - in brief, that the co-adunation is the inter-relationship of the parts.¹²³

The obvious objection to this is that there is in Coleridge's thinking no justification for translating the idea of "fusion" into the idea of multiplicity of inter-connection, and Richards' insistence that we are not claiming to describe what actually happens is a counter to this objection. He particularly needs the counter, because his idea of multiplicity of inter-connection reduces the distinction between "fancy" and "imagination" to one of degree, whereas Coleridge had insisted that it is a distinction in kind.¹²⁴ The distinction has to be reduced to one of degree, because, evidently, there will be some inter-connection between the words in any piece of writing.¹²⁵

It is important for Richards to counter the objection, because, as we have seen, he wants the analytic method for distinguishing

123. Coleridge on Imagination, pp.84-85.

124. *ibid.*, p.34.

125. *ibid.*, p.90.

between different "modes" of language, and therefore wishes to preserve the idea of a distinction in kind.

But his insistence that the analytic method does not pretend to describe "what happens", when we are reading complex language, hardly squares with his commentary on the lines from Venus and Adonis, in his initial account. There Richards says:

as the reader's mind finds cross-connexion after cross-connexion between [the meanings], he seems, in becoming more aware of them, to be discovering not only Shakespeare's meaning, but something which he, the reader, is himself making. His understanding of Shakespeare is sanctioned by his own activity in it.¹²⁶

It is hard to see this as anything other than a description of "what happens", even if one concedes, as is necessary, that spelling out the process in detail inevitably distorts, to some extent, the nature of the actual experience.

The problems which Richards' cautiousness is trying to counter, however, disappear if one sees the analytic method simply as a tool for cultivating close attention to the functioning of words in poetry, and as an attempt, admittedly inexact, to point to places where the functioning seems significantly successful or unsuccessful. This use seems humbler than the ones envisaged by Richards, but, in fact, the kind of attentive reading inculcated and illustrated by it, is the fundamental art which those engaged in the study of literature

126. Coleridge on Imagination, pp.83-84. See above, p.93.

are primarily attempting to develop, in themselves and in others. A reader whose habit of response to language has developed at the level required by the complexity of Shakespeare or Pope, will have little difficulty in detecting slackness, inertness, or failure to exploit the full powers of language, in his reading of literature in general. Whether a given degree of slackness is in the mode of "fancy" is a question which will not be of over-riding interest to him, since he will already possess that soundness of judgement which is the most important outcome of deliberate literary study.

I have given an account of Richards' theory of complexity in Coleridge on Imagination, examined some of the uses to which he wished to put it, and suggested that the analytic method is best used in inculcating attentive reading habits.

My final point concerns the general direction in which Richards is moving. We have seen that Richards' development has involved an increasing emphasis on the role of sense in poetry,¹²⁷ and here, it seems, lies the reason for his preference of Donne's lines over Dryden's, in the essay discussed above. A plain man might say, having been asked to compare the two passages, that Dryden deals in "images", whereas Donne deals in "ideas", and this rough and ready distinction would have a large element of truth in it. Richards' taste is now at the opposite pole from that which involved a high

127. See above, pp.96-97.

estimate of Swinburne. This tendency may be readily high-lighted by noting that, in the two collections of essays, Speculative Instruments and So Much Nearer, the only essay which concerns itself with examination of a literary work, is called "Troilus and Cressida and Plato";¹²⁸ and it is amply confirmed by Richards' own poetry, which is intellectually strenuous, by any standards.

This taste is intimately connected with the theoretical tendencies of Richards' later work. These tendencies are implicit in the idea of "activity", in Coleridge on Imagination, and appear more fully in The Philosophy of Rhetoric, which will now be examined, along with Richards' subsequent work. My argument is that the later development of the idea of "activity" is an exaggeration, in the opposite direction from those earlier tendencies which under-estimated the role of sense in poetry.

128. Speculative Instruments, pp.198-213.

CHAPTER 5

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RHETORIC

I.

The development of the idea of "activity" and a related attack on accounts of poetry which stress the importance of images, are central themes of The Philosophy of Rhetoric. We will look at the attack, and then at its basis and implications. Our examination will take in relevant areas of Richards' work after The Philosophy of Rhetoric.

The attack begins in the first chapter, where we are shown Lord Kames pondering on a speech by Williams, one of the private soldiers in Henry V. The topic of conversation is what "a poor and private displeasure can do against a monarch",¹ and Williams remarks that a subject, seeking redress for a grievance inflicted by a king, "may as well go about to turn the sun to ice with fanning in his face with a peacock's feather".² Richards quotes Kames' comment:

The peacock's feather, not to mention the beauty of the object, completes the image: an accurate image cannot be formed of that fanciful operation without conceiving a

1. Henry V, IV. i. 86-225.

2. *ibid.* ll.198-200.

particular feather; and one is at a loss when this is neglected in the description.³

Richards has some fun contemplating Kames "blandly enjoying the beauty and completeness of the lively and distinct and accurate image of the feather he has produced for himself";⁴ though it would in fact have been easy to pick out far less absurd examples of Kames' "imagist" doctrine. The example Richards' selects may well have been the kind of thing Johnson had in mind when he remarked that much of Kames' work is "chimerical".⁵ In this instance Kames' criteria are very evidently misapplied.

Richards' attack on Kames' assumptions is pursued in the fourth chapter, where he makes the following general point:

We cannot too firmly recognize that how a figure of speech works has nothing necessarily to do with how any images, as copies or duplicates of sense-perceptions, may, for reader or writer, be backing up his words.⁶

This distrust of "images", now coming to the fore in Richards' thinking, had always been an element in his work. It expresses itself in the theory of meaning in The Meaning of Meaning,⁷ and in, for

3. I.A. Richards, The Philosophy of Rhetoric, New York, 1936, p.16.

4. *ibid.*, p.17.

5. Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed. G.B. Hill, revised by L.F. Powell, Oxford, 1934, i, 394.

6. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.98.

7. C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning, Tenth Edition, London, 1949, pp.60-62.

instance, the remark, in Principles of Literary Criticism, that "too much importance has always been attached to the sensory qualities of images".⁸

In the sixth chapter the attack turns towards Hulme, who is quoted as saying of the language of poetry :

[it] is not a language of counters, but... a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. It always endeavours to arrest you, and make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process.⁹

To this Richards opposes his own view:

So far from verbal language being a "compromise for a language of intuition" - a thin, but better-than-nothing, substitute for real experience, - language, well-used, is a completion and does what the intuitions of sensation by themselves cannot do. Words are the meeting points at which regions of experience which can never combine in sensation or intuition, come together. They are the occasion and the means of that growth which is the mind's endless endeavour to order itself.¹⁰

Whether or not Richards accurately represents Hulme's full position, his criticism of that particular quotation is justifiable. Language

8. I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, London, 1926, p.119.

9. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.128.

10. *ibid.*, pp.130-131.

is not simply a tool for recording or reflecting experience, but an intimate part of experience, and a part which has an organising function. Richards' point is similar to that vividly recorded by Eliot in Four Quartets:

We had the experience but missed the meaning,
 And approach to the meaning restores the experience
 In a different form....
the past experience revived in the meaning
 Is not the experience of one life only
 But of many generations.¹¹

Eliot's lines also indicate that the poet, in struggling with language, is not only struggling with his experience, of which language is a part, but also with the experience of past generations, for a language is, amongst other things, a record of similar past struggles. Richards illustrates this by quoting Shelley:

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 disorganised, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse.¹²

11. "The Dry Salvages", 11.93 ff.

12. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, pp.90-91.

Richards not only points out the omissions in the "imagist" doctrine but also presents a theory of poetic language in which the key term is "activity". Fundamentally, this is the theory we have seen in Coleridge on Imagination, but the element of "activity" is further stressed by a reformulation of the context theory of meaning, which was outlined in our account of The Meaning of Meaning.¹³ The theory of "activity" is now geared for an attack on "imagism", in that it is at the furthest possible remove from the idea that words represent things. We will look at the theory in detail.

The theory of meaning presented in The Philosophy of Rhetoric defines meaning as "delegated efficacy",¹⁴ and says that "what a sign or word means is the missing parts of the context".¹⁵ "Context" here means what is meant in the theory of sign-situations presented in The Meaning of Meaning, where recurrence of a part of a context is said to recall, or be a sign of, the other parts of that context.¹⁶ There is not, of course, total re-call but a selection of relevant features of past contexts. Thus, to offer our own example, the word "book", in a particular occurrence, "means" the parts of its "contexts" in

13. See above, pp.1-3.

14. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.32.

15. *ibid.*, p.34.

16. See above, p.2.

previous occurrences, which are relevant to the new occurrence. To define "meaning" in this way may well arouse indignation in some quarters. The reason why Richards wants so to define it may conveniently be illustrated from Interpretation in Teaching:

The multiplicity and interdependence of the meaning of words, so much insisted upon here, becomes obvious and necessary as soon as we conceive of interpretation in terms of sign-situations.¹⁷

The context theory of meaning lays the greatest possible emphasis on the interpreting activity. "Multiplicity" arises from the large number of past contexts involved in the recurrence of a word, and "interdependence" from the fact that the present context determines the relevant selection from the past contexts.

Harnessed to the context theory of meaning is the idea that a "perception is never just of an it; perception takes whatever it perceives as a thing of a certain sort. All thinking from the lowest to the highest - whatever else it may be - is sorting".¹⁸ This idea, like the distrust of "images" with which it is closely connected, had always been present in Richards's thinking,¹⁹ but it now occupies a more important place. A simple illustration of the idea might run

17. I.A. Richards, Interpretation in Teaching, London, 1938, p.48, footnote.

18. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.30.

19. See, for example, The Meaning of Meaning, p.214, and Principles of Literary Criticism, p.128.

as follows: a child has a category - a "sort" - which he thinks of as "hard things"; a chair may for him be in this category. As he grows, "chair" becomes more specifically defined by partaking of a greater number of sorts, so that, eventually, it may, in a given situation, become "an interesting example of the work of Sheraton". As Richards says, a perception is "the more concrete as we take it as of more sorts".²⁰

This position is re-stated in Interpretation in Teaching and a quotation from there is useful because it serves to make an immediate further point:

To think of anything is to take it as of a sort (as a such and such) and that 'as' brings in (openly or in disguise) the analogy, the parallel, the metaphoric grapple or ground or grasp or draw by which alone the mind takes its hold. It takes no hold if there is nothing for it to haul from, for its thinking is the haul, the attraction of likes.²¹

Richards wishes to stress that all language works in the same way as metaphor: "a word is normally a substitute for (or means) not one discrete past impression but a combination of general aspects. Now that is itself a summary account of the principle of metaphor".²²

20. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.31.

21. Interpretation in Teaching, p.49.

22. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.93.

The chief objection to this account is that in metaphor proper the "aspects" to be combined are from so much more widely different areas of experience than those involved in the mere recurrence of a word, that we should regard the process as containing an important additional factor. Richards is here blowing a little too hard in his inflation of the importance of the interpreting "activity". In Hotopf's view, the importing of the principle of metaphor into the theory of meaning is one of the unjustifiable strategies by which Richards suggests that philosophy is like poetry; if all meaning is metaphoric than the most apparently technical and dry piece of philosophic prose is riddled with metaphor.²³ This point is not so important for Richards' thinking about poetry, the highly metaphoric nature of which no-one would want to deny, but it shows how hard Richards is pushing in a certain direction. Before examining the implications of his thinking, we will close our account of the theory of meaning presented in The Philosophy of Rhetoric by glancing briefly at its bearings upon analysis. Empson's well-known, almost notorious, comment on Shakespeare's comparison of a tree in winter with "bare ruined choirs", runs as follows:

the comparison holds for many reasons; because ruined monastery choirs are places in which to sing, because they involve sitting in a row, because they are made of wood, are

23. W.H.N. Hotopf, Language, Thought and Comprehension. A Case Study of the Writings of I.A. Richards, London, 1965, p.102.

carved into knots and so forth, because they used to be surrounded by a sheltering building crystallised out of the likeness of a forest, and coloured with stained glass and painting like flowers and leaves, because they are now abandoned by all but the grey walls coloured like the skies of winter, because the cold and Narcissistic charm suggested by choir-boys suits well with Shakespeare's feeling for the object of the Sonnets, and for various sociological and historical reasons (the protestant destruction of monasteries; fear of puritanism), which it would be hard now to trace out in their proportions.²⁴

It would be easy to translate Empson's list into terms of the "sorts" which constitute Shakespeare's perception of the tree and the ruined monastery, to note the part played by them in the metaphorical process, and to suggest how the context here dictates the relevant selection of features of past contexts. Such a translation would not effect any increase in descriptive power, but it would tend to prevent any talk about the "vivid particularity" of the "image", which might easily arise if the analysis were put in terms of "associations", "qualities" or "properties" of the objects in the "image": it would emphasize the intensity of the interpreting activity.

24. W. Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, Third Edition (Revised), London, 1953, pp.2-3.

II.

The account of meaning described above has some valuable features. Partly these are connected with its role as a "policeman" theory, as Richards puts it, and its function is to keep out the simplifying distortions involved in a crudely "imagist" view.²⁵ The justice of this point comes out in Richards's common-sensical remark that the words in poetry act as follows:

[they] make us apprehend, understand, gain a realizing sense of, take in, whatever it is that is being meant - which is not necessarily any physical thing. But if we say "a realizing sense", we must remember that this is not any 'sense' necessarily, such as sense-perception gives, but may be a feeling or a thought. What is essential is that we should really take in and become fully aware of - whatever it is.²⁶

Further, Richards' stress on "activity" rather than "images" leads to the development of useful analytical procedures.

The most notable of these is the naming of the two parts of a metaphor and the insistence that the relations between them are not entirely a matter of resemblance. This springs directly from the attack on Hulme's view that accuracy of correspondence between the two parts is the sole criterion of metaphor.²⁷

25. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.38.

26. *ibid.*, p.130.

27. *ibid.*, p.132.

The two parts are called "tenor" and "vehicle".²⁸ Thus if we call a man "a lion in battle", his courage is the "tenor" and the lion the "vehicle". Richards notes the oddity that names for the two principal parts of a metaphor had not been put into general currency, and suggests that one of the important factors in Hulme's mistaken view, was the ambiguous use of "metaphor" to mean sometimes "vehicle" and sometimes "vehicle and tenor".²⁹

The insistence that the relations between tenor and vehicle are not entirely a matter of resemblance runs as follows:

In general, there are very few metaphors in which disparities between tenor and vehicle are not as much operative as the similarities. Some similarity will commonly be the ostensive ground of the shift, but the peculiar modification of the tenor which the vehicle brings about is even more the work of their unlikenesses than of their likenesses.³⁰

The principal example Richards gives is Hamlet's, "What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?"³¹ Richards

28. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.96.

29. *ibid.*, pp.132-133.

30. *ibid.*, p.127.

31. Hamlet, III, i, 127.

comments:

There is disparity action.... When Hamlet uses the word crawling its force comes not only from whatever resemblances to vermin it brings in but at least equally from the differences that resist and control the influences of their resemblances. The implication there is that man should not so crawl.³²

What a "disparity action" is doing, and how important it is, in a given case, may be a matter for arguments, but Richards' work here is valuable, and its merit, as with the basic doctrine of "interanimation", with which it is closely connected, is its simplicity.

At the same time, Richards rejects the position which he illustrates by a quotation from André Breton, who is described as "the leader of the French Super-Realists":³³

To compare two objects, as remote from one another in character as possible, or by any other method put them together in a sudden and striking fashion, this remains the highest task to which poetry can aspire.³⁴

Richards describes the happy medium between this extreme and the

32. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.127.

33. *ibid.*, p.123.

34. *ibid.*

Kamesian or Hulmean extreme, by a metaphor from archery:

As the two things put together are more remote, the tension created is, of course, greater. That tension is the spring of the bow, the source of the energy of the shot, but we ought not to mistake the strength of the bow for the excellence of the shooting; or the strain for the aim.³⁵

As we shall see, this common-sense view is, not surprisingly, similar to that held by Dr Johnson, although Johnson did not explicitly formulate the idea of "disparity action".³⁶

The nature and usefulness of this feature of The Philosophy of Rhetoric need neither explanation nor comment, but it may be incidentally remarked that disparity action, which is a type of complexity or "interanimation", will be much more prominent in dramatic poetry than in descriptive, narrative, or reflective poetry. This is clear if we compare Hamlet's remark with Richards' own metaphor from archery. In the latter case it is much more difficult to see what the disparity action is doing, other than giving pleasure through surprise. For instance, the disparity between physical strength in the vehicle and mental strength in the tenor is merely irrelevant. There is a direct link between this and the tendency of the critical school which Richards helped to inspire, to prefer

35. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.125.

36. See below, p.258.

dramatic poetry - poetry which keeps close to actual speech. This is clear in Dr. Leavis's comment on Donne's line "Call country ants to harvest offices": "It is the fact that farm-labourers are not ants, but very different, that, equally with the likeness, gives the metaphor its force". Dr. Leavis associates this process with "the tone of sublimely contemptuous good humour" that marks the opening of the poem.³⁷ I have already suggested that disparity between tenor and vehicle is more prominent in dramatic poetry, and it may be added here that this will be particularly so when some kind of irony is present.³⁸ The emphasis on the importance of disparity reinforces the dominant modern taste.

Closely related to the idea of disparity action is Richards' suggestive discussion of Eliot's lines:

Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,
And they asked me in to get the beauty of it hot.

Richards notes that when "people talk of 'beautiful food' some are apt to shudder" at such gross use of the word "beauty", and adds of Eliot's line:

[it uses] that shudder, and all the pathetic reverberations from its occasion and its contrasts. That is the full use of language - which dramatic writing more than any other, of course, requires. It takes its word, not as

37. Scrutiny, xiii (1945-46), 119-120. (Donne, The Sun Rising)

38. See below, p.232, for a discussion by Dr. Johnson of a subtle case of this kind.

the repository of a single constant power but as a means by which the different powers it may exert in different situations are brought together...with an interinanimating opposition.³⁹

Richards here himself makes the point about the particular prominence of this process in dramatic poetry. What is especially evident in this commentary on Eliot is the way in which the theory of "interinanimation" stresses the importance of a "natural" use of language in poetry— language which draws upon a large number and a large variety of past contexts.

III.

Such are the valuable elements in Richards's development in The Philosophy of Rhetoric, of the idea of poetry as "activity". He is, however, in danger of moving to an opposite extreme from that occupied by Hulme and Kames. This appears in the remark that the "language of the greatest poetry is frequently abstract in the extreme and its aim is precisely to send us 'gliding through an abstract process'."⁴⁰ The last phrase here describes what Hulme thought poetry should,

39. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.85.

40. *ibid.*, p.129.

above all, avoid. To illustrate his point Richards quotes from
Troilus and Cressida:

This she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida.
 If beauty have a soul, this is not she,
 If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimony,
 If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
 If there be rule in unity itself,
 This is not she.

Richards comments: "We are not asked by Shakespeare here to perceive beauty, but to understand it through a metaphoric argument as the 'rule in unity itself' and to understand its place in the soul's growth".⁴¹ With regard to this particular instance, Richards' use of the word "abstract" is rather misleading. In these lines Shakespeare is not primarily asking us to understand "beauty"; he is depicting a young man whose love has been betrayed. We are not "gliding through an abstract process", but, if we read aright, grasping a particular moment in a human experience. Certainly, words like "abstract" and "particular" are not very satisfactory here, in any case, but they can fairly serve to make our point.

But the more important consideration is that to take lines like this as the basis of a poetic theory, is as potentially misleading as it would be to take, say, a poem by Hulme. Just as a poem by Hulme invites description in terms of sharp particularity, so these lines invite description in terms of "activity".

41. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.129. Troilus and Cressida, V, ii. 135-140.

IV.

Does Richards mislead himself by this emphasis on poetry which most prominently exhibits "activity"? It is convenient to answer the question by examining Dr. Schiller's account of Richards,⁴² because it takes for its centre the later developments of Richards' thinking, where the idea of "activity" is most elaborately developed. It will be argued that this account not only distorts beyond recognition Richards' views in Coleridge on Imagination, but also is of very limited applicability when tested against its own examples. The advantage of examining Dr. Schiller's account lies in the fact that his unifying and clarifying of important elements in Richards's work after Coleridge on Imagination, brings their weaknesses to the fore, though Dr. Schiller sees them as strengths and not as weaknesses. After discussing Dr. Schiller's account, I shall try to show to what extent it is a just reflection of the later phases of Richards's thinking. My argument is that Richards' stress on poetry of the kind exemplified in Troilus' speech readily permits confusion between the reading of poetry and the study of philosophy, and thus serves the same purpose as Coleridge's

42. Jerome P. Schiller, I.A. Richards' Theory of Literature, Yale, 1969. The following account is essentially contained in my review of Dr. Schiller's book in Essays in Criticism, xx (1970), 367-374.

metaphor of the "eddy" in Coleridge on Imagination, but with more noticeable consequences.⁴³

I will first briefly summarize Dr. Schiller's theory, which is derived from and attributed to Richards. According to Dr. Schiller, the essential value of poetry lies in the fact that its language demands a special kind of attention. This language has multiple meanings, and behind these meanings lies a multiplicity of conceptual frameworks and, hence, a multiplicity of purposes. The value of this special language is that it compels the reader to become aware of the balancing of various purposes underlying his various interpretations; this results in "self-knowledge" or "self-realisation".⁴⁴

"Frameworks" and the purposes they involve are central to the account, and are elaborated as follows:

every utterance has the function of purposing because it affirms some framework or organisation of things and events. This framework is rarely established by the utterance in question. But, as intelligible only within such a framework, and thus dependant upon its acceptance, the utterance directly supports the framework and indirectly supports the attitudes which underlie its establishment.⁴⁵

43. See above, pp.105-106.

44. See, for example, Schiller, pp.44-46.

45. *ibid.*, p.66.

The illustrative examples of these "frameworks" which Dr. Schiller gives should be reproduced, because they serve to recall some of the sources which lead to his account:

A typical example is the contrasted pair of views of nature - realistic and projectionistic - described in Coleridge on Imagination, which closely parallels the similar contrast between the "magical" and "scientific" views of the universe in Science and Poetry. A few of his frameworks are fresh and intriguing, such as the American susceptibility to "suggestion" as opposed to the English sense of "tradition"; or the Chinese attitude towards the acceptability of a statement, determined by the way in which the statement fits in with accepted social practice, and not by its meeting intellectual standards.⁴⁶

Some of the elements in Richards' work which appear in Dr. Schiller's version have been discussed in our own account, particularly the stress upon multiplicity of meaning and its connection with "self-realisation".⁴⁷ The emergence of "purposing", the aspect of meaning which Richards used to call "intention", into a primary place is a later development. Richards says, for instance, that the various other aspects of meaning may all occasionally lapse in various kinds

46. Schiller, p.67.

47. See above, pp.93-94.

of writing but that "without purposing, without the feed-forward which structures all activity, no utterance and no comprehending".⁴⁸ The phrasing here conveniently shows how the prominence of "purposing" is linked with the stress on "activity" as the key notion in an account of reading. The source of Dr. Schiller's idea of balanced conceptual frameworks is evident in his reference to the "realistic" and "projectionistic" views, which we have seen in our discussion of Coleridge on Imagination; complex language presents the "fact of mind" in which are "balanced" the two doctrines which may be derived from it.⁴⁹

Dr. Schiller supports these points with material taken from Richards' various investigations into the workings of language, and we have already described the kind of interpretation required by enquiries of that kind.⁵⁰ Dr. Schiller claims that Richards' own tendency to confuse the reading of poetry with the use of poetry as material in such enquiries allows us "to expect and discover material relevant to the description of one sort of interpretation in works ostensibly devoted to the description of the other".⁵¹ The key word

48. I.A. Richards, Speculative Instruments, London, 1955, pp.27-28. Richards refers us to Speculative Instruments, pp.119-122, for an account of "feed-forward"; see below pp.167-170 for a discussion of this.

49. See above, pp.105-107.

50. See above, pp.113-114.

51. Schiller, p.75.

here, clearly, is "relevant", and we shall look immediately at the justice of the claim.

All of Dr. Schiller's key examples are taken from Richards, and the first one is the familiar:

Look! how a bright star shooteth from the sky,
So glides he in the night from Venus' eye.

Dr. Schiller gives an edited version of Richards' commentary:

Here...the more the image is followed up, the more links of relevance between the units are discovered.... The separable meanings of each word, Look! (our surprise at the meteor, hers at his flight), star (a light-giver, an influence, a remote and uncontrollable thing)...glides (not rapidity only, but fatal ease, too)... - all these separable meanings are here brought into one.⁵²

Dr Schiller regards Coleridge on Imagination as a transitional work, giving hints about the later, and more satisfactory, theory, so he provides his own commentary, the essence of which is the remark that "each meaning found to be relevant indirectly reflects a purpose governing the entire utterance. Thus the multiplicity of meanings reflects a multiplicity of purposes".⁵³ It is, to say the least, difficult to conceive how this might be so. A remarkable feat of ingenuity would be needed to enforce the point, and even that degree

52. Schiller, p.76. See above, p.92.

53. *ibid.*, p.79.

of ingenuity would be defeated by the further need to associate the purposes with "conceptual frameworks". Coleridge, Richards and Dr. Schiller agree that the lines are in the highest poetic mode, so that it ought to be a strong candidate for fulfilling the requirements of Dr. Schiller's theory.

The same point may be made of the second of Dr. Schiller's key examples, which is Richards' analysis of Denham's lines on the Thames:

O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream
 My great exemplar, as it is my theme!
 Though deep, yet clear : though gentle, yet not dull;
 Strong without rage; without overflowing full.

Dr. Schiller's commentary, in keeping with his theory, runs:

The metaphoric relationship between mind and river forces us to concentrate on the variety of interpretations that we afford to the mind. Thus the metaphor does not say anything directly about the mind, but merely provides the occasion for multiple sayings.⁵⁴

The phrase "variety of interpretation" can only refer to the fact that Richards had said that "deep", applied to "mind", means "mysterious" and "rich in knowledge and power".⁵⁵ The essential point, however, is not that Dr. Schiller distorts and exaggerates Richards' thinking, but that the lines fail to conform to his

54. Schiller, p.85. Cf. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, pp.121-123.

55. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.122.

theory. What the lines "realise", so far from affording a "variety of interpretations" of the kind that might involve differing "purposes" and "conceptual frameworks", is what might, for convenience's sake, be called "the Augustan norm".

This is, in fact, subtly brought out by Richards's own commentary. He notes that in Denham's sequence of metaphorical adjectives, in some cases the vehicle-meaning has priority, in others the tenor-meaning, and that "this alternating movement in the shifts may have not a little to do with the rather mysterious power of the couplet, the way it exemplifies what it is describing".⁵⁶ Denham is praising, that is, a controlled and balanced personality, and the antithetical balance of the shifts, like the antithetical balance of the couplet movement, is one of the factors in the realising, as opposed to mere statement, of the meaning. We have already discussed the place that this takes in Richards's thinking; the "inter-inanimation", or complexity, of the language leads the reader to a re-creation of what the lines are about, and the heightened awareness issuing from this constitutes not only self-knowledge but self-creation.⁵⁷ In more ordinary language, the fit reader of Denham not only gets the idea, he feels what it is like to have that idea, and, further, that part of himself which answers to the idea

56. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.121.

57. See above, p.93.

and the feeling, comes into being, and is recognized. This by no means constitutes a complete account of literary study, but it describes the essence of it.

So far, the practical inapplicability of the theory which Dr. Schiller attributes to Richards has been outlined. Its weakness, generally stated, hinges on the point that Hotopf makes about Richards' discussion of Coleridge's presentation of the relation between perceived and perceiver through the metaphor of an eddy: "The self's awareness of itself embroiled in its experience" and the particular kind of "self-realisation" consequent upon it, are limited to the reading of poetry which is about such "embroilment".⁵⁸ And Hotopf's words here are, in fact, a condensed summary of Dr. Schiller's theory.

For our purposes, the convenience of Dr. Schiller's account is that it draws together the elements in Richards' thinking which spring from the use of poetry as material for investigating the workings of language, and thus makes clear their limited applicability to the reading of poetry.

Dr. Schiller's license in drawing, in the building of his theory, upon Richards' use of poetry as case material, is lent plausibility by Richards' own tendency to confuse this procedure with the reading of poetry as poetry. We will look now at some

58. Hotopf, p.89. See above, p.116.

manifestations of that tendency, in order to see the extent of Richards' own confusion, and the way in which it relates to his increasing stress upon the idea of "activity".

V.

In some respects it is surprising that Richards should be confused. For instance, in The Philosophy of Rhetoric, he can make a firm distinction between the kind of attention required by the reading of poetry and that required by further use of that reading. The aim of the book is to suggest some ways in which language works, the method of enquiry is to "translate more of our skill [in reading poetry] into discussable science".⁵⁹ As we attempt such a translation, Richards suggests, the following happens:

we find that all the questions that matter in literary history and criticism take on a new interest and a wider relevance to human needs. In asking how language works we ask about how thought and feeling and all the other modes of the mind's activity proceed.⁶⁰

Here Richards makes the necessary distinction between the art (skill) of reading and the science of semasiology. The kind of analysis,

59. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.94.

60. *ibid.*, p.95.

and accompanying theory, which is relevant to literary criticism, is that which attempts to describe our reaction to the poem; semasiology demands that, at the moment of reading, one should be aware of the reading process - the reading process itself is the focus of attention. This sort of attention, in effect, turns all poetry into the kind exemplified by Coleridge's metaphor of the eddy. In The Philosophy of Rhetoric Richards himself remarks upon "the peculiar sort of attention which is the method of the whole study".⁶¹

But there are points of confusion. One of the most noticeable, and seemingly plausible, occurs in "Poetry as an Instrument of Research", an essay which is of great importance for Dr. Schiller's account.⁶² Richards' central point here is this:

there is an important use of words - very frequent, I suggest, in poetry - which does not freeze its meanings but leaves them fluid, which does not fix an assertorial clip upon them in the way that scientific prose and factual discourse must. It leaves them free to move about and relate themselves in various ways to one another.⁶³

He adds:

Let me now use the privilege of a definer and invite you to mean - for this occasion - by ^tPoetry^t (^t...^t for

61. p. 121.

62. Speculative Instruments, pp.146-154. Cf. Schiller, p.74.

63. Speculative Instruments, p.148.

Technical) words so used that their meanings are free so to dispose themselves : to make up together whatever they can.⁶⁴

Richards' caution here should be immediately noted; the definition is a special one to be used for a special occasion.

Richards illustrates what he means by "fluid" language by discussing the title of his own essay, "Poetry as an Instrument of Research". He draws attention to its "fluidity" by noting that if we put "is" for "as", we give the phrase "the solidity, fixity, rigidity of responsible prose, ... we make the sentence, in short, mean what it says and be ready to take the consequences."⁶⁵ As it stands, however, the title is full of possibilities; the various meanings of "poetry", "instrument" and "research" can be set in a number of different patterns. Richards does not give examples, but they are easily supplied: "Poetry is a means by which we look into our own hearts and minds"; "The laws of language are best enquired into by using poetry as case material"; "We become most intimately acquainted with a past culture by studying its literature"; "The problems of emotive language can best be discussed in emotive language; a rigidly scientific procedure is out of place here".

64. P.149. For a convenient account of Richards' use of special quotation marks, see Speculative Instruments, pp.29-30.

65. *ibid.*, p.147.

The phrase is, in short, not a statement but an invitation to speculation, inviting an interpreting activity of the highest possible degree.

But there is an evident danger in transferring this idea to poetry, even in a "technical" sense. Richards himself notes that the presence or absence of an "assertorial clip" should be "thought of as a matter of degree", but goes on to dismiss the point because "degree suggests measurement and we are not in sight of measurement here".⁶⁶ This is true, but there is, nevertheless, an important and easily perceptible difference between Richards' phrase "Poetry as an instrument of research" and a poem. A poem, in fact, contains much more of an "assertorial clip". A phrase detached from a Shakespeare sonnet might, in itself, resemble Richards's title, but in its context in the poem its inter-action with the other words evidently reduces its potential variety of meaning. To say that the kind of interpretation required by Richards's title is "very frequent" in poetry is to ~~exaggerate~~ to the notion of "activity" to an intolerable degree. One might remind Richards of a point he made, in Coleridge on Imagination, about some wilfully cryptic modern poetry: "it is easy to mistake a mere freedom to interpret as we will for controlling unity of sane purpose".⁶⁷ This serves also to make

66. Speculative Instruments, p.148

67. I.A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, London, 1950, p.91.

the general point that what Richards calls an "assertorial clip" is what is usually called "unity". A further relevant comment is that the whole discussion reveals the dangers of Richards' habit of using fragments of poetry rather than whole poems - a habit which will have been evident throughout our account of his work.

The confusion is not, however, of radical importance for Richards' thinking about poetry. In the first place, it is an intermittent confusion. We have already seen that even in the later work Richards is able to make the distinction between poetry as material for studying language and poetry as poetry.⁶⁸ Secondly, Richards' interest, in his writings after The Philosophy of Rhetoric, is primarily in the study of language, so that the main effects of any confusion are chiefly in that direction. Thirdly, Richards, of course, never attempts to re-interpret the thinking of Coleridge on Imagination in the way that Dr. Schiller does.

VI.

There are further elements which need to be examined in Richards' later work, apart from those touched upon in our discussion of Dr. Schiller's account, and these also centre upon

68. See above, p.115.

the increasing stress upon "activity". As in the essay "Poetry as an Instrument of Research", the tendency is to make poetry as open-ended as possible; to insist on the variety of possible interpretations of a poem. This line of thought, however, does not depend on any special feature of poetic language, but springs from a general theory of communication, and the variety of interpretations are not simultaneously held in mind by the reader, as he reads.

An essential factor in this tendency is Richards' rejection of the terminology of "destination" and "message", as used in communications engineering. This terminology implies that a message is en-coded by the transmitter and de-coded at the destination, and Richards is anxious to deny its applicability to any subtle uses of language, calling it, in its application to poetry, the "Vulgar Packaging View".⁶⁹

He is once more insisting that poetry is composed of "pseudo-statements".⁷⁰ As we have seen, this view insists that a poem is the activity of interpretation, not an extractable idea.⁷¹ The en-coding and the message are inseparable, as was stressed by

69. See, for example, I.A. Richards, So Much Nearer, New York, 1968, p.174.

70. See, for example, Speculative Instruments, pp.147-148.

71. See above, pp.29-30. Cf. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.49 and Principles of Literary Criticism, p.275.

Richards's account of the organising function of language.

In rejecting the idea of a "destination" Richards refers to C.S. Peirce. In a critical discussion of the terminology of communications engineering, he turns to his audience and asks:

Are you the Destination? I should hope not....
 How you understand me will depend upon what I go on
 to say but more still on what you find (now or later)
 to say to yourself (or to others) about it all.

This is what the great theorist of sign-situations, Charles Sanders Peirce, meant by his doctrine that every sign needs other succeeding signs as its interpretants - and so on and so on.⁷²

For Peirce, an "interpretant" is "that which interprets a sign", and it can itself, in his view, be nothing but a further sign, which needs, in turn its own "interpretants". According to Gallie, there are, for Peirce, two escapes from the endless process here envisaged. First his notion of the "entire general intended interpretant"; second his view that for certain purposes one may ignore the fact that words are signs needing "interpretants" and treat them as though they referred directly to their objects.⁷³ Richards mentions neither of these devices, perhaps because of his desire to make interpretation seem as open-ended as possible.

72. So Much Nearer, p.159.

73. W.B. Gallie, Pierce and Pragmatism, New York, 1966, p.136 and p.116.

It is evident that there is both truth and interest in Richards' pursuit of this line of thought. Herbert's lines on reading the Scriptures may be recalled again:

Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,
And comments on thee: for in everything
Thy words do find me out, and parallels bring,
And in another make me understood.⁷⁴

To say that one's life "comments" on what one is reading is a succinct and memorable way of putting it. The literary work takes its place in one's experience, and this place will not quite resemble the place it takes in someone else's experience. Further, as Richards' phrase "now or later" implies, this place will change as the reader's experience develops. A poem by Donne will not, commonly, mean to a reader what it meant to him five years before, or will mean five years later. The point is touched upon by Empson, discussing the problems of analysis, at the beginning of Seven Types of Ambiguity:

there is a sort of meaning, the sort that people are thinking of when they say 'this poet will mean more to you when you have had more experience of life', which is hardly in reach of the analyst at all.⁷⁵

Further, if the point on which Richards is insisting is translated

74. See above, p.117.

75. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.3.

into literary historical terms it resembles Eliot's view that any genuine new poem changes the relations between poems written in the past. Pope can never be to a modern reader what he was to Johnson, because the modern reader knows Wordsworth, Eliot, and so on.

Such is Richards' rejection of the idea of a "destination". Before discussing it, we will look further at his views on the idea of a "message" being "en-coded". This can more conveniently be done with reference to Poetries and Sciences, where we read:

A vast, recent aberration of concern with poets as subjects for biography has led too many to think that poems just express items, incidents, occurrences, crises, and so on, in a poet's experience.⁷⁶

Against this he expresses the following view:

The more usual thing - so far as available evidence goes - is for a poem...to form at its inception a problem. The minimum problem I said was the finding, or creation, of a situation - a confluence of imaginative possibilities - able to support its growth. The situation, that confluence of possibilities, is a system of oppositions and collaborations among words. In brief, a poem begins by creating a linguistic problem whose solution by language will be the attainment of its end.⁷⁷

76. I.A. Richards, Poetries and Sciences, London, 1970, pp.111-112.

77. *ibid.*, p.112.

The metaphor of "growth", central to Richards' thinking here, is one that we have met before in Richards' attack on Hulme:

Words are the meeting points at which regions of experience which can never combine in sensation or intuition, come together. They are the occasion and the means of that growth which is the mind's endless endeavour to order itself.⁷⁸

Richards' drift can be suggested by a comparison with Pierce.

Gallie says that, for Pierce, "all we mean by thought or intelligence is 'a sign developing in accordance with the laws of inference'."⁷⁹ Richards, believing with Coleridge that poetry is the utterance of the whole soul, seems to suggest that all we mean by the soul is a sign developing in accordance with the laws of poetic language. A more emphatic way of rejecting the view that language "en-codes" an "experience", could scarcely be conceived.

Behind this thinking lies a motive that we have seen before in Richards' work; the hope of an imminent spectacular development. This is now introduced by using feed-forward and feed-back cycles as the model for talking about a poem's "growth". The model appears in the essay "The Future of Poetry",⁸⁰ but we will look rather at its development in Poetries and Sciences. Here we are given a

78. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.131. Cf. above, p.136.

79. Gallie, p.109.

80. So Much Nearer, pp.165-166.

clear and simple illustration of such a cycle in the free-hand drawing of a circle:

First comes the feed-forward directive as to the size of the circle. It cannot be begun without that. Then with every inch your chalk travels there is feed-back reporting to your nerve-muscle-tendon-joint executives as to violations of the feed-forward directives and an issuing of new feed-forward as to corrective action if needed.⁸¹

With regard to poetry this means that "interanimation", or the inter-actions of words, is not seen now as merely the central feature of poetry, but as the controlling agency. Richards does not put it in that way, but as follows:

in composing, or in choice between interpretations, we note how we are guided by the extent to which change in one component entails change in others, whenever we "see" that if x varies, $p, g \dots$ must vary too. The process of composition is indeed a weighing of these entailments, a balancing imposed by the rivalling possibilities of the alternates.⁸²

"We", here, Richards suggests, means "the system of relevant feed-forward, which at the moment is being confirmed by feed-back".⁸³ An

81. Poetries and Sciences, p.95.

82. *ibid.*, p.97. I have omitted Richards' special notation: cf. my footnote on p. 160 above.

83. *ibid.*, p.97.

important feature of the account is that we (in the normal sense) will not be entirely aware of the way in which the cycle is controlling the growth of the poem. To that extent the poem is composed by the language system itself.

The hope held out by this way of describing a poem appears in Richards' following remark:

Such has been the utterly unexpected rate of advance in these matters in recent years and such the promise of contemporary neurological model designs that new, and perhaps liberating, light on human potential may be looked for quite soon.⁸⁴

Richards is still searching for the key which will unlock the laws of poetic language.

Something has already been said about the doubtful usefulness of that sort of enterprise, so far as literary criticism is concerned,⁸⁵ so our discussion of Richards' thinking here will concern itself with other aspects.

First; Richards concedes that this approach may "go too far",⁸⁶ and it may be said that it has already done so. It will be readily acknowledged that the poet's struggle with language is important, and that the inherent tendencies of the language system will have some

84. Poetries and Sciences, p.96.

85. See above, p.128.

86. Poetries and Sciences, p.109.

shaping influence on the poem, but Richards exaggerates this factor. In composing a poem we may see that if 'x' varies, then 'p' and 'g' must vary too, but the choice of 'x' is dictated not only by its relation to 'p' and 'g', but by its relation to what we want to say. "What we want to say", or the experience which the poem expresses, corresponds, in Richards's analogy, with the "size of the circle" from which comes the essential "feed forward directive". No doubt, expressions such as "the experience which the poem expresses" are theoretically very unsatisfactory, as Richards' whole point here is to insist, but criticism cannot, in fact, proceed without using them. They might be called "necessary fictions".

Richards has always been suspicious of "fictions". The point is noted by Hotopf in his discussion of The Meaning of Meaning:

Ogden and Richards' touchstone - one they were always fingering - was the actual psychological conditions that caused an individual utterance.⁸⁷

When Richards attacks the idea that an "experience" is "put into words", he is concerned with the psychological complexity of what actually happens, and is, evidently, justified in insisting that words have a formative, not merely an expressive function. He is, likewise, justified in insisting that the poem is not merely

87. Hotopf, p.25.

received at a "destination"; the interpreting activity also is formative and not merely receptive. But, to use the phrase which Gallie uses in discussing Pierce, the critic has to proceed as though⁸⁸ the poem records an experience and that he has received this experience. To proceed in this way is not necessarily to fall, as Richards seems to assume, into a mistaken pre-occupation with the poet's biography. A safeguard against this is the familiar notion that a poet generalizes his experience. In Coleridge's formulation, one of the functions of the "imagination" is to fuse "the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative".⁸⁹ A typical modern formulation appears in Leavis' remark, in a discussion of the similarity between Lawrence's relation with his mother and Ursula's relation with her father in The Rainbow, that in the novel "the experience is wholly impersonalized (and, in being impersonalized, extended)".⁹⁰ The same ground is covered by the neo-classical doctrine of "generality", which will be examined in our discussion of Dr. Johnson.⁹¹

88. See above, p.164.

89. Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross, Oxford, 1907, ii, 12.

90. F.R. Leavis, D.H. Lawrence. Novelist, London, 1955, p.131.

91. See below, pp.239-248.

VII.

The kind of criticism produced by Richards' development of the idea of "activity" is well illustrated by his own commentary, in Poetries and Sciences, on Empson's poem Legal Fiction. He says of the commentary:

What this sort of gloss should be attempting to bring out is the dependance of what any word or phrase can do in the poem upon what its other words and phrases can do there: the degree of their mutual enablement and mutual control. It is this - not any actions or agonies, and wishes or hopes or endeavours on the part of the poet or his readers - that settles what the poem may be and when and how (and whether) it is finished.⁹²

The poem runs:

Law makes long spokes of the short stakes of men.
Your well fenced out real estate of mind
No high flat of the nomad citizen
Looks over, or train leaves behind.

5 Your rights extend under and above your claim
Without bound; you own land in Heaven and Hell;
Your part of earth's surface and mass the same,
Of all cosmos' volume, and all stars as well.

92. Poetries and Sciences, p.117.

Your rights reach down where all owners meet, in Hell's
 10 Pointed exclusive conclave, at earth's centre
 (Your spun farm's root still on that axis dwells);
 And up, through galaxies, a growing sector.

You are nomad yet; the lighthouse beam you own
 Flashes, like Lucifer, through the firmament.
 15 Earth's axis varies; your dark central cone
 Wavers a candle's shadow, at the end.⁹³

The most conspicuous feature of Richards' commentary is its avoidance of any mention of the tone and feeling of the poem. The nearest that Richards comes to this is in his comment on "nomad citizen" in the third line:

nomad citizen: In contrast to the farmer (cultivating his garden). The fourth verse "comforts" this farmer, who may feel rather tied by his holding. He does a lot of travelling inevitably if his property is sweeping illimitably about in this fashion. It is a disturbing sort of comfort however: Lucifer is "fallen from heaven" (Isaiah, 14:12) and the self itself is shadowed by itself, hidden from whatever light it may produce.⁹⁴

The reason why Richards has to avoid, as far as possible, questions of tone and feeling, is evident if his earlier definitions of those terms are recalled. "Tone" (the poet's attitude to his audience)

93. Poetries and Sciences, p.115.

94. *ibid.*, pp.116-117.

and "feeling" (his attitude to his subject)⁹⁵ quickly bring in the "actions or agonies, and wishes or hopes or endeavors" of the poet, which Richards thinks must be kept out of the discussion. For the same reason he carefully omits any mention of the poem's "intention", or what it is "about". Omitting, as far as possible, any consideration of feeling, tone and intention, Richards has to proceed by commenting on the senses of the words. Typical of this is his comment on the first line:

short stakes: Both the stakes the prospector drives in to mark the boundaries of his claim (line 5) and the posts of the fence that keeps cattle (say) in and trespassers out of the spun farm (line 11). Rights in this land include everything under and above (line 5). They are stakes, too, in the sense in which a landowner is said to have a stake in the country. He has invested money, time and toil in his property; he has something at stake.⁹⁶

Here Richards might have added that they are also "stakes" as in gambling. The farmer's choice appears to be a gamble merely about life, but it turns out to be a gamble involving eternity.

As well as inhibiting comment on the feeling, tone and intention of the poem, Richards' approach forbids any mention of

95. See above, p.4.

96. Poetries and Sciences, p.116.

its "images", because all must be described in terms of "activity", or the "mutual enablement and mutual control" of the words.

The approach, in short, fails to comment on what appear to the reader to be the main features of the poem.

A commentary on the tone and feeling aspects of the poem might run as follows: there is an ironical touch in "real estate of mind", which comes from the disparity action in the metaphor: the implication is that a "mind" shouldn't be fenced off like a piece of "real estate". Such a mind is a closed mind, and the point is taken up again in "owners" and "exclusiveness" in lines 9 and 10. The first stanza appears to congratulate the person addressed: "How competently you have managed your affairs. You have invested in a property free from the distressing proximity of urban and industrial development". The ironical implication is: "In being exclusive you have cut yourself off from humanity". Relevant to this implication, are the feelings evoked by the "nomad citizen"; he is, as a "nomad", unafraid, and, as a "citizen", he takes a place in the community. Also relevant are the feelings evoked by "train leaves behind", which implies; "You have never had enough human contact to be saddened by someone's departure".

The feeling of the second stanza is one of immensity, which highlights the petty and futile neatness of the "well fenced out real estate of mind". The contrast is very clear in "without bound" as opposed to "well fenced out". The feeling of immensity

reaches a climax in,

Of all cosmos' volume, and all stars as well.

Here the effect of the long, open vowel sounds, especially in the repeated "all", re-inforced by the similar sound of "well", is particularly noticeable. This feeling of illimitability undermines the neat exclusiveness of the first stanza.

The wit of the third stanza carries on the undermining process. The growth metaphor in "a growing sector", further released by the word "farm", is grotesque, and its implication is: "You thought you were only concerned in growing cash-crops, but your farm is growing something that reaches up past the stars". In terms of the tenor (the "mind") this means; "The organisation of your mind, which you arrived at through merely practical considerations, has moral implications of the most far-reaching kind". This is touched upon also in the first part of the third stanza. The idea of exclusive farm-owners hints at the local rich-man's club, the meeting place of solid, successful men, which is really a type of hell, because it issues from possessiveness, and all that goes with it. In terms of the mind, the "owner" is the man who is, as D.H. Lawrence would have said, "ego-bound"; who refuses to acknowledge that he is a part of something beyond himself. The wit in this part of the stanza is generated partly by the word "exclusive" (what Hell fences out is God). "Pointed" has a more obscure effect, but the joke, it may be suggested, is that the mutual hostility,

inevitably felt by ego-bound men, is symbolized by the pointed goads of the traditional picture of Hell.

The last stanza completes the undermining, but the feeling now is more sombre and grave. It says: "For all your apparently organised solidity you are finally as evanescent as a flash of light and insubstantial as a candle's shadow". Relevant to the feeling are the associations of "Lucifer", and of the flickering candle, which evokes, passingly, the fear that a candle will go out in a dark cellar. Also implied is the point made by Richards: "You lack self-knowledge, in that you will not recognize that you are not self-sufficient".

Such a commentary, clearly, involves making suggestions about the poem's "intention". The "intention" is, to use Richards' terms, the essential "feed-forward directive"; the intention as to the "size of the circle", without which nothing can be begun.⁹⁷ This must correspond to the poet's "wishes or hopes or endeavours", which Richards wants to cut out. His procedure is not, that is, justified by his own basic model. Nor is it justified by the event. For instance, it is easy to see the relations between "Lucifer" and the rest of the poem; it is connected with the imagery of light and darkness, with the references to Hell, and with the pride of the "owners". To see this is to see "the mutual enablement and mutual control" of the words. But the appearance of Lucifer is not

97. See above, p.168.

dictated by the rest of the poem. Empson was free to put it in or leave it out. He might have put "Mulciber", and alluded to the fact that in Paradise Lost, Mulciber,

Dropd from the Zenith like a falling Starr.⁹⁸

The appearance of Lucifer is determined not merely by feed-back from the words already used in the poem, but by feed-forward from what Empson "wants to say".

Granted, as Richards insists, the struggle with words in the composition has a formative influence. The poet might only discover what he "wants to say" during the course of that struggle. But to say that this should prevent us from talking about the feelings and intention of the poem, is an extreme and inhibiting position. As Empson himself once said, in the context of a similar discussion: "If critics are not to put up some pretence of understanding the feelings of the author in hand they must condemn themselves to contempt".⁹⁹

Such a pretence, as we have said, does not necessarily involve writing the poet's biography. A mistaken biographical attempt, with regard to this particular poem, would be to try to trace the person addressed, and his actual relations with Empson

98. Paradise Lost, Bk.I, l.745.

99. Seven Types of Ambiguity, pp. xiii-xiv.

at the time. No such person, of course, need have existed. The tendency of mind which Empson is describing exists in everyone, and Empson, in fact, may have been addressing himself - meditating on a weakness; in which case the speaker is not even Empson, but a part of Empson. A more plausible biographical attempt would be to relate the poem, in view of its attitude to "owners", to Empson's interest in Marxism, but this would add nothing essential, since the poem stands on its own feet.

I noted that Richards also refuses to talk about "images". Perhaps the most striking image in Empson's poem is the wavering tip of the cone, seen as a candle's shadow. The working of this is complex. The "dark central cone" is itself the vehicle of a metaphor. It is the ground, over which the owner of the fenced-off piece of real-estate has rights, stretching down underneath his property to the earth's centre. The tenor of the metaphor is the mystery, the unknown depths, of the owner's being. The furthestmost tip of the cone fades into insubstantiality, which is seen as the insubstantiality of a candle's shadow. But the candle's shadow clearly refers back to the original tenor; beneath the neat self-sufficiency ("the fenced out real estate of mind") is not only mystery, but also, finally, insubstantiality.

The success of the metaphor depends partly on the fact that the wavering of a candle's shadow is a vivid vehicle for conveying the kind of wavering that we are to imagine. But, as we have already

seen, the success also depends on the presence of a whole complex of further feelings about a flickering candle. As well as fear of the dark, there is a feeling of transience, and this is re-inforced by the poem's final phrase, "at the end", which implies the approach of death. This feeling, in turn, works back upon the candle's shadow, rendering it more vivid and precise; it is a dying candle, and the flaring and sinking of its guttering accentuate the wavering of the shadow.

Much of this may be seen as a support for Richards' refusal to talk about "images". The "activity" which makes the inter-connections between the words in the metaphor of the flickering candle is certainly intense. To use the language of Coleridge on Imagination, the reader seems to be more than merely reading, he feels as though he is creating and thereby realizing.¹⁰⁰ But the activity has an end. To use Coleridge's words again, what he is creating is a fusion of an "idea" with an "image".¹⁰¹ He is not merely seeing pictures; but the word "image" is hard to avoid, and there is no urgent reason to avoid it, so long as one isn't misled by it. "Image" is shorthand, one might say, for the upshot of the creative activity.

100. See above, p.93.

101. Biographia Literaria, ii, 12.

In Richards' approach the activity seems to have no upshot. The poem begins with a linguistic problem, the words need further particular words with which to inter-act, and this process goes on until the needs of the various words are satisfied. The critical method is to describe some features of the inter-action. It is as though the critic sees some chemicals thrown into a bowl, and then watches them reacting, but is not allowed to say why they were thrown in, or what the end-result was.

We have examined the development of the idea of "activity" and the sort of approach in which it issues. It has been noted that a scientific ambition is present in the development, and this provides the cue for a final comment on this phase of Richards' work.

At the end of his History of Western Philosophy, Bertrand Russell suggests that: "Whatever can be known, can be known by means of science; but things which are legitimately matters of feeling lie outside its province".¹⁰² Richards' neglect of the feeling in Empson's poem, and his attempt to describe its "activity" merely in terms of sense is dictated, largely, by his hope that "contemporary neurological model designs"¹⁰³ may be harnessed to

102. Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy, London, 1961, p.788.

103. See above, p.169.

the analysis of poetry. His attempt, for the reason given by Russell, is unsatisfactory. Feelings play too large a part in poetry to be so neglected.

The scientific ambition is a hope for certainty, and this is connected with Richards' exasperation with the chaos, as he sees it, of current literary studies. Just before his analysis of Empson's poem, for instance, he has disparaging comments about various critical approaches; linguistic analysis, archetypal criticism, comparative and historical studies, literary biography, are all viewed sceptically.¹⁰⁴

One may have a good deal of sympathy with Richards here. The type of literary liberalism which stresses the possibility of a large variety of "approaches" to poetry, is, in many cases mere licensing of irrelevance. But a scientific "cure" would be worse than the disease. In Richards' pursuit of scientific certainty one misses the atmosphere which springs from seeing criticism as, to use the phrase of Eliot's which Leavis seized upon, "the common pursuit of true judgement".¹⁰⁵

In one sense Richards is well aware of the inadequacies of a scientific approach to poetry. He says, for instance, in "The

104. Poetries and Sciences, p. 113.

105. F.R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit, Preface, v.

Future of the Humanities", that "the main doctrines and positions which keep man humane are insusceptible, at present, to scientific proof".¹⁰⁶ One notes, there, however, the qualification "at present", which is the loophole for the entrance of "contemporary neurological model designs". But more important is the fact, which we have noted before, that Richards has not extendedly engaged in "the common pursuit" with reference to a given body of literature.¹⁰⁷ It is, it may be argued, the absence of this sheet-anchor which permits his occasional waywardness.

Richards' thinking is now at the opposite pole from his earlier work, where, as we have seen, there is neglect of the role of sense in poetic language, and a corresponding over-emphasis on feeling.¹⁰⁸ The basis for the earlier view was, it has been suggested, poetry of the kind written by Swinburne. The basis for the later view is "poetry" of the type represented by Richards' phrase "poetry as an instrument of research", which, in fact, is not "poetry", but merely an invitation to unlimited speculation.¹⁰⁹ Its nearest equivalent in poetry is a fragment such as Coleridge's

106. Speculative Instruments, p.67.

107. See above, p.13.

108. See above, p.10.

109. See above, p.160.

metaphor of the eddy, which plays a crucial part in Coleridge on Imagination.¹¹⁰

Our account of Richards has held that the period of his work that resulted in Coleridge on Imagination is the most fruitful for literary criticism. Here he avoids the extremes of the doctrine of "equilibrium", with its over-stress on feeling, and the doctrine of "activity", with its neglect of feeling. An over-all view of Richards' work would, in fact, lead us to expect the essential interest, for a literary critic, to lie where I have placed it. His initial interests were psychological, linguistic and philosophical, and these resume their central position in his later work, in which the other large interest is pedagogy. It is in the period from Principles of Literary Criticism to Coleridge on Imagination that he works most closely on poetry, and the latter book is the valuable culmination of this period.

110. See above, p.115.

CHAPTER 6

COMPLEXITY AND SOME ASPECTS OF THE DOCTRINE OF PROPRIETY IN POETIC LANGUAGE

I.

My discussion of some aspects of analysis, and accompanying ideas about poetry, in eighteenth century criticism, centres chiefly on Johnson's work on Shakespeare, though reference will be made to other critics.

The discussion is intended, firstly, to give some depth and perspective to the ideas that we have seen developed by Richards, by seeing them in a different setting, and, secondly, to support the suggestion that the better use of such ideas is that exemplified by eighteenth century criticism - that is, in pointing to success or failure in poetry, and not in attempting, as Richards does, to distinguish between modes of language, or schools of poetry.

It is further hoped that an outline of the important similarities between eighteenth century ideas and those of Richards, may show the need for modifying some current assumptions about eighteenth century literary criticism; particularly the assumption that its ideas about poetic language were highly peculiar and are now exploded.

Here there is also a more general point. Such assumptions are held by exaggerating differences between critical schools; by

describing those features of eighteenth century criticism which appear most distinctive, and then presenting them as a description of eighteenth century criticism in general. This procedure is particularly evident in histories of criticism, where there is an inevitable tendency to talk in terms of "schools", "developments", "revolutions", and so forth, and so to exaggerate the most distinctive features of any given "school". This is further accentuated when emphasis is placed on the importance of "intellectual background" and when, consequently, it tends to be suggested, for example, that a literary critic who admired Locke, must be a radically different sort of critic from one who admired Kant. Background of this kind is stressed by discussing the history of criticism in terms of large aesthetic theories, rather than in terms of the actual practice of criticism.

All these tendencies are fully exemplified in Professor Wellek's account of Dr. Johnson.¹ What our discussion of Dr. Johnson serves to stress, is the obvious fact that, between different critical "schools", there is a large degree of same-ness.

The danger of emphasizing same-ness is the tedium ensuing from dwelling upon elementary features of criticism. That the danger is worth risking may be indicated by Robert M. Ryley's "William Warburton as New Critic", a representative document in modern discussion of eighteenth century criticism. Here the

1. R. Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, Vol. I, "The Later Eighteenth Century", Yale, 1955, pp.79-104.

following suggestion is made:

whereas the neo-classical critic normally asks whether a word is plain or fancy, high or low, Warburton anticipates the semantic interests of twentieth century critics by trying to determine precisely the meaning of a word or phrase in its special context.²

Warburton, as we shall see, is indeed a perceptive and sensitive reader, but his procedure is not at all exceptional, as even a cursory comparison of his edition of Shakespeare with Hamner's, Theobald's or Johnson's, or with eighteenth century Shakespearean commentary in general, will show. "To determine precisely the meaning of a word" is the essence of the enterprise. Professor Ryley's assumptions about the "New Criticism" are also worth mentioning. Commenting on the subtlety of Warburton's analysis, he remarks:

surely the assumption that a poem can be more complex than thousands of readers have ever realized and that it is the critic's task to discover that complexity is congenial to New-Critical theory.³

The assumption that the "New Critic" sits down in front of a poem, saying to himself, "Now what complexity can I discover here?", is startling when it is so blankly stated. But, on reflection, one

2. Studies in Criticism and Aesthetics, 1660-1800, ed. H. Anderson and J.S. Shea, Minnesota, 1967, p.254.

3. *ibid.*, p.257.

supposes that it is an assumption not only amongst some commentators on critical history, but also, perhaps, amongst some of the "New Critics" themselves. There is little wonder that Professor Ryley concludes that Warburton's resemblances to the "New Critics" are "superficial", though "interesting".⁴

It may be that Professor Ryley's caution about suggesting similarities between Warburton and the "New Critics" is occasioned partly by the attitude which the "New Critics" themselves have taken towards eighteenth century views on poetic language. A brief recapitulation of that attitude will be useful, and especially so because it will be further discussed at other points in my examination of modern analytic criticism.⁵

For Dr. Leavis, Johnson is inhibited from understanding the essential nature of poetic language by the doctrine of "propriety". Both eighteenth century poetry and criticism, Dr. Leavis suggests, assume that the language of poetry should be the "common currency of terms, put together according to the conventions of grammar and logic".⁶ The point is elaborated as follows:

It is not an age in which the poet feels called to explore further below the public surface than conventional expression takes cognizance of, or to

4. Studies in Criticism and Aesthetics, 1660-1800, p.249.

5. See below, pp.363-369.

6. "Johnson as Critic", Scrutiny, xii (1944-5), 194.

push in any way beyond the frontiers of the charted. He has no impulse to indulge in licentious linguistic creation, nor does it occur to him that such indulgence may with any propriety be countenanced.⁷

The obsession with "propriety" blinds Johnson, who is the figure chiefly being discussed, to that "concrete specificity in the rendering of experience" which is the hall-mark of Shakespeare's poetry.⁸

The same nexus of ideas is apparent in Allen Tate's critique of Johnson's views on the metaphysical poets. Discussing Johnson's views on metaphor, Tate says: "I believe it is fair to say that Johnson liked his tenors straight, without any nonsense from the vehicles".⁹ This point is also made by Professor Wellek who remarks that Johnson required that "the tenor and the vehicle should remain neatly separated".¹⁰ Tate assumes that the vehicle in a metaphor can be equated with a new access of experience, and that the tenor is an idea or a thought. Thus armed, he interprets Johnson's dislike of devotional poetry as a timid adherence to orthodoxy: "the imaginative act of returning the

7. "Johnson as Critic", Scrutiny, xii (1944-5), 194.

8. *ibid.*, p.195.

9. "Johnson on the Metaphysicals", Kenyon Review, xi (1949), 381.

10. A History of Modern Criticism, i, 99.

paraphrase to the hazards of new experience (new vehicles) is an impiety, even a perversity, which he [Johnson] reproves in the Metaphysical poets".¹¹ Tate generalizes this into a broad view which parallels that of Dr. Leavis, suggesting that Johnson's incapacity for the creative and dramatic use of metaphor is "a defect that seems general in that age, when men assumed a static relation between the mind and its object, between poet and subject".¹²

Both Tate and Dr. Leavis are, in short, attacking that approach to language which tends to issue in the familiar "clothing" metaphor - the poet finds a thought or idea and then "dresses" it in elegant language. For Dr. Leavis the truly poetic use of language is "exploratory-creative". Exactly what he means by this will be fully discussed later,¹³ but it may immediately be suggested that his eighteenth century poet who writes with "a common currency of terms put together according to the conventions and logic" is something of a man-of-straw. Against it one might set, for instance, Pope's description of Homer's language:

Aristotle has reason to say, he [Homer] was the only poet who had found out living words; there are in him

11. Kenyon Review, xi, 385.

12. *ibid.*, p.389.

13. See below, pp.363-369.

more daring figures and metaphors than in any good author whatever.... Yet his expression is never too big for the sense, but justly great in proportion to it: 'Tis the sentiment that swells and fills out the diction, which rises with it and forms itself about it.¹⁴

Pope is here trying to describe that use of language which D.W. Harding describes in his essay on Rosenberg—the use which issues from the poet's bringing together "idea" and "expression" at any unusually early stage of the psycho-physiological process, so that they modify each other before coming to full consciousness. Professor Harding contrasts this with the more usual state of affairs, where the "idea" is distorted slightly in order to fit the nearest convenient verbal formula or stock phrase.¹⁵ As Pope puts it, in "living words" the diction forms itself about the sentiments, rather than the sentiment being fitted to the diction.

Thus to quote Pope, however, though it may be suggestive, leaves the essential questions unanswered, and we should remind ourselves of the features of eighteenth century criticism which have disturbed modern critics.

14. "Preface to The Iliad", Twickenham Edition of Pope, ed. M. Mack, London, 1967, vii, 10.

15. "Aspects of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", Scrutiny, iii, (1934-5), 365.

A well-known case is Macbeth's;

I have liv'd long enough : my Way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf.

(Macbeth, V. iii. 22--23)

Upon this Johnson comments, in his notes to his edition of Shakespeare :

As there is no relation between the "way of life", and "fallen into the sear", I am inclined to think that the "W" is only an "M" inverted, and that it was originally written,

my May of life.

"I am now passed from the spring to the autumn of my days, but I am without those comforts that should succeed the sprit^lness of bloom, and support me in this melancholy season."¹⁶

Johnson does not, in fact, insert the emendation into the text, but it is clear which reading he prefers. It is now generally agreed that such preference for tidiness and precision loses the essential

16. Throughout this chapter I shall refer to Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. A. Sherbo, which takes up volumes vii and viii of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson. The two volumes in question were published by the Yale University Press in 1968 and seem destined to become the standard reference work. I describe Johnson's footnote to Macbeth's lines here as "Yale, viii, 791-2", and this formula will be followed in all cases. As in the Yale edition, act, scene and line references follow, W. Aldis Wright's Cambridge edition (revised 1891-93), but the text follows Johnson's first edition.

effect of what only superficially appears to be an imprecise sequence of words. Such, it will be said, is the doctrine of "propriety" in action.¹⁷

An oddly similar and even more outrageous instance, which Johnson does insert into his text, is Warburton's emendation of the Gentleman's description of Cordelia, after she hears what her sisters have done to her father:

You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears
Were like a better way.

(King Lear, IV, iii, 19-21)

Warburton, on similar grounds to those given by Johnson in the previous instance, emends "better way" to "wetter May".¹⁸ To fill out the picture, it may be remarked that Benjamin Heath, a noted Shakespearean of the time, while conceding that Warburton's suggestion is "not absolutely without propriety", suggests "April day" as an even greater improvement.¹⁹

The tendency is clear and no further examples need be given.²⁰

17. "Propriety" here, it may be noted, essentially issues in a concern for the inter-relations of words.

18. Johnson's Edition of Shakespeare, London, 1765, vi, 117.

19. Revisal of Shakespeare's Text, London, 1765, p.343.

20. Johnson exhibits the tendency clearly in his comments on 2 Henry VI, III.ii.97 (Yale, viii, 587-8); Richard II, II.i.133 (Yale, vii, 434-5); Richard III, IV.i.102 (Yale, viii, 625); Hamlet, III.i.70 (Yale, viii, 982).

A modern commentator would note that this tendency, if given free rein, would turn Shakespeare's speeches, alive as they are with the actual pressures of thought, feeling and language, into exhibitions of studied sentiment, of the kind that may be conveniently studied in Johnson's own play Irene.

However, critics ought not to be judged by their worst attempts. The question is, are these examples merely the visible part of a cold iceberg of incomprehending disapproval of Shakespeare's poetry, or relatively unimportant manifestations of a bias? I shall argue that the latter is the fairer answer. And it may usefully be added that modern commentators on Johnson sometimes rigidly proceed with reference to pre-conceived ideas, rather than with reference to what is before them. One such example arises from Johnson's comment when Eleanor, in King John, urges a speedy reconciliation with the French, while they are in the mood for a parley,

Lest zeal now melted by the windy breath
Of soft petitions, pity and remorse,
Cool and congeal again to what it was.

(King John, II.i.477-479)

Johnson comments:

We have here a very unusual, and, I think, not very just image of "zeal", which in its highest degree is represented by others as a flame, but by Shakespeare as a frost. To "repress zeal", in the language of others, is to "cool", in Shakespeare's to "melt" it; when it exerts its utmost power it is commonly said to "flame",

but by Shakespeare to be "congealed".²¹

Professor Sherbo, who is commonly anxious to defend Johnson, remarks that Johnson is here "disturbed by Shakespeare's deviation from poetic tradition", and adds:

One must concede that zeal has rarely been equated with coldness, and no writer, even Shakespeare, Johnson is saying, should allow a desire for novelty to lead him into absurdity. Johnson was evidently disturbed by the terms of the metaphors, neglecting their total effect in his concentration on their constituent parts.²²

Professor Sherbo seems to be bullied here by the view that Johnson liked his tenors and vehicles separate. Johnson, in fact, does not talk about the "absurdity" of the effect, nor is he appealing merely to "poetic tradition", nor does he attribute any desire for novelty to Shakespeare. To put the point in terms of Richards' thinking, Johnson is here noting a failure to triumph over the resistances of words, and appealing to the criterion elaborated in Richards' comment on Eliot's use of the word "beauty" with reference to food.²³ Behind the metaphor of "flame" for "zeal" is a whole inter-connected system of words, such as "fiery", "hot-headed", "hot-tempered", "warm-hearted", and so on, and Shakespeare

21. Yale, vii, 415.

22. A. Sherbo, Samuel Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare, Urbana, 1956, p.77.

23. See above, p.67 and p.147.

here encounters the resistance of this system. It is noticeable that Johnson, with the accuracy which one expects of him, makes this a point about usage, and not about the nature of "zeal"; he does not claim that "zeal" is "hot". Professor Sherbo does not say what the "total effect" is, which Johnson is alleged to have neglected, and his point seems to be no more than an inert recall of the kind of allegation made by Tate. It is, in fact, hard to evade the conclusion that these lines of Eleanor's are some of the thousand that Ben Jonson wished Shakespeare had blotted.

That a "defender" of Johnson can proceed in that fashion, indicates, perhaps, more strongly than anything else could, the need for an examination of the doctrine of propriety.

II.

It has been suggested, with reference to an example above, that the doctrine of propriety concerns itself with, amongst other things, inter-relations between words. Propriety is inter-relation, impropriety is absence of inter-relation. Propriety, that is, concerns itself with what Richards called "interanimation".²⁴

24. See above, p.90.

To pursue the resemblance, the basis of the doctrine of propriety is the criterion of realisation. The aim of "proper" writing is to make the reader feel that he is grasping not merely words but things and experiences. The concern for "propriety" of diction issues from a pre-occupation with "the force of poetry, that force which calls new powers into being, which embodies sentiment, and animates matter".²⁵ This common ground between Richards and eighteenth century criticism is crucial, and will be examined in some detail.

But several objections may immediately arise. It may be said that, though the doctrine of propriety resembles Richards' theory of interanimation in some respects, it is radically vitiated by rigid notions of what kinds of interanimation are permissible, by irrelevant social criteria for judging poetic language, by exploded theories about the need for different types of diction in different genres and by narrow views about "correctness" of signification. It may also be said that the eighteenth century critics, the victims of Locke's description of the mind, were unable to formulate a creative account of poetic language.

The problem, finally, is one of degree; to what extent were the above factors disabling? My discussion, therefore, has two broad

25. Rambler (No.168), ed. W.J. Bate and A.B. Strauss, Yale, 1969, v, 127.

aspects. First, I shall outline the basis of the doctrine of propriety; second, I shall examine the doctrine in practice. Throughout, I shall attempt to indicate the flexibility of the doctrine.

To centre attention upon Johnson's Shakespearcan criticism has several advantages. It has been considered, in the first place, a locus classicus of the alleged disabilities that I intend to examine. Further, by excluding that aspect of propriety of diction which relates to the neo-classical interest in genre, it indicates the secondary nature of that aspect. That Johnson does exclude that aspect of propriety may readily be illustrated from his preface to Shakespeare.

In his preference of Shakespeare to Addison, Johnson's central point is that "Addison speaks the language of poets, and Shakespeare, of men". He says of Addison's Cato:

[it] affords a splendid exhibition of artificial and fictitious manners, and delivers just and noble sentiments, in diction easy, elevated and harmonious, but its hopes and fears communicate no vibration to the heart; the composition refers us only to the writer; we pronounce the name of Cato, but we think on Addison.²⁶

26. Preface to Shakespeare, Yale, vii, 84.

He says, on the other hand, of Shakespeare's plays:

[they] are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind, exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature.²⁷

This dismissal of considerations of literary genre insofar as they affect diction, is not presented by Johnson as an apology, or as an incidental point; it is closely related to his essential admiration for Shakespeare. From the fact that Shakespeare uses the language of men, which communicates a "vibration to the heart", follows this conclusion:

This therefore is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirrour of life; that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious extasies, by reading human sentiments in human language; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.²⁸

A further point which may usefully be extracted from this, is the necessity for rejecting apparently plausible compromises of the kind to be found in Professor Wimsatt's account of Johnson's

27. Preface to Shakespeare, Yale, vii, 66.

28. *ibid.*, p.65.

Shakespeare criticism. Professor Wimsatt argues as follows:

how he [Johnson] got to the heart of Shakespeare - perceived the progress and tenor of the drama - except through the aesthetic surface, the particulars of actions and words, may be difficult to understand. Doubtless we confront here some incompleteness of conversion, an unresolved tension between the neo-classic conscience and the liberating impulse. Johnson the lexicographer would of course be most painfully sensitive to the jaggedness of the verbal idiom - the maverick particularities.²⁹

Since Johnson so firmly grounds his claim for Shakespeare's greatness upon Shakespeare's language, it is hard to see how Professor Wimsatt's position is tenable. It is hoped that a more tenable position may emerge from the following discussion.

III.

I shall first look at the working basis of the doctrine of propriety, but it is convenient to preface this with some orthodox remarks by Kames about the nature of propriety, and with an introductory example of the application of the doctrine. Kames

29. Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. W.K. Wimsatt, London, 1960, p.xxi.

notes that language is a medium in which connection is a central feature and adds:

We are so franed by nature, as to require a certain suitability or correspondence among things connected by any relation. This suitability or correspondence is termed congruity or propriety; and the want of it, incongruity or impropriety.³⁰

Propriety has two branches; one deals with the "right choice of words or materials", the other with the "due arrangement of these words and materials".³¹ These two branches are not really separate; whether or not the "right" word has been chosen will depend not only on its "proper" meaning, but also on its relations with the other words in the context. To that extent the problem of the relations between words includes the problem of the relations between words and what they point to. Consequently the former problem will more concern us. There will be, however, separate discussion of one particularly sensitive area of the question of "correctness" of signification.³²

If we ask why the eighteenth century critics demanded a "proper" use of language, we quickly arrive at the point made by Richards in his attack on Kanes; there is a very strong demand

30. Henry Home (Lord Kanes), Elements of Criticism, Edinburgh, 1762, ii, 5-6.

31. *ibid.*, ii, 256.

32. See below, pp.273-287.

for concreteness, particularly of a visual kind.³³ Lengthy illustration of this fact would be redundant, but some examples may be given to recall the point fully. Thomas Warton, discussing Pope's poetry, makes the central claim clearly:

The use, the force, and the excellence of language certainly consists in raising clear, complete, and circumstantial images and in turning readers into spectators.³⁴

Addison, of course, conducts his discussion of the "imagination" in highly pictorial terms, and, elsewhere, refers to "those beautiful descriptions and images which are the spirit and life of poetry".³⁵ Kames dwells at some length on the importance of "ideal presence", which results from the calling up of ideas into the mind by an unusually deliberate and intense exertion of memory, and adds that "the power of language to raise emotions depends on raising such lively and distinct images as are here described".³⁶ Erasmus Darwin sees this as the essential distinction between poetry and prose.³⁷ Blair notes that the importance of metaphors springs

33. See above, pp.134-135.

34. Eighteenth Century Critical Essays, ed. S. Elledge, New York, 1961, ii, 756.

35. "An Essay on Virgil's Georgics", Joseph Addison, Miscellaneous Works, ed. A.C. Guthkelch, 1914, ii, 4.

36. Elements of Criticism, i, 93.

37. Eighteenth Century Critical Essays, ed. S. Elledge, ii, 1005-6.

from the following fact:

"they make] an abstract conception, in some degree, an object of sense; they surround it with such circumstances as enable the mind to lay hold of it steadily, and to contemplate it fully."³⁸

Spence, discussing Pope, makes the same point: "a metaphor is not to be used unless it gives a greater light and makes the thing more sensible to us".³⁹ So does Addison; a metaphor "serves to convey the Thoughts of the Mind under Resemblances and Images which affect the Senses".⁴⁰ Absence of imagery is one of the chief grounds of Dr. Johnson's critique of the metaphysical poets: "In forming descriptions, they looked out not for images, but for conceits".⁴¹ His Dictionary defines a "conceit" as "a sentiment without an image". It also defines the "Fancy" as the "power of forming ideal pictures".⁴²

We shall waive, for the moment, Richards' objections to such naively "imagist" views, and concentrate on the fact that they correspond with the emphasis in critics like Dr. Leavis, on

38. Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, ed. H.F. Harding, Southern Illinois, 1965, i, 287.

39. Eighteenth Century Critical Essays, ed. S. Elledge, i, 404.

40. The Spectator (No.595), ed. D.F. Bond, Oxford, 1965, v, 35.

41. Lives of the Poets, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, Oxford, 1905, i, 33.

42. W.K. Wimsatt and C. Brooks give a full account of this tendency in eighteenth century criticism, in Literary Criticism. A Short History, New York, 1959, Chapter XIII.

"concreteness" or "realisation". It will be seen that they demand a high degree of sensory content, and that they involve criteria similar to those in Richards' own analysis of the words "frail steel tissue of the sun", which, as I pointed out, consists of an enumeration of the properties or qualities of the objects described, which are brought out by the inter-actions of the words.⁴³

The common ground between Richards' theory of *interanimation* and the doctrine of propriety is that both see concreteness or realisation as being achieved by a full exploitation of the implications of the words used.

This is clear, for example, in a comment by Spence on what Dr. Leavis would call some "unrealized" lines from Pope's *Iliad*:

From his eyes poured down the tender dew
and,

But Anticlus unable to controul,
Spoke loud the languish of his yearning soul.

Spence says: "In these the action is described in words that import a violence, while the act to be expressed is plainly something still and gentle".⁴⁴ The implications of tender weeping are stillness and gentleness, and these implications should interweave with similar implications in the surrounding words. Evidently,

43. See above, p.70 and p.74.

44. Eighteenth Century Critical Essays, ed. S. Elledge, i, 403.

the words "poured down" and "spoke loud" do not have such implications.

It may seem peculiar that there should be a need to show that eighteenth century critics were, in fact, in possession of this, the most elementary principle of good writing. That there is such a need may be indicated by a more interesting example from Johnson's notes on Shakespeare.

Lepidus, in Antony and Cleopatra, attempting to gloss over Antony's weaknesses, says:

His faults in him seem as the spots of heav'n,
More fiery by night's blackness.

(Antony and Cleopatra, I.iv.12-13)

Johnson comments:

If by spots are meant stars, as night has no other fiery spots, the comparison is forced and harsh, stars having been always supposed to beautify the night; nor do I comprehend what there is in the counter-part of this simile, which answers to night's blackness.⁴⁵

The new Arden edition comments:

His faults are made more conspicuous by his goodness, as the stars by night's blackness. The simile aims only at force of contrast, disregarding correspondence of quality in the things compared.⁴⁶

45. Yale, viii, 843.

46. Antony and Cleopatra, ed. M.R. Ridley, London, 1954, pp.33-34.

In an atmosphere from which intelligible critical principles seem to have vanished, it is hardly surprising that one should need to point out the nature of Johnson's principles. Johnson's principles are clear. That there is no "correspondence of quality", as the Arden edition puts it, means that there is no realisation, because there is insufficient inter-connection between the parts of the meaning. To recall for a moment Richards' key example, in the lines from Venus and Adonis⁴⁷ the powers of the word "star" are fully exploited; in the speech of Lepidus they are not. It is further noticeable that Johnson feels such a conspicuous lack of inter-connection between "blackness" and Antony's virtues, that the comparison seems entirely to elude him.

In the comment in the Arden edition there is mere abnegation of principle. The word "aims" is totally unjustified, implying, as it does, some mysterious insight into what was going on in Shakespeare's mind as he wrote. The oblique suggestion that the disregard of "correspondence of quality" somehow adds to the "force of contrast" will not bear scrutiny. In the tenor the contrast is between faults and virtues, in the vehicle it is between stars and blackness; the disparity between faults and stars, which worries Johnson, is in no way effective.

47. See above, pp.91-92.

I have dwelt upon this example not only because it illustrates the atmosphere in which confusion about eighteenth century critical principles flourishes, but also because, as anyone who has examined modern editions of Shakespeare will readily recognize, it is far from untypical. The desire to vindicate Shakespeare at every point and at any cost is a familiar feature of the modern Shakespeare industry.

It would be easy to amass negative examples of Johnson's principle that failure of inter-connection between the implications of words is failure of realisation, since it is the basic principle of his analytic technique; but we will look, instead, at some more positive examples, in which Johnson records approval of Shakespeare.

In the second part of Henry VI, Captain Whitmore, about to commit murder, says, as the night draws in:

The gaudy, blabbing, and remorseful day
Is crept into the bosom of the sea.

(2 Henry VI, IV.i.1-2)

Johnson comments:

The epithet "blabbing" applied to the day by a man about to commit murder, is exquisitely beautiful. Guilt is afraid of light, considers darkness as a natural shelter, and makes night the confidante of those actions which cannot be trusted to the "tell-tale day".⁴⁸

48. Yale, viii, 591.

Here Johnson is sketching the network of implications through which the metaphor of the day as an informer is realised. As Richards would put it, the more the image is followed up the more relevant links are found.⁴⁹ It is by noting a network of a slightly different kind that Johnson defends the word "breed", in a speech by Angelo in Measure for Measure, against Warburton's version. Angelo, roused by Isabella's virginal innocence, says in an aside:

She speaks, and 'tis such sense,
That my sense breeds with it.

(Measure for Measure, II.ii.141-142)

Johnson comments:

Thus all the folios. Some later editor has changed "breeds" to "bleeds", and Dr. Warburton blames poor Mr. Theobald for recalling the old word, which yet is certainly right. "My sense breeds with her sense", that is, new thoughts are stirring in my mind, new conceptions are "hatched" in my imagination. So we say to "brood" over thought.⁵⁰

There is present here a network of inter-connection with a cluster of related words, of the kind which Johnson found absent in the idea that zeal is cold. The fertility with which Johnson explores the meaning may usefully remind us of the metaphoric concreteness

49. See above, p.93.

50. Yale, vii, 185.

of his own poetry, which Dr. Leavis has so well described; a concreteness that issues from Johnson's sensitivity to the full powers of language.⁵¹ Here, the complex of associations that comes in with "stirring", "hatching" and "brooding" are the source of the vivid strength of the lines.

In the same play, Johnson is moved to praise some lines in the Duke's attempt to prepare Claudio for death by making him despise life:

Thou hast nor youth, nor age;
But as it were an after-dinner's sleep,
Dreaming on both.

(Measure for Measure, III.i.32-34)

Johnson comments:

This is exquisitely imagined. When we are young we busy ourselves in forming schemes for succeeding time, and miss the gratifications that are before us; when we are old we amuse the languour of age with the recollection of youthful pleasures or performances; so that our life, of which no part is filled with the business of the present time, resembles our dreams after dinner, when the events of the morning are mingled with the designs of the evening.⁵²

51. F.R. Leavis, Revaluation, London, 1936, pp.117-119.

52. Yale, vii, 193.

At first glance it may be thought that Johnson is merely indulging his taste for moralizing, but his description of the tenor, in fact, fully brings out the power of the vehicle. That this is "exquisitely imagined" is, for Johnson, a matter of the multiplicity of inter-connection between the tenor and the vehicle.

The attentive habit of reading which goes with this principle appears not only at points where Johnson is praising or blaming Shakespeare, but at points where he is simply giving an explanatory gloss. When, for instance, Othello calls Desdemona as "false as water", Johnson remarks: "As water that will support no weight, nor keep any impression".⁵³

IV.

Such then is the essence of the doctrine of propriety. Its resemblance to Richards' theory of realisation through multiplicity of inter-connection is obvious and central. The picture should now be filled out a little by noting how these ideas relate to such key terms in eighteenth century criticism as "simplicity" and "ease"; terms which express a demand for

53. Yale, viii, 1045; Othello, V.ii.137.

concreteness. The linguistic medium should become, as it were, transparent, so that the reader feels himself in the presence not of words, but of things and experiences.

A quotation from Steele serves to clear away an initial possibility of confusion over the word "ease": "simplicity is of all things the hardest to be copied, and ease to be acquired with the greatest labour".⁵⁴ "Ease", in eighteenth century stylistic description, has a high sense and a low sense. The difficulty of attaining "ease" in the high sense is stressed in Felton's Dissertation on Reading the Classics, where we find praised:

that ornamental Plainness of Speech, which every common Genius thinketh so plain, that any Body may reach it, and findeth so very elegant, that all his Sweat and Pains, and Study, fail him in the Attempt.⁵⁵

The relations between "simplicity", "plainness" or "ease", the doctrine of propriety and the doctrine of realisation, may be illustrated from some basic observations by Dennis:

Simplicity of Thought, is Thought which naturally arises from the Subject, Ideas which bear a just Proportion to the Things they represent, and which the Subject seems of itself as it were to offer to us, instead of our obtruding them upon that.⁵⁶

54. Quoted in Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. E.N. Hooker, Baltimore, 1943, ii, 446.

55. *ibid.*, ii, 445. Hooker gives a full account of these terms.

56. *ibid.*, ii, 32.

For Dennis "Simplicity of Expression" is "an Expression proportion'd to the Ideas, as they are to the Things".⁵⁷ The ground is covered by Johnson in the third number of The Rambler, in the remark that criticism may discover, in examining a given work, "some secret inequality...between the words and sentiments, or some dissimilitude of the ideas and the original objects".⁵⁸ The ideal is the elimination of distraction from the subject that is being written about; the medium should attract no attention to itself. It is with this criterion in mind that Johnson expresses dissatisfaction with the eighteenth century tendency to indulge in "poetical" language.⁵⁹ The two senses of "ease" are conveniently distinguished by Johnson in a number of The Idler. Of the high sense Johnson says:

Easy poetry is that in which natural thoughts are expressed without violence to the language.... Language suffers violence by harsh or by daring figures, by transposition, by unusual acceptations of words, and by any licence which would be avoided by a writer of prose. Where any artifice appears in the construction of the verse, that verse is no longer easy. Any epithet

57. Quoted in Critical Works of John Dennis, ii, 33.

58. Rambler, iii, 17.

59. See for example Idler (No.63), The Idler and the Adventurer, eds. W.J. Bate, J.M. Bullitt and L.F. Powell, Yale, 1963, pp.196-198.

which can be ejected without diminution of the sense, any curious iteration of the same word, and all unusual, tho' not ungrammatical, structure of speech, destroy the grace of easy poetry.⁶⁰

The rigour of the criterion is further stressed when Johnson goes on to remark: "To require from any author many pieces of easy poetry, would be indeed to oppress him with too hard a task".⁶¹ Of particular interest is the example of "un-easy" poetry which Johnson gives:

The first lines of Pope's Iliad afford examples of many licenses which an easy writer must decline.

Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring
Of woes unnumber'd, heav'nly Goddess sing,
The wrath which hurl'd to Pluto's gloomy reign
The souls of mighty chiefs untimely slain.

In the first couplet the language is distorted by inversions, clogged with superfluities, and clouded by a harsh metaphor; and in the second there are two words used in an uncommon sense, and two epithets inserted only to lengthen the line; all these practices may in a long work easily be pardoned, but they always produce some degree of obscurity and ruggedness.⁶²

60. The Idler (No.77), The Idler and The Adventurer, ed. W.J. Bate, J.M. Bullitt, and L.F. Powell, Yale, 1963, p.239.

61. *ibid.*, p.242.

62. *ibid.*, pp.239-40.

The low sense of "ease" is defined in Johnson's comment on Pope's little society poem, "On the Countess of Burlington Cutting Paper":

Affectation, however opposite to ease, is sometimes mistaken for it, and those who aspire to gentle elegance, collect female phrases and fashionable barbarisms, and imagine that style to be easy which custom has made familiar.⁶³

Two points may be made here. First, when an eighteenth century critic demands that poetry be "easy", in the high sense, it is important not to see in it confirmation of the opinion put forward by Dr. Leavis:

most eighteenth-century verse, and all verse of the Augustan tradition, has a social movement—a movement that suggests company deportment, social gesture and a code of manners: it is polite.⁶⁴

The second, and more important, point concerns Johnson's use of terms like "harsh" and "obscure". They involve higher criteria than conventionality or ready intelligibility. They describe absence of "ease", or failures of realisation, as Johnson's comments on the opening of The Iliad readily illustrate. The metaphor of a "spring", which Johnson calls "harsh", so far from being

63. The Idler (No.77), The Idler and The Adventurer, p.240.

64. F.R. Leavis, "Johnson and Augustanism", The Common Pursuit, London, 1952, p.103.

"far-fetched" is something of a cliché - a vaguely appropriate figure which might readily come to mind as a substitute for "origin". In the light of the analytic procedure which we have seen Johnson using on Shakespeare's poetry, "harsh" here must mean "failing to fully exploit the powers of the words". The implications of "spring" (fertility, pleasantness, naturalness, and so on) are not only irrelevant but inappropriate. Nor does Pope use the one implication which might be relevant—the flowing of water as the flowing of tears. The relation between "harshness" and "obscurity" is indicated by Johnson's word "clouded"; redundancy and deviation from common meanings call attention to the words and distract attention from the subject. His point is not that the lines, which are, in an obvious sense, conventional, are difficult to understand, or that their devices trespass beyond conventional bounds, but that they lack realising power.

It is worth showing what "harshness" essentially means for Dr. Johnson, because, as Dr. Brown says, perhaps "no critical term used by Johnson has done more injury to his reputation as a critic".⁶⁵ Dr. Brown himself makes the important point that Johnson, in using the term "harsh" refers to the meaning rather than to sound of words, and to this it should be added that he is referring to absence of interanimation.

65. J.E. Brown, The Critical Opinions of Samuel Johnson, New York, 1926, pp.125-126.

The general background of terms like "simplicity" and "ease" is well-known, but it should be recalled, because it has often been seen as revealing a spirit inimical to poetry. One of the main factors usually referred to in accounts of this aspect of eighteenth century criticism, is the influence of French neo-classicism, and this is clearly a correct assessment.⁶⁶

Addison, for instance, holding up for our admiration the style recommended by Bouhours and Boileau, thus identifies it:

that beautiful Simplicity, which we so much admire in the Compositions of the Ancients; and which no Body deviates from, but those who want this Strength of Genius to make a Thought shine in its own natural Beauties.⁶⁷

An influence readily lending itself to the pressure indicated here, was that of the Royal Society, in its attitude to language. For Sprat, as is notorious, the ideal was that language should say "so many things, almost in an equal number of words".⁶⁸ For Hobbes "the light of human minds is perspicuous words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity...and on the contrary, metaphors and senseless and ambiguous words are like ignes fatui".⁶⁹

66. Critical Works of John Dennis, ii, 445.

67. Spectator (No.62), i, 268.

68. Thomas Sprat, The History of the Royal Society, London, 1667, p.113.

69. Leviathan, ed. H. Morley, London, 1889, p.30.

That such thinking can be inimical to poetry there can be no doubt, but it has a more congenial side. A convenient illustration of this occurs in Ecclesiastes, a book advising clergymen how to preach effectively, by John Wilkins, a member of the Royal Society who introduced Sprat to the Society. Wilkins tells the following anecdote:

[a scholar] meeting...a countryman as he was in a journey, and falling into discourse with him about divers points of Religion...observed the plain fellow to talk so experimentally, with so much heartinesse, and affection, as made him first begin to think, that sure there was something more in those truths, than his notionall humane learning had yet discovered.⁷⁰

Wilkins is here praising that vigorous folk-speech, soaked in actual experience, which Dr. Leavis attributes to the common people of the seventeenth century. In preferring "experimental" language to "notionall" language, he is preferring concreteness to abstraction.

The wider background here, which clearly relates to the emphasis laid by the scientific movement upon the importance of sensory experience, goes beyond our scope. So far as literary criticism is concerned, we have already seen the importance of sensory detail in the eighteenth century view of realisation.⁷¹ We may

70. J. Wilkins, Ecclesiastes, London, 1651, pp.39-40.

71. See above, pp.201-203.

V.

We have looked at the eighteenth century idea of realisation in poetry, and at its relation with the doctrine of propriety and with some key terms of stylistic description. The question remains whether these ideas, even though basically sound, were too rigidly applied by eighteenth century critics. Are they as wooden as Richards, in his account of Kames, suggests?⁷³

That last example from Warburton's notes to Shakespeare perhaps indicates the contrary. Warburton there talks of the "images of things", but it seems clear that he does not mean it literally; it is hard to see what he might have been having an image of. It seems likely that Warburton is here, as people often do when they speak of "images", merely indicating a high level of vividness or power. As I said in my examination of Richards' later development, there is no harm in so talking provided that certain dangers are avoided. It might be added that Coleridge himself can speak in a way which seems as "imagist" as that of Hulme. The third and most important characteristic of the poetic imagination, for example, is said by Coleridge to be "the power of so carrying on the eye of the reader as to make him almost lose the consciousness of words — to make him see everything".⁷⁴ And he can talk so despite the fact that he

73. See above, pp.134-135.

74. Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Shakespearean Criticism, ed. T.M. Raysor, Everyman, 1960, i. 189.

can elsewhere stress the importance of "activity" just as heavily as Richards, as when he notes that in reading poetry there is:

An endless activity of thought, in all the possible associations of thought with thought, thought with feelings, or with words, or of feelings with feelings, and words with words.⁷⁵

It is true, however, that abuse of the "imagist" view can readily be found in eighteenth century criticism. Addison, for instance, in his method for exposing bad metaphors, adopts the stance for which Richards castigates Kames: "It will most effectually discover the Absurdity of these monstrous Unions, if we will suppose these Metaphors or Images actually painted".⁷⁶

Professor Sherbo implies that Johnson is to be found actually using this method with reference to the words in which the dying Melun, telling the English who have fought on the French side that Lewis, in fact, intends to betray them once they have helped him to victory, urges them to,

Unthread the rude eye of rebellion,
And welcome home again discarded faith,
Seek out King John and fall before his feet.

(King John, v.iv.11-13)

75. Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Shakespearean Criticism, i, 192.

76. Spectator (No.595), v, 36.

Johnson calls the metaphor, here, "harsh",⁷⁷ and Professor Sherbo suggests that Johnson "was troubled by mental images of a tailor at his trade".⁷⁸

We shall examine, therefore, at some length the various modifications, which are to be found in eighteenth century criticism, of the crudely "imgist" view.

One of the most striking of these is that recorded by Samuel Holt Monk, in his account of the growing interest, in the eighteenth century, of the way in which images are modified by feelings.⁷⁹

The relation between images and feelings is central in eighteenth century critical thought, and Professor Elledge has illustrated the pervasiveness of the kind of view held by Quintilian. For Quintilian, Professor Elledge tells us, the generation of emotion is the essence of poetry, and this confronts him with this question:

how are we to generate these emotions in ourselves, since emotion is not in her own power? I will try to explain as best I may. There are certain experiences which the Greeks call φαντασίαι, and the Romans visiones, whereby things absent are presented to our

77. Yale, vii, 427.

78. Samuel Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare, p.66.

79. The Sublime, MLA of America, 1935. See especially pp.84-100.

imagination with such extreme vividness that they
 seem actually to be before our very eyes.⁸⁰

This is the view we have already seen adopted by Kames, and it may incidentally, be remarked that it much resembles Eliot's idea of "objective correlatives".⁸¹ A similar emphasis is apparent in the Longinian stream in eighteenth century criticism. For Longinus,

an image has one purpose with the orators and another with the poets and...the design of the poetical image is enthralment, of the rhetorical — vivid description. Both, however, seek to stir the passions and emotions.⁸²

In the development recorded by Monk, however, the emphasis is not only upon the way in which an image excites an emotion, but also on the way in which the image is modified by the emotion. Monk, that is, is tracing the emergence of the view that imagination shapes reality — the emergence of a "romantic" critical theory.

A representative passage in his illustration of this emergence is the following from Robert Lowth:

The mind, with whatever passion it be agitated, remains fixed upon the object that excited it; and while it is earnest to display it, is not satisfied with a plain

80. "Theories of Generality and Particularity", PMLA, xlii. (1947), 158.

81. See below, pp.292-293.

82. W. Rhys Roberts, Longinus on the Sublime, London, 1907, p.85.

and exact description; but adopts one agreeable to its own sensations, splendid or gloomy, jocund or unpleasant.⁸³

It is in the thinking of Burke that one finds some of the most sharp attacks on the idea that poetry must excite clear and exact images. In conducting this attack Burke discusses the nature of poetic language:

The truth is, all verbal description, merely as naked description, though never so exact, conveys so poor and insufficient an idea of the thing described, that it could scarcely have the smallest effect, if the speaker did not call in to his aid those modes of speech that mark a strong and lively feeling in himself.⁸⁴

And he uses this assertion to attack the following "common notion":

[that] the power of poetry and eloquence...is; that they affect the mind by raising in it ideas of those things for which custom has appointed them to stand.⁸⁵

Although Burke's development of his case is startling, in the extreme emphasis which it places on the auditory effects of poetry,

83. Quoted by Monk, The Sublime, p.81.

84. E. Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, ed. J.T. Boulton, London, 1958, p.175.

85. *ibid.*, p.163.

it remains of great interest. Its interest, for present purposes, may be summarized as follows; it calls attention to the fact that in metaphor there are inevitably relations not only between tenor and vehicle, but also between the metaphor and the speaker.

Before we consider examples, something should be said about the relation of Dr. Johnson to the development outlined by Monk. Johnson admired Burke's essay, calling it "an example of true criticism",⁸⁶ but, of course, Johnson finds no place in Monk's account of "pre-romantic" criticism. At the level of general taste, Johnson's place here might fairly be indicated by recalling his attitude to the enthusiasm for Ossian: "Sir, a man might write such stuff for ever if he would abandon his mind to it".⁸⁷ It is evident that Johnson is not a "pre-romantic" critic.

However, it also seems evident from even a cursory examination of Johnson's criticism that he possessed the ideas in which Monk is interested. Without wishing to question the validity of Monk's account of those critics with whom he deals, we should note **again** the dangers of dwelling too much upon the development of critical theory, and of ignoring actual critical performances, particularly in the case of critics who rise above the common run—critics, that

86. Boswell's Life of Johnson, ed. G.B. Hill and L.F. Powell, Oxford, 1934, ii, 90.

87. *ibid.*, iv, 183.

is, whose work is more shaped by their response to poetry than by current aesthetic theories.

For example, Johnson, in a number of The Rambler devoted to the discussion of epistolary literature, notes that such literature should usually employ the "familiar style", and then adds:

But it is natural to depart from familiarity of language upon occasions not familiar. Whatever elevates the sentiments will consequently raise the expression; whatever fills us with hope or terror will produce some perturbation of images, and some figurative distortions of phrase.⁸⁸

Metaphor does not give clear pictures, but, in also conveying feelings, modifies the image presented. Johnson uses similar language in a discussion of the ambiguous signification of the word "poverty". He descants on the abuse of language in general, and adds that many people profess to find the most conspicuous examples of this abuse in the "compositions of poets, whose stile is professedly figurative, and whose art is imagined to consist in distorting words from their original meaning".⁸⁹

As his remarks on departures from the familiar style show, Johnson knows very well the value of such "distortion". It seems,

88. Rambler (No.152), v, 46.

89. Rambler (No.202), v, 287.

consequently, necessary to disagree with a current view of Johnson's ideas about language. R. Downes, for example, says that, for Johnson, "the mind perceives reality, retains mental pictures of it, and communicates these pictures by allotting them signs which are called words".⁹⁰ It will be noticed that Downes' view dovetails very readily with the kind of general stricture proposed by Allen Tate, that the trouble with eighteenth century literary men was their assumption of a static relation between perceived and perceiver. It is possible to make out a plausible case, as Downes does, by amassing quotations which show Locke's influence on Johnson, but Johnson was a critic, not a philosopher, and, as our quotations from The Rambler show, his insight into how poetic language works was penetrating and clear. Coleridge, say, may well have despised Johnson's way of putting it, but it is important to observe that Johnson is describing the same phenomena that pre-occupied Coleridge.

The point may readily be supported by well-known passages from Johnson's literary criticism. For example, when Macbeth describes the night-scene in a soliloquy before the murder of Duncan, Johnson quotes, as a contrasting passage, a description of

90. "Johnson's Theory of Language", REL, Vol.iii (October, 1962), p.30.

night by Dryden, and says:

Night is described by two great poets, but one describes a night of quiet, the other of perturbation. In the night of Dryden, all the disturbers of the world are laid asleep; in that of Shakespeare, nothing but sorcery, lust and murder, is awake. He that reads Dryden, finds himself lull'd with serenity, and disposed to solitude and contemplation. He that peruses Shakespeare, looks round alarmed, and starts to find himself alone. One is the night of a lover, the other, of a murderer.⁹¹

To use Lowth's phrase, quoted by Monk, the lover and the murderer adopt descriptions "agreeable to [their] sensations".

In a similar vein is Johnson's comment on L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. The two poems, he remarks, show "how, among the successive variety of appearances, every disposition of mind takes hold on those by which it may be gratified".⁹² Such comments issue not out of any literary theory, but out of attention to the poetry and out of common observation. It would certainly seem rather strained to cite them as examples of the Longinian or "pre-romantic" tendencies in eighteenth century criticism. The

91. Yale, viii, 769-70; Macbeth, II.i.49.

92. Lives of the Poets, i, 166.

same might be said of Johnson's remark about James Thomson:

[he] had as much of the poet about him as most writers. Everything appeared to him through the medium of his favourite pursuit. He could not have viewed those two candles burning but with a poetical eye.⁹³

An example, which has more of a feeling of being in contact with eighteenth century theories of the "sublime", is Johnson's comment on Edgar's description of the precipice, in King Lear. Johnson disagrees with Addison's high estimate of it and adds:

He that looks from a precipice finds himself assailed by one great and dreadful image of irresistible destruction. But this overwhelming idea is dissipated and enfeebled from the instant that the mind can restore itself to the observation of particulars, and diffuse its attention to distinct objects. The enumeration of the choughs and crows, the samphire-man and the fishers, counteracts the great effect of the prospect, as it peoples the desert of intermediate vacuity, and stops the mind in the rapidity of its descent through emptiness and horror.⁹⁴

A "great and dreadful image of irresistible destruction" was the kind of thing, no doubt, upon which enthusiasm for the "sublime" loved to dwell, but in this description of the way in which a passion modifies a perception, Johnson is pursuing a line of thought which,

93. Boswell, i, 453.

94. Yale, viii, 695; King Lear, IV.vi.11.

as we have seen, was always congenial to him. If we are to argue, in the end, that there are Longinian elements in Johnson's criticism, they are not to be seen as an excrescence, or a modifying tendency, on his central views, but as an integral part of them.

Johnson, in his account of the way in which images are "perturbed" by figurative language, is noting, as was Richards in his remark that poetic language is non-referential, one of those things which are so obvious that they elude attention. Accordingly, in our examination of what consequences the idea has upon his critical practice, we will begin with an extremely obvious example. The Fool says of Lear, when he has given up his throne, "That's a sheal'd peascod" (King Lear, I.iv.198). Johnson comments: "ie. Now a mere husk, which contains nothing. The outside of a king remains, but all the intrinsic parts of royalty are gone: he has nothing to give".⁹⁵ It may seem absurd to take such an example, but from it several points may be drawn for application to more interesting cases.

It would be foolish to suppose here that Johnson might have felt tempted to condemn the metaphor for not conveying a picture. The Fool indicates Lear's emptiness not, to use Burke's words, by

95. Yale, viii, 670.

"naked description", but by calling "in to his aid those modes of speech that mark a strong and lively feeling in himself".⁹⁶ To put it in a different way the junction of tenor and vehicle is effected largely by the speaker's feelings. The background of feeling, in this particular case, could only be described by a wider reference to the play; there is an element of bitterness, even of contempt, and the metaphor suits well with the general character of a professional fool. This, in short, is the dramatic use of metaphor. It is worth noting that if this background of feeling were removed, the metaphor would appear outrageously far-fetched; to compare a monarch who has abdicated with an empty pea-pod might then provoke a violent reaction from a neo-classical critic interested in "decorum".

It is here, it can be argued, that Johnson's failure with Donne (that it was a failure is undeniable) may most fruitfully be discussed. He condemns Donne's metaphors as "far-fetched" because he has not grasped the feelings which effect the essential junction between tenors and vehicles. It is not usually noticed that this is where the burden of Johnson's critique lies. He says of the metaphysical poets:

they wrote rather as beholders than partakers of human nature;
as beings looking upon good and evil, impassive and at

96. See above, p.223.

leisure; as Epicurean deities making remarks on the actions of men and the vicissitudes of life, without interest and without emotion. Their courtship was void of fondness and their lamentation of sorrow.⁹⁷

The remainder of his critical commentary is an attempt to explain the literary basis of this lack of feeling. Had Donne been able to see Johnson's comments he might have retorted that he had forgotten more about love than Johnson ever knew. And it may be added that Donne would probably have been right, and that this is where Johnson's incapacity lies, and not in the rigidities of neo-classical literary theory.

With Shakespeare Johnson has no such problem; for him, Shakespeare's excellence lies precisely in his power of conveying feeling, in his power over language which communicates a "vibration to the heart".⁹⁸

We may consider him, for instance, responding to a subtly dramatic use of a conceit, when Iachimo, in the process of making Posthumus believe that he has seduced Imogen, says that one of

97. Lives of the Poets, i, 20.

98. See above, p.198.

the paintings in Imogen's bedroom shows:

Proud Cleopatra, when she met her Roman,
And Cydnus swell'd above the banks, or for
The press of boats, or pride.

(Cymbeline, II.iv.70-72)

Warburton had argued that the image here indicates that Iachimo "is secretly mocking the credulity of his hearer, while he is endeavouring to persuade him of his wife's falsehood". Johnson replies:

If the language of Iachimo be such as shews him to be mocking the credibility [sic] of his hearer, his language is very improper, when his business was to deceive. But the truth is, that his language is such as a skilful villain would naturally use, a mixture of airy triumph and serious deposition. His gayety shews his seriousness to be without anxiety, and his seriousness proves his gayety to be without art.⁹⁹

This is Johnson's criticism at its best. He unerringly reaches through to the state of feeling which dictates, and is expressed by, the poetry. The figure is of the same type as, though much more delicate than, the Fool's, quoted above. The "far-fetched" conceit of the river swelling itself up like a vain man elicits no condemnation from Johnson, because the junction between tenor and vehicle is successfully made by Iachimo's feelings. Nor,

99. Yale, viii, 886-87.

consequently, is the figure said to be "harsh". Although there is only a single, and very arbitrary, point of resemblance between the river and the proud man (they both swell), the disparity is itself functional, and functional disparity is a species of interanimation or propriety. The function of the disparity between tenor and vehicle here is to express, as Johnson says, Iachino's "airy triumph".

It is not entirely an accident that Johnson's phrasing is reminiscent of Eliot's definition of "wit" as an "alliance of levity and seriousness". The use of conceits (of which the most obvious feature is disparity between tenor and vehicle) is crucial to the poetry of "wit". As Eliot notes, the "difference between imagination and fancy, in view of this poetry of wit, is a very narrow one".¹⁰⁰ If Eliot had had access to Richards' thinking at this point he might have expanded this into a remark that the distinction is narrow because in "witty" poetry, the process of interanimation involves the function of disparity. For Richards, the question, in a given case, would be the degree to which the disparity is connected with the speaker's feelings; and this also is the case with Johnson; he has no complaint here because the conceit is dramatically functional.

100. Selected Essays, 1951, p.296 and p.297.

How the view which attributes to Johnson a desire for neatly separated tenors and vehicles would explain examples of this kind, is difficult to see. It is, likewise, difficult to avoid the conclusion that Johnson's comment on Iachimo's lines issues from a response to Shakespeare's "concrete specificity in the rendering of human experience" - a response of which Dr. Leavis holds him to be incapable.¹⁰¹

It would be easy to accumulate examples illustrating Johnson's response to the dramatic as opposed to pictorial functioning of metaphor.¹⁰² A useful example, used by Professor Sherbo, occurs when the Archbishop of Canterbury praises the transformation of the disreputable Prince Hal into a learned and eloquent monarch:

Then he speaks,
The air, a charter'd libertine, is still.
(Henry V. I.i.47-48)

Professor Sherbo says:

One might expect this figure to be castigated as "forced and unnatural", "harsh", and "far-fetched". But Johnson proclaims it exquisitely beautiful.¹⁰³

101. See above, p.189.

102. See, for example, King John, II.i.300 and V.i.72 (Yale, vii, 412 and 427); Henry V, IV.ii.34 (Yale, viii, 556).

103. Samuel Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare, p.76; cf. Yale, viii, 529.

This is useful partly as an indicator of the present climate of opinion. Professor Sherbo feels compelled to see such things as surprising exceptions to the rigidity of Johnson's "neo-classical principles". The surprise, in fact, should not be at Johnson's failure to castigate the figure, but at the fact that he should be expected to castigate it. This case is similar to our previous ones. It is a conceit, in which the junction between tenor and vehicle is effected by reference to the speaker's feelings, of which the metaphor is, in turn, an expression. The speech in which the lines occur runs in a vein of exaltedly beautiful panegyric, and by the time these lines are reached the feeling has been firmly established, so that the effect feels perfectly "natural", just as does the Fool's comparison of King Lear with an empty pea-pod.

As a final example we may take a vivid illustration of one of the powers by which Coleridge characterized the imagination: "the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others and by a sort of fusion to force many into one".¹⁰⁴ Vernon, reporting to Hotspur before the battle of Shrewsburg, describes Hal and his companions as they wait for the battle:

All furnisht, all in arms;
All plum'd like estridges that wing the wind,

104. Coleridge. Shakespearcan Criticism, ii,188.

Baited like eagles, having lately bath'd:
 Glittering in golden coats, like images,
 As full of spirit as the month of May,
 And gorgeous as the sun at Midsummer;
 Wanton as youthful goats, wild as young bulls.
 I saw young Harry, with his beaver on,
 His cuisses on his thighs, gallantly arm'd,
 Rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury;
 And vaulted with such ease into his seat,
 As if an angel dropt down from the clouds,
 To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,
 And witch the world with noble horsemanship.

(1 Henry IV, IV.i.97-108)

Johnson comments:

This gives a strong image. They were not only plumed like estridges, but their plumes fluttered like those of an estridge beating the wind with his wings. A more lively representation of young men ardent for enterprize perhaps no writer has ever given.¹⁰⁵

To attempt to make pictures of the similes would here, evidently, result in absurdity. The extraordinary sequence of figures looks, on the face of it, a candidate for Pope's phrase a "glaring chaos

105. Yale, vii, 482.

and wild heap of wit".¹⁰⁶ Those who like to dwell on Johnson's neo-classical rigidity should be again surprised at his admiration. What unifies the images is the current of feeling, which comes across so strongly that Hotspur is provoked into a fit of irritation by Vernon's delighted admiration. It is worth noting that Johnson uses the words we have seen in Burke's account of images - "strong" and "lively"; the speaker is using "those modes that mark a strong and lively feeling in himself".¹⁰⁷ Johnson uses them because there is no exact pictorial effect. It is tempting to quote here a beautiful description by Johnson of the effect that such imagery has. Speaking of a Greek hymn celebrating good health, he says that "no one, who has ever languished under the discomforts and infirmities of a lingering disease, can read it without feeling the images dance in his heart".¹⁰⁸ It is hard to imagine a more vivid description of the way in which metaphor can blend visual, kinaesthetic and emotional elements. Further,

106. Essay on Criticism, 1.292. It should be remarked here that in eighteenth century criticism no essential distinction is made between metaphor and simile. Johnson, following the usual pattern, defines, in the Dictionary, a metaphor as "a simile comprized in a word". The same definition is given by Addison in Spectator No.595: "a metaphor is a similitude in one word".

107. See above, p.223.

108. Rambler (No.48), iii, 260.

Vernon's lines also exemplify, to a high degree, that "tumbling" imagery which is characteristic of Shakespeare; a flow in which one figure gives birth to another, and which Johnson has no difficulty in admiring.

The doctrine of propriety applies equally to these cases, where what is realised is not an exact picture but an image modified by feelings. This is clear from the examples we have so far considered. The network of implications, or the high degree of propriety, which Johnson sketches, in his comment on Captain Whitmore's comparison of the day with an informer, refers to the speaker's feelings rather than to the relations between tenor and vehicle - to an experience rather than to a concrete object.¹⁰⁹

It is, of course, true, that Johnson can use, and mis-use, the crudely "imagist" doctrine. He applies it to the metaphysical poets, where it is inapplicable, and argues that they cannot arouse emotion because they present no images.¹¹⁰ But, as we have said, his dealings with Shakespeare's dramatic poetry make it clear that his critique of the metaphysical poets does not spring from a mechanical application of theory.

109. See above, p.207.

110. Lives of the Poets, i, 20-21.

VI.

The insistence, in eighteenth century criticism, that the essential function of imagery is to arouse emotion is crucial, because it connects with their stress on the ideas of "sympathy" and "generality". We shall outline these ideas, partly because the idea of "generality" is another modification of the crudely "imagist" view, but, more importantly, because "sympathy" and "generality" cover the same ground as Richards' notion of "self-realisation".

In Richards' formulation, as we have seen, verbal complexity, or inter inanimation, is creativity, and, in re-creating the experience which a poem presents, the reader is realising himself. In eighteenth century terms, propriety of diction realises images which arouse emotion; to feel emotion in this way is an act of sympathy; sympathy is possible because human nature is, fundamentally, always the same; consequently, what we are realising is, in the end, ourselves.

That eighteenth century criticism saw emotion as the end of imagery is a reflection of their generally emotive theory of poetry. This view is apparent in Dr. Johnson's criticism, lying, for instance, at the heart of his discussions, in his preface to Shakespeare, of the mingling of tragic and comic scenes and of the "unities".

With regard to the mingling of tragic and comic scenes, Johnson says that, by those who disapprove of it:

It is objected, that by this change of scenes the passions are interrupted in their progression, and that the principal event, being not advanced by a due gradation of preparatory incidents, wants at last the power to move, which constitutes the perfection of dramatic poetry.¹¹¹

Johnson goes on to disagree with the objectors, but agrees that the "power to move" is "the perfection of dramatic poetry".

With regard to the "unities", it had been argued that to break the unity of time and place, breaks the dramatic illusion.

Johnson says:

It will be asked, how the drama moves if it is not credited. It is credited with all the credit due to a drama. It is credited, whenever it moves, as a just picture of a real original.¹¹²

The insistence on the primacy of emotional effect is not restricted to Johnson's discussions of dramatic poetry. It is, as we have said, the basis of his critique of the metaphysical poets, and here the relevance of the idea of "generality" is clear. The

111. Preface to Shakespeare, Yale, vii, 67.

112. *ibid.*, p.78.

metaphysical poets, Johnson says:

were not successful in representing or moving the affections. As they were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising they had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment, which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasure of other minds.¹¹³

The final ground of Johnson's principle, as is indicated by that phrase "uniformity of sentiment", is the idea upon which he loved to dwell; "that human nature is always the same".¹¹⁴ Much illustration would be superfluous, but we may recall Imlac's claim, in Rasselas, that "the province of poetry is to describe Nature and Passion, which are always the same",¹¹⁵ or Johnson's remark in The Rambler, that "reason and nature are uniform and inflexible".¹¹⁶

It is through an act of sympathy that we perceive this generality. Here lies Johnson's preference, for instance, for "domestic" over "imperial" tragedy:

It is not easy for the most artful writer to give us an interest in happiness or misery, which we think

113. Lives of the Poets, i, 20.

114. Adventurer (No.99), The Idler and The Adventurer, p.431.

115. Rasselas (Chapter X), The Works of Samuel Johnson, London, 1825, vi, 185.

116. Rambler (No.125), iv, 301.

ourselves never likely to feel, and with which we have never yet been acquainted. Histories of the downfall of kingdoms, and revolutions of empires, are read with great tranquillity.¹¹⁷

The point is repeated in his summary of Timon of Athens: "the play of Timon is a domestic tragedy, and therefore strongly fastens on the attention of the reader".¹¹⁸ His affection for biography is justified in similar terms:

Those parallel circumstances, and kindred images, to which we readily conform our minds, are, above all other writings, to be found in narratives of the lives of particular persons; and therefore no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition.¹¹⁹

The tendency is towards the view that what we contemplate, when moved by poetry, is, essentially, ourselves, and a general statement to this effect appears in the same Rambler:

All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of the imagination, that

117. Rambler (No.60), iii, 319.

118. Yale, viii, 745.

119. Rambler (No.60), iii, 319.

realises the event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever notions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves.¹²⁰

The same line of thought runs through Johnson's preface to Shakespeare; the drama represents "to the auditor what he would himself feel, if he were to do or suffer what is there feigned to be suffered or to be done"; or, "Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion".¹²¹

It is no accident that Johnson, in the words "an act of imagination that realises the event", anticipates one of Dr. Leavis' favourite phrases - "the realising imagination". The phrase "men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted", also indicates the central importance for Johnson, of Shakespeare's poetry. The moving power of the language is that from which all else follows.

This nexus of ideas is not, of course, peculiar to

120. Rambler (No.60), iii, 318-319.

121. Yale, vii, 78 and 64.

Johnson. Burke notes the following effect of sympathy:

we enter into the concerns of others;...we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost anything which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected.¹²²

The ideas are neatly summed up by John Upton in his Critical Observations, an important document in Shakespeare criticism of the mid-eighteenth century:

how beautiful is it to see the struggles of the mind, and the passions at variance.... But what is tragic poetry without passion? In a word, 'tis ourselves, and our own passions, that we love to see pictured; and in these representations we seek for delight and instruction.¹²³

Upton's final words here indicate clearly that the essence of the eighteenth century view of the moral function of poetry, is the insistence that poetry gives self-knowledge. It is, therefore, no surprise to find that Coleridge, in a typical essay on the self-realising powers of poetry, adduces a passage from Harburton's

122. The Sublime and the Beautiful, p.44.

123. John Upton, Critical Observations on Shakespeare, London, 1746, pp.81-82.

preface to Shakespeare, as a satisfactory expression of his own views:

Of all literary exertions, whether designed for the use or entertainment of the world, there are none of so much importance, or so immediately our concern, as those which let us into the knowledge of our own nature. Others may exercise understanding or amuse the imagination; but these only can improve the heart and form the human mind to wisdom.¹²⁴

To put this in a modern perspective, what Warburton is describing is what Dr. Leavis calls moral en-actment, as opposed to moral statement.¹²⁵

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Dr. Leavis, in accusing Johnson of moralizing crudity in his approach to Shakespeare, is being less than just.¹²⁶ It is certainly true that Johnson very seriously accused Shakespeare of not making his "moral" clear:

he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to shew in the virtuous a disapprobation

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124. Coleridge, The Friend, ed. B. Rooke, London, 1969, 1, 115. On p.457 of the same volume there is another typical Coleridgean remark in the same vein: "In all his [Shakespeare's] various characters, we still feel ourselves communing with the same human nature".
125. "Johnson as Critic", Scrutiny, xii (1944-45), 197.
126. See, for example, The Common Pursuit, pp.110-111 or p.118.

of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance.¹²⁷

But, in view of the ideas which we have been examining, this must be seen as a point of secondary importance. Johnson is here concerned with the public responsibility of the poet, and he demands clear moral statement, in addition to moral enactment, in order that the "examples" should not merely "operate by chance". His major point, which Dr. Leavis unfairly dismisses, is that "he that thinks reasonably must think morally", and he is here referring to the complex of ideas that we have outlined.¹²⁸ In evoking our response to fundamental human nature Shakespeare is teaching us about ourselves, and the reader of Shakespeare is "cured of his delirious extasies, by reading human sentiments in human language".¹²⁹ It is in the purifying of the imagination that Johnson sees the essential value of Shakespeare.

Such are the most important aspects of the ideas of "generality" and "sympathy". That they need to be stressed may be suggested by Professor Elledge's remark, in a discussion of a minor aspect of

127. Preface to Shakespeare, Yale, vii, 71.

128. *ibid.*, p.71. Cf. The Common Pursuit, p.110.

129. Yale, vii, 65.

"generality" (its relation with the Longinian stream in eighteenth century criticism), that "we suspect that the words "general" and "particular" were almost as useless and actually just as meaningless for the eighteenth century critic as they are for the modern student of that period".¹³⁰ It is never a safe procedure to accuse Johnson of bandying meaningless words about.

The further point about the idea of "generality" is that it modifies the crudely "imagist" approach, since it demands that the images of poetry should be "general" as well as "particular".

Johnson can quite happily employ both criteria. In the character of Inlac he can say:

The business of a poet...is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind.¹³¹

But he can also say of Rowe:

I know not that there can be found in his plays any deep search into nature, any accurate discriminations

130. "Theories of Generality and Particularity", PMLA, xlii (1947), 149.

131. Rasselas (Chapter X), Works, 1825, vi, 186.

of kindred qualities, or nice display of passion in its progress; all is general and undefined.¹³²

or, of Milton:

his images and descriptions of the scenes or operations of Nature do not seem to be always copied from original form, nor to have the freshness, raciness, and energy of immediate observation.¹³³

The simultaneous demand for "particularity" and "generality" is only an apparent contradiction. That the imagination reconciles "the individual, with the representative" was to be, for Coleridge, one of its central features.¹³⁴

132. Lives of the Poets, ii, 76.

133. ibid., i, 178.

134. Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross, Oxford, 1954, ii, 12.

CHAPTER 7

COMPLEXITY AND THE DOCTRINE OF PROPRIETY IN JOHNSON'S SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM

I.

I have illustrated some ways in which the central principles of eighteenth century criticism resemble those of Richards, and have argued that eighteenth century critics applied these principles in a less rigid way than modern commentators suggest. I wish now to examine their flexibility as it is exemplified in Johnson's Shakespeare criticism, but would like to dwell, first, on some general features of Dr. Johnson's response to Shakespeare's poetry. This is particularly worthwhile since it raises, I think, an interesting question about important elements in modern Shakespeare criticism.

According to Dr. Leavis, "what Johnson acclaims in Shakespeare, it might be said, is a great novelist who writes in dramatic form", and this "radical insufficiency [is] correlated with his abstraction of the 'drama' from the 'poetry' - with his failure to see the dramatic genius as a poetic and linguistic genius". Johnson is seen, in short, as a pre-cursor of Bradley, engaged in irrelevant discussion of Shakespeare's "characters".¹

1. "Johnson as Critic", Scrutiny, xii (1944), 198.

The alternative to an approach in terms of "character", and the relation of that alternative with Shakespeare's poetic genius, may be conveniently indicated by referring to a passage in Dr. Leavis'. Education and the University, where some lines from Macbeth are quoted:

All our service,
In every point twice done, and then done double,
Were poor and single business to contend
Against those honours deep and broad wherewith
Your majesty loads our house.

(Macbeth, I.vi. 14-18)

Dr. Leavis comments:

The effect of concreteness - of being, we might say, 'realized' and not merely verbal - depends above all on the implicit metaphor introduced with 'deep and broad'. Those adjectives, plainly, describe a river, and, whether we tell ourselves so or not, the presence of a river makes itself felt in the effect of the passage, giving a physical quality to 'contend', in the third line, that it would not otherwise have had.²

There is no comment whatever on the dramatic significance of the lines, and Dr. Leavis almost talks as though he were praising a vividly concrete description of a river by Keats. It is an inadvertence, because Dr. Leavis usually, in discussing Shakespeare,

2. F.R. Leavis, Education and the University, (New Edition), London, 1948, p.77.

makes penetrating remarks about the dramatic significance of the poetry. But it is an important inadvertence in that it lends countenance to a familiar modern approach to Shakespeare; the approach which sees a play as a meaningful pattern of realised imagery.³

It is not my purpose to quarrel with that approach, but objection must be made to the view that it, and it alone, does justice to Shakespeare's poetic genius.

If one works with any sort of scheme resembling Richards', and talks in terms of complexity of language (a complexity which must involve aspects of tone and feeling) then a "character" approach to Shakespeare is inevitable. One must find oneself talking in the way that Johnson talks in, say, his description of the tone and feeling of Iachimo's lines, since there is no other way in which the complexity of the poetry can be fully discussed.⁴ And to talk in that way of all Iachimo's lines is to discuss his "character".

If, on the other hand, one is to see a play as a pattern of concretely realised images, one may be pursuing a legitimate and interesting line of enquiry, but one will be examining less than

3. I am thinking of the approach exemplified in the work of, say, L.C. Knights, or D.A. Traversi.

4. See above, pp.231-233.

the full complexity of the poetry. One will, in fact, be largely employing a crudely "imagist" approach, and demanding nothing further than concrete particularity.

There is a need to enforce the point with further illustration, especially since, as we have seen, Johnson's admirers tend to fall back on the view, necessary if one accepts Dr. Leavis' arguments, that Johnson, in some mysterious fashion, pushed his way irritably past Shakespeare's poetry, to seize the human truths beneath.

Johnson's account of Polonius is a convenient example. Johnson is provoked to write at length on Polonius because he disagrees with Warburton, who sees the character as that of a "weak, pedant, minister of state".⁵ Johnson insists, against this, on the complexity of the character:

Polonius is a man bred in courts, exercised in business, stored with observation confident of his knowledge, proud of his eloquence, and declining into dotage. His mode of oratory is truly represented as designed to ridicule the practice of those times, of prefaces that made no introduction, and of method that embarrassed rather than explained. This part of his character is accidental, the rest is natural. Such a man is positive and confident, because he knows that his mind was once strong, and knows not that it

5. Yale, viii, 973. For the method of reference employed here and in the rest of this chapter, see footnote number 16 of the preceding chapter.

has become weak. Such a man excels in general principles, but fails in the particular application. He is knowing in retrospect, and ignorant in foresight. While he depends upon his memory, and can draw from his repositories of knowledge, he utters weighty sentences, and gives useful counsel; but as the mind in its enfeebled state cannot be kept long busy and intent, the old man is subject to sudden dereliction of his faculties, he loses the order of his ideas, and entangles himself in his own thoughts, till he recovers the leading principle, and falls again into his former train. This idea of dotage encroaching upon wisdom, will solve all the phaenomena of the character of Polonius.⁶

On the surface this account may seem to support the view that Johnson's strength is in getting the general drift of a character and in isolating the "type" to which it belongs. But that procedure is, in fact, exemplified by Warburton's summary, not by Johnson's, of which the most impressive feature is the delicate response to the shifting qualities of the poetry in which Polonius, in the full sense of the phrase, expresses himself. An examination of Polonius' speeches reveals that, at every point, they respond to Johnson's account, and, as such analysis proceeds, it finds itself talking about subtly varying tones, feelings and movements; it is, in short, analysis of the poetry. A full investigation would

6. Yale, viii, 974.

be too lengthy, but it is, perhaps, sufficient to look at Polonius' long speech claiming that he has discovered the source of Hamlet's madness:

But what might you think
 When I had seen this hot love on the wing,
 (As I perceiv'd it, I must tell you that,
 Before my daughter told me:) what might you,
 Or my dear Majesty your Queen here, think
 If I had play'd the desk or table-book,
 Or giv'n my heart a working, mute and dumb,
 Or look'd upon this love with idle sight?
 What might you think? No, I went round to work,
 And my young mistress thus I did bespeak;
 Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy sphere,
 This must not be; and then, I precepts gave her,
 That she should lock herself from his resort,
 Admit no messengers, receive no tokens:
 Which done, she took the fruits of my advice;
 And he repulsed, a short tale to make,
 Fell to a sadness, then into a fast,
 Thence to a watching, thence into a weakness,
 Thence to a lightness, and, by this declension,
 Into the madness wherein now he raves,
 And all we wail for.

(Hamlet, II.ii.120-140)

The opening is "positive and confident"; the product of Polonius' "knowing-ness". Then begins a "sudden dereliction of faculties" as he wanders into an irrelevant compliment to the queen. There is an evident shift of tone and feeling between these two first movements. This is followed by a change into

the far-fetched and repetitious descant on his own insight into the situation; he is "proud of his eloquence" and "knowing in retrospect". He then "falls again into his former train" by repeating "what might you think?" Having pulled himself together he manages a moment of concise weightiness:

Lord Hamlet is a Prince out of thy sphere,
This must not be.

But he drifts off again into inconsequentiality and indulges himself with his ridiculous "mode of oratory". It is out of detail of this kind that Johnson's account grows, and "detail" here means poetic detail. In what other way could the growth occur? Lacking this sensitivity of response a reader can only bring away from the text a stereotype of the kind produced by Warburton.

II.

I will now examine, with reference to Johnson's notes on Shakespeare, the flexibility of the doctrine of propriety, and look first at the question of permitted relations between tenors and vehicles in metaphors. This is an important question because upon it hinge many of the uses of such terms (connected with the doctrine of propriety) as "far-fetched", "strained", "harsh" and "obscure". I will introduce the examination with an outline of the important idea of "surprise" or "novelty".

The idea of surprise rests, simply, on the observation that "nothing can strongly strike or affect us, but what is rare or sudden".⁷ This is the element which occupies the second half of Johnson's well-known definition of "wit" as that "which is at once natural and new"; a definition which occurs in his critique of the metaphysical poets, who, he says, cultivated surprise at the expense of naturalness.⁸

In its practical application the idea is important in Johnson's view of metre, and this may be illustrated by glancing at his review of Wharton's essay on Pope:

Unvaried rhymes, says this writer [Wharton], highly disgust readers of a good ear. It is surely not the ear but the mind that is offended. The fault arising from the use of common rhymes is, that by reading the past line the second may be guessed, and half the composition loses the grace of novelty.⁹

The criterion behind this is, to use Richards' word, "activity"; common rhymes result in an easy and mechanical mode of inter-

7. Rambler (No.78), ed. W.J. Bate and A.B. Strauss, Yale, 1969, iv, 46.

8. Lives of the Poets, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, Oxford, 1905, i, 20. Cf. Coleridge's remark that the poetic imagination reconciles a "sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects". Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross, Oxford, 1954, ii, 12.

9. The Works of Samuel Johnson, London, 1825, v, 666. Cf. Johnson's condemnation of a uniform prose style "in which the first half of the sentence betrays the other". Lives of the Poets, i, 418.

connection between the words, whereas rhymes which have "novelty" issue in a greater intensity of "activity". Johnson cannot, there, be referring to mere and literal "novelty", for, in that case, he would be reducing all rhymes to the level of common rhymes after the first reading since one then knows in any case what the rhyme is going to be.

The principle appears in his noting "the frequent intersections of the sense, which are the necessary effects of rhyme".¹⁰ Johnson is here contrasting rhymed and blank verse, and his well-known preference for the former is largely, therefore, to be seen in terms of increased "interanimation" ("frequent intersections of the sense").

It follows from this that for Johnson metre is a movement of meaning. This appears in his disagreement with Pope about representative metre,¹¹ or in his satirical exposure of Dick Minim's analysis of "tied imagery".¹² The following summary of his views is more conveniently quotable:

poetical measures have not in any language been so far refined as to provide for the subdivisions of passion. They can only be adapted to general purposes;

10. Lives of the Poets, iii, 299.

11. ibid., iii, 230-231.

12. Idler (No.60), ed. F.J. Bate, J.M. Bullitt and L.F. Powell, Yale, 1963, ii, 188-189.

but the particular and minuter propriety must be sought only in the sentiment and language.¹³

What more concerns us is the idea of surprise with regard to metaphor. For instance, it appears clearly in the remark that a "simile may be compared to lines converging at a point and is more excellent as the lines approach from . greater distance".¹⁴ And this principle is applied critically to one of Dryden's similes, in which "there is so much likeness in the initial comparison that there is no illustration"; it is like saying "of a brook, that it waters a garden as a river waters a country".¹⁵

It is therefore incorrect of Richards to say that Johnson may be seen as exactly opposed to André Breton. For Breton, according to Richards, the sole criterion of success in metaphor is the greatness of the distance between tenor and vehicle, "whereas Johnson objected to comparisons being, like Cowley's, 'far-fetched'".¹⁶

Johnson's position, in fact, is like Richards', as may be indicated by his comment on Pope's comparison of the progress of

13. Works, 1825, v, 664.

14. Lives of the Poets, ii, 130.

15. ibid., i, 441.

16. I.A. Richards, The Philosophy of Rhetoric, New York, 1936, p.124, See above, p.145.

study with a journey through the Alps: "the most exact resemblance is traced between things in appearance utterly unrelated to each other".¹⁷ Here "exact resemblance" corresponds with that multiplicity of inter-connection which Richards describes in the comparison of the departing Adonis with a falling star, in Coleridge on Imagination, and that the tenor and vehicle are "utterly unrelated to each other" corresponds with that disparity between tenor and vehicle which Richards describes as "the strength of the bow", or the source of the metaphor's energy.¹⁸

As we have seen, when Johnson uses terms like "far-fetched" or "harsh" he is talking not about any absolute idea of distance between tenor and vehicle but simply about failure of junction, which means failure to utilize the full powers of the words involved.

It is worth adding that Johnson's stress on the importance of surprise in metaphor relates to his stress on the importance of the poet's memory. "'it", for instance, is defined on one occasion as:

the unexpected copulation of ideas, the discovery of some occult relation between images in appearance remote from each other; an effusion of wit therefore

17. Works, 1825, v, 666.

18. The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p.125.

presupposes an accumulation of knowledge; a memory stored with notions, which the imagination may cull out to compose new assemblages.¹⁹

This flexibility of memory pre-supposes a high power of receptiveness in the poet, a power which Johnson attributes, for example, to Savage, of whom it is said:

he could frequently recollect incidents, with all their combination of circumstances, which few would have regarded at the present time, but which the quickness of his apprehension impressed upon him.²⁰

In terms of Richards' little illustration of the same theme, Savage would have noticed the colour of the water and the wheeling of the pigeons, as well as the drift of the speech, in the scene in Trafalgar Square.²¹

The co-incidence of views is not surprising. Richards and Johnson are simply noting that the poet is highly receptive to impressions and highly retentive of them. To revert to a theme we have touched upon before, it is the kind of point that histories of criticism tend to neglect, because it is so commonplace; but its common-place-ness is an index of its importance.

19. Rambler (No.194), v, 251.

20. Lives of the Poets, ii, 429.

21. See above, p.21.

In an examination of particular examples of Johnson's views on the relations between tenor and vehicle, it would be absurd to claim that one is measuring exactly, but suggestive instances may serve as a basis for some tentative conclusions.

We have already seen that, when there is a dramatic junction between tenor and vehicle (as in the Fool's comparison of Lear with a pea-pod, or Iachimo's comparison of a river with a vain man), Johnson has no difficulty with metaphors which, barely considered, might appear outrageously "far-fetched".²² This is an important category and we will look at further examples of it.

Kames, occupied, characteristically, in setting out the "rules" for good metaphors, condemns a too "slight resemblance" between tenor and vehicle, and continues :

The expression, for example, drink down a secret, for listening to a secret with attention, is harsh and uncouth, because there is scarce any resemblance betwixt listening and drinking.²³

This is the sort of approach which Richards condemns as characteristic of the eighteenth century critics. There is, however, a difference between the wooden rigidities of a theorist and the practice of a perceptive critic. Ariel, in The Tempest,

22. See above, pp.231-233.

23. Elements of Criticism, Edinburgh, 1762, iii, 155.

sent upon an errand by Prospero, says:

I drink the air before me, and return
Or e'er your pulse twice beat.

(The Tempest, V.i.102-103)

One might think that there is even less resemblance between drinking and travelling fast, than between drinking and listening. Johnson's comment is:

"To drink the air" is an expression of swiftness of the same kind as to "devour the way" in Henry IV.²⁴

It needs no great insight to point out that the junction is effected by the idea of the eager avidity of a thirsty man. Further, in both "drink the air" and "devour the way" there is a clear junction of disparity between tenor and vehicle; the impossibility of drinking air or eating a road dictates the tone and feeling of the metaphors. In Ariel's case this tone and feeling relate to his "character" as a whole, since his forte is precisely to perform the impossible. Where there is a successful dramatic function of metaphor, the criteria to be found in Kames are, for Johnson, irrelevant.

The degree of flexibility which Johnson will exercise in this respect is nowhere more clear than in his well-known comment

24. Yale, vii, 133.

on Macbeth's description of Duncan's corpse:

Here, lay Duncan;
His silver skin laced with his golden blood.
(Macbeth, II.iii.110-111)

Johnson comments:

It is not improbable, that Shakespeare put these forced and unnatural metaphors into the mouth of Macbeth as a mark of artifice and dissimulation, to show the difference between the studied language of hypocrisy, and the natural outcries of sudden passion. This whole speech, so considered, is a remarkable instance of judgement, as it consists entirely of antithesis and metaphor.²⁵

This subtlety of response to the dramatic function of the poetry, even when it involves violating the neo-classic "rules", is also evident in Johnson's summary of Antony and Cleopatra:

Upton, who did not easily miss what he desired to find, has discovered that the language of Antony is, with great skill and learning, made pompous and superb, according to his real practice. But I think his diction not distinguishable from that of others: the most tumid speech in the play is that which Caesar makes to Octavia.²⁶

25. Yale, viii, 774.

26. Yale, viii, 873.

The speech referred to is that in which Caesar, under pretence of indignation at Antony's casual treatment of Octavia, seeks further excuse for a break with Antony.²⁷ The "tumidity", that is, expresses Caesar's hypocrisy. That Johnson can single out this speech, in this way, is in itself important testimony of his grasp of the essentially poetic nature of Shakespeare's drama.

In the light of this we may also consider his comment on Isabella's disgust at her brother's acquiescence in Angelo's offer to let her brother live if Isabella will sacrifice her virginity:

Is't not a kind of incest, to take life
From thine own sister's shame?

(Measure for Measure, III.i.140-141)

Johnson comments:

In Isabella's declamation there is something harsh, and something forced and far-fetched. But her indignation cannot be thought violent when we consider her not only as a virgin but as a nun.²⁸

Professor Sherbo says: "the idea (Johnson would call it a conceit) that Claudio's taking life from his sister's prostitution can be likened to incest is so 'far-fetched' that it displeases instantly".²⁹ But Johnson, surely, is making a point not about

27. Antony and Cleopatra, III, vi, 42-55.

28. Yale, vii, 197.

29. Samuel Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare, Urbana, 1956, p.67.

Shakespeare's poetic infelicities, but about Isabella's character; she is indulging in "declamation", just as Caesar is indulging in "tumidity", or Macbeth in the "studied language of hypocrisy".

One may also set here Johnson's justification of the "obscurity" of the language of Caliban in The Tempest:

His diction is indeed somewhat clouded by the gloominess of his temper and the malignity of his purposes; but let any other being entertain the same thoughts and he will find them easily issue in the same expressions.³⁰

The final part of this comment refers implicitly to the central cluster of ideas which we outlined earlier; the language of Shakespeare is such that it provokes in the reader the feelings which it expresses, and this is the ground on which is based Johnson's view of the moral function of poetry.

"Harshness", "tumidity", "forced-ness", and "obscurity", then, are words which Johnson can use not merely in a condemnatory fashion but as indicators of one of the ways in which poetry functions dramatically.

30. Yale, vii, 123.

III.

We shall now look at some instances where there is a rather delicate relation between tenor and vehicle but where there is no obvious dramatic function.

Richard II, uttering sinister threats about the consequences if Bolingbroke pursues his rebellious courses, says;

ere the crown, he looks for, live in peace,
Ten thousand bloody crowns of mothers' sons
Shall ill become the flow'r of England's face.

(Richard II, III.iii.95-97)

Theobald was disturbed by the oddity of the metaphor, and wished to emend "flower" to "floor". Warburton indulges in a typically rude remark about Theobald, explains that "the flower of England" means "the choicest youths of England, who shall be slaughter'd in this quarrel, or have 'bloody crowns'", and goes on to remark that it is a "fine and noble expression". Johnson reproduces the note and says that the passage is thus "very happily explained".³¹ It is easy to see why Theobald was disturbed, and the generosity of Warburton and Johnson here perhaps goes too far. Shakespeare seems to be half toying with "crowns" in the sense of "buds", and the total effect could easily feel rather clogged and tortuous. Warburton's reading entails firmly cutting out the literal sense

31. Yale, vii, 442.

of "flower" and restricting attention to the metaphorical sense. This means that the propriety of the diction here is very limited, since the powers of the words are not being fully used. The metaphor is, in fact, a less extreme instance of the kind we have seen Johnson adversely criticizing in Lepidus' comparison of Antony's faults with stars.³²

A more extreme case occurs when Timon, bankrupt and bitter, calls down a curse on the unprincipled opportunist, who

his particular to foresee
Smells from the gen'ral weal.

(Timon of Athens, IV.iii.156-157)

In reply to Warburton's emendation of "foresee" to "forefend", Johnson comments:

The metaphor is apparently incongruous, but the sense is good. To "foresee his particular", is "to provide for his private advantage", for which "he leaves the right scent of publick good". In hunting, when hares have cross'd one another, it is common for some of the hounds "to smell from the general weal, and foresee their own particular".³³

Here the main senses of "foresee" and "smell" have to be cut out, because, if stressed, they clash with each other in an absurd

32. See above, p.205.

33. Yale, viii, 733.

fashion. Johnson is quite willing to understress the chief senses, and let the relevant secondary implications come in. This is not to say that he is enthusiastic about the metaphor, but the breach of propriety evidently does not distress him.

He is, however, enthusiastic about the following complex, and typically Shakespearean, metaphorical play, in which the interactions of meaning are fleeting and delicate. Claudio, in Measure for Measure, tells the Provost that the condemned prisoner Barnadine is,

As fast lock'd up in sleep, as guiltness labour
When it lyes starkly in the traveller's bones.

(Measure for Measure, IV.ii.61-62)

Johnson glosses "starkly" as "stifly", and adds: "These two lines afford a very pleasing image".³⁴ The lines contain a metaphor within a simile, and the metaphor contains a personification. The effect defies any neat account, and the reader is not allowed to press too far the triple comparison between sleep, a prison and bones. Johnson's gloss brings out the essential connecting link; "starkly" carries, on the one hand, implications of being closely restricted, as in prison, and, on the other hand, of the stiffness or soreness of the bones of a weary man. If one presses the metaphor too hard, the idea of personified "labour" being

34. Yale, vii, 203.

imprisoned inside a man's bones quickly becomes absurd. What carries off the effect is the power, or the "propriety", of the relevant implications of "starkly".

That example was chosen partly because it offers itself for useful comparison with one upon which Professor Sherbo comments, and which we have already glanced at:

Unthread the rude eye of rebellion,
 And welcome home again discarded faith,
 Seek out King John and fall before his feet.³⁵

Professor Sherbo says that for Johnson the "fact that Rebellion is personified here contributes to the harshness of the metaphor, for how can Rebellion be a person and a needle at one and the same time?"³⁶ Professor Sherbo seems to be here referring to the common eighteenth century dictum that metaphors should not be crowded upon each other, and it is important to stress the inadequacy of this sort of plausible conjecture, which assumes an easy identity between the rules propounded by critical theorists and the actual practice of critics.

If we apply this "rule" to Claudio's lines we must say, "How can personified labour be locked up inside someone's bones?" Nor is it the case that Johnson's admiration of the image is a surprising

35. See above, pp.220-221.

36. Samuel Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare, p.66.

exception to his usual adherence to the "rules". It is the propriety of "starkly" that carries the effect, and such propriety is conspicuously absent from the metaphor of the needle and thread; there is no network of relevant implications to be carried over from the vehicle to the tenor.

The point may be illustrated further by King John's angry dismissal of the impertinent French envoy, who has presented him with a box of tennis-balls:

So, hence! be thou the trumpet of our wrath,
And sullen presage of your own decay.

(King John, I.i.27-28)

Johnson comments:

By the epithet "sullen", which cannot be applied to a trumpet, it is plain, that our authour's imagination had now suggested a new idea. It is as if he had said, be a "trumpet" to alarm with our invasion, be a "bird" of "ill-omen" to croak out the prognostick of your own ruin.³⁷

Johnson does not ask, "How can the man be at the same time a trumpet and a bird?", but describes instead Shakespeare's habit of moving rapidly from one metaphor to another, a process which has been analysed, for instance, by D.W. Harding.³⁸

37. Yale, vii, 406.

38. See, for example, Experience into Words, London, 1963, pp. 181-182.

This last example represents a species of "allusion", and, if one were thoroughly to enquire into the sensitivity of eighteenth century critics to the concrete vigour of Shakespeare's poetry, a large number of one's examples would come under this head. It is here that eighteenth century critics place that oblique, half-explicit, metaphorical activity which is one of the leading characteristics of Shakespeare's poetry.

How the term "allusion" is used is best recalled by an example rather than by a definition. Of Antony's lament,

I am so lated in the world, that I
Have lost my way for ever

(Antony and Cleopatra, III.xi.3-4)

Johnson simply says, "Alluding to a benighted traveller".³⁹ The lines are a very beautiful illustration of the way in which Shakespeare can call up, in one word, a wealth of relevant implication.

A similar example is Flaminius' question in Timon of Athens:
Has friendship such a faint and milky heart
It turns in less than two nights?

(Timon of Athens, III.i.53-54)

Johnson comments: "Alluding to the "turning" or acescence of milk".⁴⁰ It would be easy to gather together examples

39. Yale, viii, 857.

40. *ibid.*, p.721.

of Johnson's sensitivity to this sort of effect, but it would be superfluous.⁴¹ As we have seen in his comment on "sullen presage" he has no objections to fleeting allusions even when they come in to complicate another metaphor.

The conclusion which offers itself from those examples is that where vehicles are bringing in relevant implications, Johnson is indifferent to questions of neatness, explicitness or logic, and it seems, therefore, necessary to reject views like the following:

Clearly, what Johnson did was to analyse...[a] passage in the very process of reading it: he habitually interposed the demand that he understood how a figure works, and the qualification that its foundation be neither far-fetched nor difficult to discover, before allowing it to become poetically effective.⁴²

As we have seen the doctrine of propriety is essentially concerned not with arbitrary rules about which vehicles should go with which

41. Cf. Timon of Athens, I.ii.40; III.vi.4; and V.iv.8. (Yale, viii, 713; 727 and 744): King Lear, I.ii.97 (Yale, viii, 667): Measure for Measure, V.i.240 (Yale, vii, 211): Much Ado, III.i.112 (Yale, vii, 367): Othello, IV.i.118 (Yale, viii, 1041): Troilus and Cressida, I.iii.319 and V.i.55 (Yale, viii, 916 and 934): Henry V, I.i.33 and III.i.16 (Yale, viii, 528 and 545). This is a very incomplete list.

42. M.H. Abrams, "Unconscious Expectations in the Reading of Poetry", ELH, ix (1942), 237-238.

tenors, but with enquiring into success, or absence of it, in the inter-connection of words.

IV.

"Allusion", touched upon above, involves, like all metaphorical modes, a shift of meaning within a word; as Johnson's Dictionary says, the basic feature of metaphor is the use of a word in other than its normal signification. The result is a double range of reference; as the mind of the reader selects from the normal range and from the new range, it grasps what is being presented in an unusually full way. In Johnson's words metaphor "conveys the meaning more luminously", because it "gives you two ideas for one".⁴³

I will now examine eighteenth century views on those shifts of meaning which have none of the formal features of metaphor, and which are a notable characteristic of Shakespeare's poetry. In such cases a word is extended to a meaning it does not normally have, without any metaphorical basis for the extension, and in this area lies a good deal of what is usually called Elizabethan boldness and

43. Boswell's Life of Johnson, ed. G.B. Hill and L.F. Powell, Oxford, 1934, iii, 174.

freedom with the English language. Our topic, in fact, is the eighteenth century attitude to Shakespeare's linguistic "licentiousness", and our argument is that the doctrine of propriety is applicable in this field in the same way as in the field of metaphor proper, and that the eighteenth century critic is happy with non-metaphorical extension of meaning when the normal range is relevant to the new range; when, that is, there is "intercrinination" between the two ranges.

We may take first two examples of which Johnson disapproves, because they clearly illustrate the kind of shift of meaning that is here at issue. The examples occur together in Richard II. Aumerle, challenged to a duel by Bagot, but reluctant to fight a man who is his social inferior, exclaims;

Shall I so much dishonour my fair stars,
On equal terms to give him chastisement?

(Richard II, IV.i.21-22)

Warburton had wanted to emend "stars" to "stem", on the grounds that the latter is nearer to the necessary idea of "rank" or "high birth". Johnson comments:

I think the present reading to be unexceptionable.
The "birth" is supposed to be influenced by "stars",
therefore our authour with his usual licence takes
"stars" for "birth".⁴⁴

Seeing Aumerle's reluctance, Fitzwater, Bagot's ally, joins in:

44. Yale, vii, 444-45.

If that thy valour stand on sympathies,
 There is my gage, Aumerle, in gage to thine.

(Richard II, IV.i.33-34)

Johnson comments:

Here is a translated sense much harsher than that of "stars" explained in the foregoing note....

"Sympathy" is an "affection" incident at once to two subjects. This "community of affection" implies a "likeness or equality of nature", and thence our poet transferred the term to "equality of blood".⁴⁵

The idea of "likeness or equality of nature" is in the range of meaning of "sympathy", so Shakespeare isolates it, re-applies it, and cuts out the rest of the normal range. It is evidently that last point which makes Johnson call this a "harsher" shift than that of "stars". "Harshness", as we have seen, means conspicuous failure to exploit the powers of words. In the case of "stars" the usual implications are not relevant, and there is no particular point in the extension of meaning. In the case of "sympathies", the usual implications are more than irrelevant, they are evidently contrary to the implications required by this particular context. The speech is hostile, and the word "sympathies" is therefore improper, since its usual meaning has to be cut out, but struggles

45. Yale, vii, 445.

to get in. To use Richards' phrase again, Shakespeare has failed here to "triumph over the resistances of words".⁴⁶

Before we look at some more delicate examples, the background of the problem should be outlined. Warburton discusses it in his preface, when arguing against those who had said that Shakespeare's freedom with language is the sign of a confused mind:

The truth is, no-one thought clearer, or argued more closely than this immortal bard. But his superiority of genius less needing the intervention of words in the act of thinking, when he came to draw out his contemplations into discourse, he took up (as he was hurried along by the torrent of his matter) with the first words that lay in his way; and if, amongst these, there were two Mixed-modes that had but a principal idea in common, it was enough for him; he regarded them as synonymous and would use the one for the other without fear or scruple.⁴⁷

It is worth stressing here that Warburton regards the habit as illustrating Shakespeare's boldness as well as his "licentiousness", and that he connects it with a "genius less needing the intervention of words". Here again we may recollect D.F. Harding's account of that use of language in which words and experience meet at an

46. Practical Criticism, London, 1929, p.212.

47. Johnson's Edition of Shakespeare, 1765, i, cxxxv. For a discussion of "mixed-modes", see below, pp.280-282.

unusually early stage in the psycho-physiological process.⁴⁸

Warburton, I should add, is here being a moderate; for an enthusiast such as John Upton one of the "rules" which Shakespeare, being above the ordinary "rules", invented for himself and which the reader must observe, is:

He sometimes omits the primary and proper sense, and uses words in their secondary and improper signification.⁴⁹

Amongst Warburton's notes to Shakespeare, the following is an illustration of what he has discussed in general in his preface.

Of the lines,

Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
That in a spleen unfolds both heav'n and earth

(Midsummer Night's Dream, I, i, 145-146)

he says:

Shakespear always hurried on by the grandeur and multitude of his ideas, assumes every now and then, an uncommon license in the use of words. Particularly in complex moral modes it is usual with him to employ one, only to express a very few ideas of that number of which it is composed. Thus wanting here to express the ideas "of a sudden", or "in a trice", he uses the word spleen; which, partially considered, signifying

48. See above, p.191.

49. Critical Observations on Shakespeare, London, 1746, p.304.

a hasty sudden fit, is enough for him, and he never troubles himself about the further or fuller signification.... And it must be owned this sort of conversion adds a force to the diction.⁵⁰

The word "force" occupies a high place in eighteenth century stylistic description, and Warburton's acuteness here goes very far. So far from being uncomprehendingly repelled by Shakespeare's licentious diction, he sees clearly how it works and is, despite a touch of nervousness about it, happy to allow its strength.

The word "force" is a cue for offering further illustration of how shrewdly the eighteenth century critics discussed the problem. Here is Joshua Reynolds, in an Appendix to the 1765 edition of Johnson's Shakespeare, putting forward a theory different from Warburton's, with reference to Brabantio's reply when the Duke tries to console him for his loss of Desdemona to the Moor:

But words are words; I never yet did hear,
That the bruis'd heart was pierced through the ear.
(Othello, I.iii.218-219)

Warburton had suggested "pieced" (i.e. mended) for "pierced", but Reynolds remarks:

Shakespeare was continually changing his first expression for another, either stronger or more uncommon, so that very often the reader, who has not the same continuity

50. Johnson's Edition of Shakespeare, 1765, i, 95.

or succession of ideas, is at a loss for its meaning. Many of Shakespeare's uncouth strained epithets may be explained, by going back to the obvious and simple expression which is most likely to occur to the mind in that state. I can imagine the first mode of expression that occurred to Shakespeare was this:

The troubled heart was never cured by words:
To give it poetical force, he altered the phrase;

The wounded heart was never reached through the ear:
"Wounded heart" he changed to "broken", and that to "bruised", as a more uncommon expression. "Reach", he altered to "touched", and the transition is then easy to "pierced", i.e. thoroughly touched. When the sentiment is brought to this state, the commentator, without this unraveling clue, expounds "piercing the heart", in its common acceptation, "wounding the heart", which making in this place nonsense, is corrected to "pieced the heart", which is very stiff, and as Polonius says, is a "vile phrase".⁵¹

It says a great deal for literary criticism in Johnson's time that critical speculation at this level of persistence and detail could be offered by a painter. As a speculation about Shakespeare's method of composition, it is opposite to that offered by Warburton, and similar to that offered by Empson.⁵² Of course, it may well

51. Johnson's Edition of Shakespeare, 1765, viii, L14 - L14^v.

52. W. Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, Third Edition (Revised), London, 1953, pp.82-83.

be wrong, but what is of interest to us is the level of acuteness at which the problem of Shakespeare's "licentiousness" was discussed, and the way in which it is related to his "poetical force". The question for the eighteenth century critic is, "At what point does force over-reach itself and become impropriety?" Reynolds believes, and it is hard to see how he might be refuted, that so much of the range of "pierced" acts in a way contrary to that demanded by the context to which one part of its range has been transferred, that the consequence is "nonsense". It is a more extreme case of the kind we have seen in "sympathies" above, and, again, "impropriety" means absence of inter inanimation.

One of the useful consequences of discussing this aspect of eighteenth century views on diction is that it brings out particularly clearly the fact that multiplicity of inter-connection was their working principle. This is apparent in Warburton's remark that Shakespeare sometimes uses only "a very few ideas of that number of which [the word] is composed"; the implication being that the better use is that which exploits as many of the ideas as possible. It is here helpful to recall Locke's account of "mixed modes". Locke stresses the liberty possessed by the

53. See above, p.277.

mind in forming ideas of "mixed modes":

in its complex ideas of mixed modes, the mind takes a liberty not to follow the existence of things exactly.... Nor does the mind...examine them by the real existence of things; or verify them by patterns, containing such peculiar compositions in nature.⁵⁴

An example given by Locke illustrates the point:

Thus the name of procession: what a great mixture of independent ideas of persons, habits, tapers, orders, motions, sounds, does it contain in that complex one, which the mind of man has arbitrarily put together, to express by that one name.⁵⁵

Locke is here talking of what Richards so much wished to stress in his use of a context theory of meaning:

The multiplicity and interdependence of the meaning of words, so much insisted upon here, becomes obvious and necessary as soon as we conceive of interpretation in terms of sign-situations.⁵⁶

For Richards a word is built up from a multiplicity of "contexts"; for Locke it contains a large number of "ideas".

54. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. A.C. Fraser, 1894, ii, 44.

55. *ibid.*, ii, 52.

56. I.A. Richards, Interpretation in Teaching, London, 1938, p.48, footnote. Cf. above, p.139.

There is, of course, a large theoretical difference; Richards regards all words in the way in which Locke regards "complex ideas of mixed modes". Locke's remark that, with such ideas, "the mind takes a liberty not to follow the existence of things exactly" would, presumably, raise from Richards the objection that the mind never merely perceives, but that all perception is creation.

In actual practice, however, the eighteenth century doctrine of propriety tends to treat all words as "mixed modes". This may be shown by recollecting any of the examples with which we have been dealing. For instance, Johnson's objection to the comparison of "faults" with "stars", rests on an appeal to the implications of "stars", or the complex of "ideas" which are usually attached to it.⁵⁷

Richards' theory of interanimation is explicitly and consciously worked out in terms of a theory of mind and a theory of meaning, while the doctrine of propriety consists, rather, of a body of working assumptions. Richards derives obvious advantages from his theories of mind and of meaning; they give his work on poetic language greater coherence, point and clarity. He also derives specific advantages. For instance, being able to stress that all words provoke an interpreting activity similar to that

57. See above, p.205.

provoked by metaphor, he could easily describe Shakespeare's free use of language in the same way as he describes metaphor. When a word is used in a sense slightly different from its normal sense, there is a disparity action which gives greater energy to the meaning, because the usual sense and the new sense operate in the same way as vehicle and tenor in metaphor. All that Warburton or Reynolds can say is that the uncommon use of words gives greater "poetical force". Even with metaphor proper, the eighteenth century critic can only talk in terms of "surprise" and note that the difference between tenor and vehicle is important. Richards' terms "activity" and "creativity", relating neatly and directly to his general theory of poetry, are more satisfying, but it must be insisted that the eighteenth century critics saw what was there and did essential justice to it, in their own way.

Johnson, it should be added, had considered the problem of "mixed modes" as attentively as had Warburton or Reynolds. This is clear, for instance, in his note on Lear's lines:

Those wicked creatures yet do look well-favour'd,
When others are more wicked.

(King Lear, II.iv.255-256)

Warburton had wished to emend "wicked", in both its occurrences, to "wrinkled", on the grounds that this makes a better "connection" with "well-favour'd". Johnson rejects the emendation and makes -

the following comment on Warburton's emendation:

[he should have] remembered what he says...concerning "mixed modes". Shakespeare, whose mind was more intent upon notions than words, had in his thoughts the pulchritude of virtue, and the deformity of wickedness; and though he had mentioned "wickedness" made the correlative answer to "deformity".⁵⁸

It has already been suggested that, in practice, the doctrine of propriety applies to the "licentious" use of language in exactly the same way that it applies to metaphor, and that Johnson finds "sympathies" a "harsher" "translated sense" than "stars" because its normal implications are not only irrelevant but in fact contrary to its new context. This point may be confirmed by looking briefly at further examples of Johnson's response to "that perpetual slight alteration of language", to use Eliot's phrase, which characterizes Shakespearean poetry.⁵⁹

Helena, in All's Well That Ends Well, referring to Bertram's unwitting seduction of her, talks of those occasions,

When saucy trusting of the cozen'd thoughts
Defiles the pitchy night.

(All's Well That Ends Well, IV.iv.23-24)

58. Yale, viii, 680-81.

59. "Philip Massinger", Selected Essays, London, 1951, p.209.

Warburton had wished to emend "saucy" to "fancy", and insert a comma after it. Johnson comments:

This conjecture is truly ingenious, but, I believe, the author of it will himself think it unnecessary, when he recollects that "saucy" may very properly signify "luxurious", and by consequence "lascivious".⁶⁰

For Johnson the sense has to be deduced in the same way as with "sympathy" in our earlier example, but here there is no objection, because the usual implications of "saucy" readily accommodate themselves to the new context.

A similar case occurs in Two Gentlemen of Verona when Julia says :

The air hath starv'd the roses in her cheeks,
And pinch'd the lilly-tincture of her face,
That now she is become as black as I.

(Two Gentlemen of Verona, IV.iv.150-152)

Warburton thought the reference was to being sun-burned and emended "pinch'd" to "pitch'd". Johnson comments:

This is no emendation, - none ever heard of a face being "pitched" by the weather. The colour of a part "pinched", is livid, as it is commonly termed, "black and blue". The weather may therefore be justly said to "pinch" when it produces the same visible effect.⁶¹

60. Yale, vii, 398.

61. *ibid.*, p.172.

Here the new head sense of "pinch'd" is only a small part of the normal range of implications, but it is acceptable because much of that normal range (such as a general feeling of discomfort and unpleasantness) is still relevant.

Such examples may seem, singly considered, trivial, but it is such slight distortion of meaning which, as Eliot notes, is the life-blood of Shakespeare's poetry.

It is, evidently, true that eighteenth century critics did have a bias; a modern critic, for instance, would not be provoked into saying that the use of "sympathy", examined above, is "harsh". But it is unjust of Dr. Leavis to say of the eighteenth century literary man: "He has no impulse to indulge in licentious linguistic creation, nor does it occur to him that such indulgence may ever with any propriety be countenanced".⁶² The border-line between the free use of language we have just looked at and metaphor proper is often very faint; where the new application of a word strongly invites in its old range of implications, the concreteness achieved is that which one associates with metaphor. And concreteness, as we have seen, so far from being something to which, as Dr. Leavis suggests, the eighteenth century critic was insensitive, is central to the doctrine of propriety.

62. "Johnson as Critic", Scrutiny, xii (1944), 194.

It is also worth noting that it is a characteristically modern bias which makes Dr. Leavis so much exaggerate the extent of Johnson's bias. Dr. Leavis says of Shakespeare's poetry:

[it is] highly specific and, so, highly complex
- which is to say, compressed and licentious in
expression: hence the occasions for Johnson's vigours
and rigours of censure.⁶³

It is, surely, an exaggeration to assume that concreteness inevitably involves "licentiousness" of diction. A glance at Dr. Leavis' own commentary on the concreteness of Johnson's poetry, the diction of which is never "licentious", is sufficient to confirm the point.⁶⁴

V.

My main purpose in discussing the doctrine of propriety in eighteenth century criticism has been to show its similarities with Richards' theories. I have wished to do so for two reasons; first, to give depth and perspective to Richards' theories, and, second, to support my contention that the better use of these theories is that

63. "Johnson as Critic", Scrutiny, xii (1944), 194.

64. F.R. Leavis, Revaluation, London, 1936, pp.118-19.

exemplified in the criticism of Johnson, and not that exemplified in Richards' own attempts to distinguish between different modes of language, or different phases of literary history.

Used in the Johnsonian way, such an analytic method can have no pretence to rigorous exactness; its virtue lies in concentrating attention upon the fact that poetry is "the best words in the best order",⁶⁵ and in providing a means for pointing suggestively to how, in a given case, the words are working, or failing to work. The value of this kind of attentiveness lies primarily, I think, in its gradual establishment of a perceptive habit of reading, and in its promotion of fruitful discussion, rather than in the fixing of a rigorous critical theory.

It is also hoped that our examination, though far from complete, may have been sufficient to suggest that the doctrine of propriety does not deserve the opprobrium that is now generally bestowed upon it. On this note we may finally glance at a point in Johnson's preface to Shakespeare:

In tragedy his performance seems constantly to be worse, as his labour is more. The effusions of passion which exigence forces out are for the most part striking and energetic; but whenever he solicits his invention, or strains his faculties, the offspring of his throes is tumour, meanness, tediousness, and obscurity.⁶⁶

65. Coleridge, Table Talk, ed. H. Morley, London, 1884, p.63.

66. Yale, vii, 72-73.

This may be related to Johnson's comment on Hamlet's, "To be or not to be....":

Of this celebrated soliloquy, which bursting from a man distracted with contrariety of desires, and overwhelmed with the magnitude of his own purposes, is connected rather in the speaker's mind, than on his tongue, I shall endeavour to discover the train, and to show how one sentiment produces another.⁶⁷

This, then, is one of the "effusions of passion which exigence forces out"; it suggests that Johnson's preference is for the mature Shakespearean style, rather than for the "laboured" (i.e. manifesting an obvious carefulness of execution) style of the earlier tragedies.

When Johnson adversely criticizes Shakespeare's poetry, he is not taking his own Irene as the rigid standard, and manifesting incomprehension of what Shakespeare was doing; he is, rather, making the sort of point that Eliot was later to make when he referred to "the strained and the mixed figures of speech in which Shakespeare indulged himself".⁶⁸ In the context of his own age Johnson was, in fact, consciously resisting bardolatry,⁶⁹ and it is in this respect that his Shakespeare criticism is now particularly timely.

67. Yale, viii, 981.

68. "'Rhetoric' and Poetic Drama", Selected Essays, p.38.

69. The eruption of this bardolatry into the first Shakespeare Jubilee in 1769 is amusingly recorded by Christian Deelman in The Great Shakespeare Jubilee, London, 1964.

CHAPTER 8

THE IDEA OF COMPLEXITY IN THE CRITICISM OF T.S. ELIOT

I.

I wish to point out the ideas which Eliot, in his criticism, has in common with Richards and with the eighteenth century critics, to outline Eliot's distinctive features, and to suggest that these distinctive features are closely connected with his weaknesses.

The central and crucial point of similarity between Eliot, Richards and the eighteenth century critics, lies in Eliot's account of complexity of meaning and of "realisation", and of the connection between the two.

The key statement here is Eliot's oft-quoted comment on "Shakespearean" poetry. After some brief quotations, he remarks:

These lines of Tourneur and of Middleton exhibit that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations, meanings perpetually eingeschachtelt into meanings, which evidences a very high development of the senses, a development of the English language which we have perhaps never equalled.¹

1. T.S. Eliot, "Philip Massinger", Selected Essays, Third Enlarged Edition, London, 1951, p.209.

There is here a heavy emphasis upon alteration, or distortion, of language, and this will be discussed in detail later. For the moment we shall note that the idea of "encapsulation" (in "eingeschachtelt") is the idea of "interanimation" and that the "very high development of the senses" corresponds with the eighteenth century stress on "circumstantial particularity"² or with Richards' enumeration of the sensory qualities of the objects in his analysis of "frail steel tissue of the sun".³ These similarities are central and not incidental. Though they use different terms, which have different implications, Eliot, Richards and the eighteenth century critics are talking about the same poetic phenomena. The poet by a complex use of language makes the reader grasp with unusual power what is being presented by the poetry.

The idea of interanimation is also central in Eliot's comment⁴ on the following beautiful lines by Lord Herbert of Cherbury:

So when from hence we shall be gone,
 And be no more, nor you, nor I,
 As one another's mystery,
 Each shall be both, yet both but one.

2. See above, pp.201-203.

3. See above, pp.74-75.

4. "The Metaphysical Poets", Selected Essays, pp.284-285.

This said, in her up-lifted face,
 Her eyes, which did that beauty crown,
 Were like two stars, that having faln down,
 Look up again to find their place:

While such a moveless silent peace
 Did seize on their becalmed sense,
 One would have thought some influence
 Their ravished spirits did possess.

Eliot remarks on the power of the lines and says, "a good deal resides in the richness of association which is at the same time borrowed from and given to the word 'becalmed'". This is Richards' theory in a nutshell, though it exists only at the level of an acute insight, and is nowhere in Eliot's criticism elaborated into an explicit theory as it is in Richards' work.

The emphasis upon sensory particularity is most conspicuously developed in Eliot's notion of the "objective correlative". His basic statement occurs in the essay on Hamlet:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. If you examine any of Shakespeare's more successful tragedies, you will find this exact equivalence; you will find that the state of mind of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep has been

communicated to you by a skilful accumulation of imagined sensory impressions.⁵

Eliot's notion of an "objective correlative" has, of course, further implications, and these are developed in his application of it to Hamlet. What I wish to stress is the simple core of the notion, which appears most clearly in the remark about Lady Macbeth. This simple core closely resembles the eighteenth century insistence on imagery as the crucial means for the evocation of feelings. There is nothing odd about the resemblance; the fact is one with which any reader of poetry is familiar.

II.

For both Richards and the eighteenth century critics, as we have seen, there is a direct connection between the "realisation" produced by a complex use of language, and the moral function of poetry; what one is "realising" is, in the end, oneself.⁶ This moral function is shrewdly touched upon by Eliot, but is not in any way related to his thinking about poetic language.

5. "Hamlet", Selected Essays, p.145.

6. See above, p.85, and p.244.

In "The Three Voices of Poetry", for instance, he says, mulling over his own experience of creating fictional characters, "I can't see, myself, any way to make a character live except to have a profound sympathy with that character".⁷ He elaborates the point as follows:

Some bit of himself that the author gives to a character may be the germ from which the life of that character starts. On the other hand, a character which succeeds in interesting its author may elicit from the author latent potentialities of his own being.⁸

Eliot makes the connection between this and the moral function of poetry by way of a point about structure, when he suggests that Ford's plays lack the "significance" that one finds in Shakespeare and adds:

a dramatic poet cannot create characters of the greatest intensity of life unless his personages, in their reciprocal actions and behaviour in their story, are somehow dramatizing, but in no obvious form, an action or struggle for harmony in the soul of the poet.⁹

Eliot makes the point more simply, and in a fashion reminiscent of Johnson's preference for "domestic" over "imperial" tragedy, in

7. T.S. Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry", On Poetry and Poets, London, 1957, p.93.

8. *ibid.*, p.94.

9. "John Ford", Selected Essays, p.196.

this remark:

Iago frightens me more than Richard III: I am not sure that Parolles, in All's Well That Ends Well, does not disturb me more than Iago. (And I am quite sure that Rosamund Vincey, in Middlemarch, frightens me far more than Goneril or Regan.)¹⁰

The more nearly a character comes home to us, the greater the effect, and for most of us the villainy of a Richard, a Goneril or a Regan is a remote, though real, possibility, whereas the vanity of a Parolles or the impenetrable egotism of a Rosamund Vincey is only too familiar.

But these elements, however interesting and suggestive, are not related to Eliot's thinking about poetic language. Indeed, at the points in his criticism where he talks most penetratingly about poetic language there is a positive anxiety to avoid any attribution of a moral function to poetry. This is clear, for instance, in his insistence that Swinburne's "morbidly is not of human feeling but of language",¹¹ or his noting how completely, in the evaluation of great poetry, "any semi-ethical criterion of 'sublimity' misses the mark", which is followed by the assertion that the intensity with which a variety of elements are fused is the better criterion.¹²

10. "The Three Voices of Poetry", On Poetry and Poets, p.93.

11. "Swinburne As Poet", Selected Essays, p.327.

12. "Tradition and the Individual Talent", *ibid.*, p.19.

There are, of course, lengthy discussions, in Eliot's criticism, of poetry and morality, but none of them are connected with his ideas about poetic language.

III.

It would be hard to over-emphasize the importance of Eliot's central ideas - his suggestions as to the relation between linguistic complexity and realisation. These two ideas are, of course, basic to the work of Dr. Leavis, and they are the means by which Dr. Leavis contrived to put into practice his urgent insistence that literary studies should be a literary discipline, and not be allowed to become a sub-division of philosophy or history. Whatever exaggerations it may have been subjected to, the notion of complexity, associated with the criterion of realisation, had the great merit of re-introducing a Johnsonian discipline - a discipline which, for Johnson, centred on the idea of "propriety"; and it did permit a concern with wider judgements. Eliot's central ideas, being pondered and applied, generated a great deal of critical relevance.

However, Eliot's account of the complexity of poetic language has several distinctive features, all of which are connected with the emphasis on "disparity" which is evident in his phrase "perpetual slight alteration of language" in the passage quoted above.

The root of this stress is to be found in Eliot's definition of "impersonality", and in his idea of the "objective correlative".

The poet, he says,

has, not a personality to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.¹³

This is directly connected with the well-known illustration in his essay on the metaphysical poets. The ordinary man, Eliot says,

falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.¹⁴

In his denial of the importance of "personality" Eliot uses the phrase "art-emotion". The poet's actual emotions may be crude, ordinary and uninteresting, but his "art-emotions" are complex, because they combine "a number of floating feelings, having an affinity to this emotion by no means superficially evident".¹⁵ To transfer this back to the illustration, and to re-introduce the idea of the "objective correlative", the formula by which the

13. "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Selected Essays, pp.19-20.

14. "The Metaphysical Poets", *ibid.*, p.287.

15. "Tradition and the Individual Talent", *ibid.*, p.20.

emotion of love is conveyed is composed of feelings associated with reading Spinoza, the noise of a typewriter, the smell of cooking, and so forth. We shall later look at more plausible examples of the process from Eliot's own poetry.¹⁶

Eliot is here, in his own way, covering the ground that Richards covers in his account of the poet's memory, the poet's ability to connect disparate areas of experience.¹⁷ The difference is that Eliot puts more emphasis on the surprise caused by the disparity between the experiences associated. This is apparent, to quote another well-known remark, in his comment on Johnson's critique of the metaphysical poets. Johnson had said that in metaphysical poetry the "most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together"; Eliot replies that "a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the operation of the poet's mind is omnipresent in poetry".¹⁸

This emphasis on the surprise occasioned by the fluidity of the poet's associative power has several consequences for Eliot's thinking. It relates, first, as we have said, to his pre-occupation with the poet's alteration of language; second, to his interest in the poetry of "wit"; and, third, to his fondness for a high degree

16. See below, pp.311-312.

17. See above, pp.18-22.

18. "The Metaphysical Poets", Selected Essays, p.283.

of "suggestiveness" in poetic language. These are the distinctive features of Eliot's notion of complexity and we will examine them in turn.

IV.

To a large extent, Eliot's emphasis on the poet's alteration of language, which might lead, for instance, to poetry such as some of Dylan Thomas', is counter-acted by strong opposite tendencies in Eliot's thinking. These tendencies may be focussed by recalling his fondness, in describing the diction of some poetry which he admires, for such terms as "correct", "pure" or "simple".¹⁹ There are, however, some points at which the emphasis on alteration or distortion is noticeable, and these are of particular interest, since they relate very closely to the tendency, which we have already seen in some remarks by Dr. Leavis, to insist that creativity in poetic language necessarily involves "licentiousness".²⁰

Eliot, for example, contrasting Shakespeare with Milton, quotes

19. See, for example, Selected Essays, p.285 and p.151.

20. See above, pp.188-189.

some lines from Macbeth:

Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood.

Eliot comments:

With Shakespeare, far more than with any other poet in English, the combinations of words offer perpetual novelty; they enlarge the meaning of the individual words joined; thus... 'rooky wood'. In comparison, Milton's images do not give this sense of particularity, nor are the separate words developed in significance. His language is, if one may use the term without disparagement, artificial and conventional.²¹

This is powerful and suggestive criticism. It will be clear that, although Eliot is stressing the way in which Shakespeare alters language ("the combinations of words offer perpetual novelty"), he is basically using, and doing so very persuasively, the principle which Richards called inter inanimation. The key contrasting example he gives from Milton is:

paths of this drear wood
The nodding horror of whose shady brows
Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger.²²

Eliot does not comment on this beyond saying that it is "artificial and conventional", and, as it turned out, subsequent critics found

21. "Milton I", On Poetry and Poets, p.140.

22. *ibid.*, p.140.

it hard to believe that such terms can be used undisparagingly.

Eliot's comparison of Shakespeare with Milton is similar to Richards' comparison of Gray with Blake, or Donne with Dryden, and the resemblance is not co-incidental. One would not quarrel with Eliot's comment on Shakespeare, but he has neglected to notice the complexity of Milton's language. Milton is metaphorically seeing the trees as demon-bandits, and, to show how the metaphor "enlarges the meaning of the individual words joined", one has only to note that "shady" refers to the bandits' hats, pulled over the eyes, as well as to the hanging branches of the trees, and consequently how much, for example, would be lost by changing "brows" to "boughs".

Novelty is prominent in Shakespeare's words, but any difference between them and Milton's words cannot be accounted for in terms of interinanimation or complexity. It is also arguable that the most striking effect that Eliot quotes from Shakespeare is "light thickens", and here the interinanimation is, as in Milton's lines, the consequence of an implied metaphor. The vehicle, only fleetingly present, is possibly soup, and perhaps more specifically the soup that the witches make "thick and slab". At any rate, the enlarging of the meaning is produced by a metaphorical action of the same kind as is exhibited by Milton's lines.

It is important to notice here that Eliot is appealing not only to a criterion of interinanimation but also to one of particularity. The lines from Macbeth, he says, "convey the feeling of being in

a particular place at a particular time".²³ The same criterion is used with regard to some lines from L'Allegro:

While the ploughman near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe,
And every shepherd tells his tale,
Under the hawthorn in the dale.

Eliot comments:

It is not a particular ploughman, milkmaid, and shepherd that Milton sees (as Wordsworth might see them); the sensuous effect of these verses is entirely on the ear, and is joined to the concepts of ploughman, milkmaid, and shepherd.²⁴

Eliot is using the cluster of ideas contained in our initial quotation; complexity of language corresponds with sensory particularity. It is probable, in fact, that Eliot's reaction to these lines of Milton was, "There is no particularity, therefore there is no complexity of language". Be that as it may, Eliot is using a crude form of the doctrine of particularity, and is also, again, ignoring the inter-actions of Milton's words. The effect depends not only upon the sounds of the words but upon the sounds that the words describe, and it is a typically Miltonic effect.

23. "Milton I", On Poetry and Poets, p.140.

24. *ibid.*

The passage fuses together the ideas of work and happiness, and it does so, for example, through the connections of "whets" with "whistles" and "scythe" with "blithe". To some extent this is obviously a connection of sound—the effect, as Eliot notes, is on the ear. But the effect on the ear is in the closest possible cooperation with the meaning of the lines. The whetting of the scythe gathers, by the connections, the feeling of gaiety present in "whistles" and "blithe", and it gives back to them a feeling of business and briskness. By this process of *interinanimation* the feeling of "happy work" is created. As Richards would say, the movement of the metre ("scythe/blithe") is a movement among meanings. Richards derived that way of talking from Coleridge, and it is closely connected with Coleridge's definition of the imagination as that "power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others and by a sort of fusion to force many into one".²⁵ In Milton's lines work and gaiety are fused together and the linguistic complexity is the symptom of this fusion.

The fact that Eliot, besides ignoring *interinanimation* unless it is prominent enough to appear as novelty of meaning, is here using a crude criterion of particularity, is worth dwelling on.

25. Shakespearean Criticism, ed. T.M. Raysor, 1960, ii, 188.

Dr. Johnson's account of Milton's imagination is a convenient framework:

Whatever be his subject he [Milton] never fails to fill the imagination. But his images and descriptions of the scenes or operations of Nature do not seem to be always copied from original form, nor to have the freshness, raciness, and energy of immediate observation.²⁶

This includes Eliot's point but goes beyond it. For Johnson, as we have seen, there were other criteria than concrete particularity.

It was said above that the effect in those lines from L'Allegro was typical of Milton. The point may be supported by a brief examination of some fairly representative lines from Paradise Lost, which confirm the way in which the imaginative modification of images is accompanied by complexity of language:

now glowed the firmament
With living Saphirs: Hesperus that led
The starry Host, rode brightest, till the moon
Rising in clouded Majestie, at length
Apparent Queen unvaild her peerless light,
And o're the dark her silver mantle threw.²⁷

This is a representative example of Milton's "magnificence", which here hinges upon the comparison of the night-sky with a state

26. Lives of the Poets, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, Oxford, 1905, i, 178.

27. Paradise Lost, Bk IV, ll.604-609.

occasion; the stars are the ceremonial soldiery, Hesperus is the chief of the general staff; the moon is the queen. The culmination of the effect is the fine imperious gesture of the queen, casting away her cloak; here the common-place metaphor is made bold and surprising almost to the point of being a conceit. What prevents it from obtruding itself as a conceit is the success with which it is carried off. For instance, the imperiousness of the gesture has a retro-active effect upon "apparent", giving it the implication: "It is obvious from her behaviour that she really is queenly". "Apparent" is also firmly given the sense "becoming visible". The moon's imperiousness relates back to her "clouded Majestie" giving it, especially in connection with the fact that Hesperus "rode brightest", the implication that the queen-moon is a little cross at being outshone. That is a crude way of putting it. It is difficult to find a word which describes that type of haughtiness which is a sort of "cloudedness". The complexity of Milton's language here, as in the lines above from L'Allegro, consists of a full and subtle exploitation of the powers of the individual words.

What makes these lines typical is that they exemplify Johnson's remark; they fill the imagination, rather than give a particular observation of nature. "Glowed" and "living Saphirs" are examples of a recurrent Miltonic effect. "Glowed" scarcely seems to be the "proper" word here, if one were looking for accurate observation; and, it might be asked, how can there be a high

degree of interanimation in a phrase like "living saphirs", when the chief implications of "living" are warmth, vitality and movement, while the chief implications of "saphirs" are hardness, lifelessness, and so on? But Milton, of course, uses this type of oxymoron frequently, and to call it oxymoron is to indicate that there is a conspicuous disparity effect. Some other examples are useful, because they serve to make a further point about Eliot's use of the criterion of concrete particularity and, with it, a criterion of alteration of language.

The "pavement" of heaven "like a sea of jasper shone".²⁸ The relation between "sea" and "jasper", or "sea" and "pavement" is exactly like that between "living" and "saphirs". Satan wings his way "through the pure marble air".²⁹ Raphael's wings are described as "downy gold" or "feathered mail".³⁰ The fruit in Eden is "burnished with golden rind".³¹ In the midst of Eden stands,

the Tree of Life,
High eminent, blooming ambrosial fruit
Of vegetable gold.³²

28. Paradise Lost, Bk III, 1.363.

29. *ibid.*, Bk III, 1.564.

30. *ibid.*, Bk V, 1.282 and 1.284.

31. *ibid.*, Bk IV, 1.249.

32. *ibid.*, Bk IV, 11.218-220.

It is no accident that Dr. Leavis seizes on this last example, claiming that the words exhibit no "fusion".³³ It is, indeed, typical, but Dr. Leavis' remark is, I think, misleading.

What the examples make clear is that Milton, in using this type of effect, is describing not an actual but an imagined world, of which an important feature is that it is not like the real world. To quote Johnson again, "Milton's delight was to sport in the regions of possibility: reality was a scene too narrow for his mind". The important point, for us, is that where a disparity action is so used, it is functional. The clash between the implications of the words is precisely what makes these implications relevant, and there is, in such cases, a high degree of interanimation. As with Ariel's claim that he will "drink the air", which we looked at earlier, these Miltonic effects are an assertion of the existence of the impossible. The idea of a "sea of jasper" is plainly intended to astonish the reader and the astonishment is generated by the disparity between the implications of the two words; the sea is ceaselessly moving, of vast extent and soft so that one sinks in it; jasper is unmoving, small and hard. It is clearly not possible to demonstrate conclusively that there is any difference between any one of these Miltonic effects and disparities of a

33. F.R. Leavis, Revaluation, Tradition and Development in English Poetry, London, 1936, p.50.

merely absurd or unsatisfactory nature. All one can do, after making detailed comments of the kind made above, is to point out that this is the local action of the fundamental Miltonic power to create visionary worlds—worlds imaginatively transformed by feelings of awe; and that this local action involves, through the deliberate disparity-effects, complexity of language.

The further point to be made about Eliot's criticism, arising from this, is that Eliot can, elsewhere, waive the criterion of concrete particularity, but when he does so, he talks in terms of "simplicity" of diction, and is therefore consistent in assuming that where there is no particularity there is no complexity of poetic language. This is apparent in his discussion of Ben Jonson's poetry, which we shall examine;³⁴ but before doing so it is necessary to describe the second of the three distinctive features of Eliot's notion of complexity in poetic language; his fondness for a high degree of "suggestiveness".

V.

It is convenient to begin describing this second feature by quoting Eliot's remark that, in the poetry of Shakespeare, Donne,

34. See below, pp.316-318.

Webster and Tourneur, the "words have often a network of tentacular roots reaching down to the deepest terrors and desires".³⁵ Eliot, so far as I am aware, never goes into this satisfactorily, but the same metaphor of depth occurs in another of his descriptions of Shakespeare's poetry:

The re-creation of word and image which happens fitfully in the poetry of such a poet as Coleridge happens almost incessantly with Shakespeare. Again and again, in his use of a word, he will give a new meaning or extract a latent one; again and again the right imagery saturated while it lay in the depths of Shakespeare's memory, will rise like Anadyomene from the sea.³⁶

It is significant that it is easy to associate this with Eliot's well-known account, in the same book, of the "auditory imagination":

What I call the 'auditory imagination' is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and

35. "Ben Jonson", Selected Essays, p.155.

36. T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry And The Use of Criticism, London, 1933, pp.146-147.

the trite, the current, and the new and surprising,
the most ancient and the most civilised mentality.³⁷

In this passage Eliot is talking not about "images" but about the tied imagery or the direct effects of words, as is shown by his stress on "syllable and rhythm". We shall return to that point in a moment, and first recall how important to Eliot these ideas are. In a much later essay, Eliot quotes Valery:

"I prize the theories of Poe, so profound and so insidiously learned; I believe in the omnipotence of rhythm, and especially in the suggestive phrase."³⁸

Eliot is far from identifying himself with this "credo of a very young man",³⁹ as he calls it, but nonetheless goes on to remark that "within this tradition from Poe to Valery are some of those modern poems which I most admire and enjoy".⁴⁰ One is here reminded of his remark about Baudelaire:

It may be that I am indebted to Baudelaire chiefly for half a dozen lines out of the whole of Fleurs

37. T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry And The Use of Criticism, London, 1933, pp.118-119.

38. "From Poe to Valery", To Criticize the Critic, London, 1965, p.37.

39. *ibid.*

40. *ibid.*, p.42.

du Mal; and that his significance for me is summed up in the lines:

Fourmillante Cité, cité pleine de rêves,
Ou le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant...⁴¹

One is also reminded of the way in which haunting lines from other poets stick in Eliot's mind, of which he himself has given some examples;⁴² or, most obviously, one may note Eliot's own extraordinary power in creating haunting lines himself.⁴³

That Eliot tends, in his use of metaphors of depth, to associate imagery with the direct effects, on the grounds that both are mysterious in their operation, may be confirmed by the way in which he develops the theme with reference to images in his own poetry:

Why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others? The song of one bird, the leap of one fish, at a particular place and time, the scent of one flower, an old woman on a German mountain path, six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at night at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill: such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer. We might just as well ask why, when we

41. "What Dante Means to Me", To Criticize the Critic, pp.126-127.

42. The Use of Poetry And The Use of Criticism, London, 1933, p.147.

43. See below, pp.377-378 for the influence of this on Dr. Leavis.

try to recall visually some period in the past, we find in our memory just the few meagre arbitrarily chosen set of snapshots that we do find there, the faded poor souvenirs of passionate moments.⁴⁴

This is from the same area as the remark about Shakespeare's imagery rising like Anadyomene from the sea, but Eliot is clearly talking about himself rather than about Shakespeare. The relevant lines, from Journey of the Magi, run:

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door asking for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.

Professor Gardner notes that these lines effect a "transformation of this personal memory to give it general symbolic significance",⁴⁵ that the gamblers foreshadow the dicers at the foot of the cross, and that the three trees imply the three crosses on Calvary. Professor Gardner offers no comment on the water-mill, the old white horse or the smell of vegetation, and this may seem to support Eliot's remark that "such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell".⁴⁶

44. The Use of Poetry And The Use of Criticism, London, 1933, p.146.

45. Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot, London, 1949, p.125 footnote.

46. See above, p.311.

It is that element of mysteriousness which makes Eliot talk in the same way about images as he talks about the direct effects; but in doing so he exaggerates beyond all need the element of mystery in imagery. This exaggeration is connected with the mysteriousness which pervades Eliot's account of the way in which the poet's mind works. A poem is, he says,

a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation.⁴⁷

The stress here on the unconsciousness of the process reminds us that this is in turn connected with that aspect of the idea of "objective correlatives" to which Yvor Winters so strongly objected. Eliot says, in his definition of "objective correlatives", that they are the only way in which the poet can express emotion, and he seems also to suggest that they are the nearest the poet can come to understanding his emotions; to use the words quoted above, "they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer". The vividly remembered image is an "objective correlative" for feelings which the poet does not understand.

47. "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Selected Essays, p.21.

In objecting to this notion, Winters points out that Eliot himself later rejects it, without seeming to be aware that he is doing so.⁴⁸ Contrasting Lancelot Andrewes with Donne, and preferring Lancelot Andrewes, Eliot says:

[Donne] is constantly finding an object which shall be adequate to his feelings; Andrewes is wholly absorbed in the object and therefore responds with the adequate emotion.⁴⁹

Andrewes, that is, knows what the actual motive for his emotion is. As Winters notes, Eliot makes the comparison between Andrewes and Donne in 1926, but is still talking in terms of "objective correlatives" in the essay on Tournneur in 1931.⁵⁰ As we have just seen he is still talking in those terms in The Use of Poetry And The Use of Criticism.

Eliot's preoccupation with images which stand for a depth of emotion which cannot be expressed in any other way, and cannot be understood, is clearly of great interest for any general study of Eliot. For our purposes, its significance is that it makes Eliot, in his criticism, attach exaggerated importance to the "haunting" line; and the atmosphere of such lines is one of the key elements in Eliot's notion of "complexity" in poetic language.

48. In Defense of Reason, Denver, 1947, pp.468-469.

49. "Lancelot Andrewes", Selected Essays, p.351.

50. In Defense of Reason, p.468, footnote.

What does "exaggerated importance" mean here? In the first place, it may be explained by referring to Eliot's own words in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism. Talking further of the kind of image which, in Shakespeare's poetry, "rises like Anadyomene from the sea", Eliot adds that it will, in its poetic context, "have its rational use and justification".⁵¹ This is so, and it is what criticism is primarily concerned with. To refer to Eliot's own examples, why the image of the water-mill meant so much to him may be of interest to the biographer or the psychoanalyst, but the critic's concern is with the effect of the image, not with its origin. The critic may find it difficult to describe this effect in abstract terms, but if the effect remains, for the critic, as shrouded in mystery as the origin, then the image can only be regarded as a failure. In fact, the reference to the water-mill, for example, presents no more difficulty than such a detail would present in a narrative section in a novel; it establishes the scene and creates a suitable atmosphere. A description of this atmosphere would involve subtle reference to other parts of the poem, but would not require speculation about the depths of Eliot's unconscious associative processes.

51. The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p.147.

To describe the second, and more important, consequence of Eliot's exaggeration of the importance of the haunting, suggestive line, we return to our earlier point about Ben Jonson.⁵²

It is in the essay on Jonson that Eliot uses the words which we quoted at the beginning of our account of Eliot's preoccupation with suggestiveness; the words of "Shakespeare, and also Donne and Webster and Tourneur (and sometimes Middleton)...have often a network of tentacular roots reaching down to the deepest terrors and desires. Jonson's most certainly have not".⁵³

Eliot is describing the way in which Jonson's poetry is "of the surface" though not "superficial",⁵⁴ and the most prominent positive word in his description is "simple". He quotes from a speech by Sylla's ghost in Catiline:

Dost thou not feel me, Rome? not yet! is night
 So heavy on thee, and my weight so light?
 Can Sylla's ghost arise within thy walls,
 Less threatening than an earthquake, the quick falls
 Of thee and thine? Shake not the frightened heads
 Of thy steep towers, or shrink to their first beds?
 Or as their ruin the large Tyber fills,
 Make that swell up, and drown thy seven proud hills?
 (I.i. 7-8)

52. See above, p.308.

53. "Ben Jonson", Selected Essays, p.155.

54. *ibid.*, p.155.

Of this Eliot says: "it is the careful, precise filling in of a strong and simple outline",⁵⁵ and adds that the "words themselves are mostly simple words, the syntax is natural, the language austere rather than adorned".⁵⁶

The point I wish to stress is that though the poetry is not suggestive, its language is certainly complex. Consider, for instance, the bold condensation of a phrase like "quick falls", or the grotesque metaphor of the towers shaking with fright or pulling the bed-clothes over their heads, or the relations between "swell up" and "proud" in the last line, or the way in which violent upward and downward movements relate and contrast with each other throughout the passage, giving a sickening nightmare atmosphere ("heavy", "light", "arise", "quick falls", "shrink", "ruin", "fills", "swell up", "drown"). The lines, in short, exhibit a high degree of interanimation.

And yet it is perfectly clear what Eliot is driving at, and his essay on Ben Jonson is criticism of the highest quality, so that to insist that the language of these lines is complex rather than simple may seem to be merely a quibble. That it is more than a quibble will be clear when we discuss Eliot's exaggeration of the importance of "suggestiveness" and his corresponding

55. "Ben Jonson", Selected Essays, p.150.

56. *ibid.*, p.151.

misconception of "simplicity" of language, in the context of the notion of a "dissociation of sensibility".⁵⁷ For the moment I will rest with the point that Eliot's ideas of "complexity" and "simplicity" are misleading, in the way we have described.

VI.

So far we have looked at distortion of language and at suggestiveness, as distinctive elements in Eliot's idea of complexity in poetic language, and at his tendency, at important points, to assume that, where these features are absent, complexity must be absent. The third distinctive element is "wit", as defined and discussed in the essay on Marvell, and this element has two separable strands.

The first strand may be illustrated, for instance, by the following observation about the nature of "wit":

it implies a constant inspection and criticism of experience. It involves, probably, a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible.⁵⁸

57. See below, pp.326-331.

58. "Andrew Marvell", Selected Essays, p.303.

elected a perch from which he cannot afford to fall,
and from which he is in danger of slipping:

Food alike those pure
Intelligential substances require
As doth your Rational; and both contain
Within them every lower faculty
Of sense, whereby they hear, see, smell, touch, taste,
Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate,
And corporeal to incorporeal turn.⁶³

This quotation is rather unfair, because Milton is not often in such acute danger as this. The point is more justly made by Dr. Johnson, in his remark that Milton's "confusion of spirit and matter" in his presentation of the angels is particularly noticeable in the narration of the war in heaven, and that this narration is consequently "the favourite of children, and gradually neglected as knowledge is increased". Eliot's phrase, "he is in danger of slipping", in fact, feels a little odd; had he put "occasionally" it would have weakened his point, and had he put "frequently" it would have clearly been an exaggeration.

It may be that the absence of "wit" in Milton is one reason why Eliot assumed that Milton's language is without complexity; we have already noted, in our discussion of Richards, a tendency amongst some modern critics to assume that where there is no complexity of tone, there is no complexity at all. But the more

63. "John Dryden", Selected Essays, p.311. Johnson's remarks are from Lives of the Poets, i, 185.

important point is that there is an ambiguity in the term "wit", which results in a criticism of Milton far more damaging than the mere assertion that he lacks "wit" in the sense in which it is exhibited by Dryden.

Eliot makes the claim that Marvell blends thought with feeling, by adducing Coleridge's remark that the "imagination" reconciles "judgement" with "enthusiasm", and "emotion" with "order", and by comparing Marvell with William Morris, whose poetry is characterized by feeling without thought.⁶⁴

This claim corresponds with Eliot's views on the metaphysical poets in general, as, for example, in the remark that "Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose".⁶⁵ This last capacity is pre-eminent in Donne and his followers, says Eliot, and is eroded by Milton and Dryden: "Each of these men performed certain poetic functions so magnificently well that the magnitude of the effect concealed the absence of others".⁶⁶

At this point, as Dr. Leavis has noted, there is a blur in Eliot's thinking about "wit", but Eliot's case against Milton and Dryden is clear enough in outline; Dryden's poetry has

64. "Andrew Marvell", Selected Essays, pp.298-300.

65. "The Metaphysical Poets", *ibid.*, p.287.

66. *ibid.*, p.288.

insufficient feeling, Milton's insufficient thought. This case involves the idea of a "dissociation of sensibility" and needs to be examined at length. My examination will include points from my account of the various elements in Eliot's notion of complexity in poetic language, and add some further description of his notion of "simplicity".

VII.

Eliot's most elaborate account of simplicity of poetic language occurs in a discussion of Dante. It is claimed that "Dante's attempt is to make us see what he saw. He therefore employs very simple language".⁶⁷ Insofar as visual vividness is related to sensory particularity, this position contradicts that held by Eliot about the language of the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets, since, as we have seen, Eliot there associates particularity with complexity.⁶⁸ The contradiction springs from the inadequacy of his notions of both complexity and simplicity. His notions are, in fact, impressionistic. Up to a point, this does not matter,

67. "Dante", Selected Essays, p.243.

68. See above, p.290.

especially when the impressions are as vivid and sensitive as those of a critic of Eliot's genius. But, in the end, his reliance upon insufficiently worked out impressions leads to confusion.

Having asserted the highly visual quality of Dante, Eliot compares Dante's Italian with the English language:

[English] words have associations, and the groups of words in association have associations, which is a kind of local self-consciousness, because they are the growth of a particular civilisation.⁶⁹

This gives English words "opacity", whereas Dante's words have "lucidity".⁷⁰ Mario Praz has taken issue with this,⁷¹ and, indeed, it seems that what Eliot attributes to English must be a fundamental feature of any language, and that Eliot's impression of Dante's "lucidity" is the consequence of his knowing Italian far less well than he knows English.

It would be presumptuous of me to pretend to any analysis of Dante, but a brief comment on a Dante-esque passage in Eliot's own poetry can, I think, serve as an adequate substitute. Eliot comments on this passage in "What Dante Means to Me", refers to

69. "Dante", Selected Essays, p.240.

70. *ibid.*, p.239.

71. "T.S. Eliot and Dante", T.S. Eliot: A Selected Critique, ed. L. Unger, New York, 1966, pp.306-307.

"this very bare and austere style", to the "simple words and simple phrases", and notes that the language is "very direct".⁷² As Eliot did far more work on this passage than anyone will ever do, and as he had genius to boot, it seems impertinent to question his judgement, but it seems very unlikely that words like "simple" and "direct" would naturally spring to the mind of a reader asked to comment on it. The first line contains a deliberate ambiguity; the second and third deliberate paradoxes; the fourth and fifth a metaphor of "metaphysical" surprisingness; the sixth a simile of striking boldness; and so one could go on:

In the uncertain hour before the morning
 Near the ending of interminable night
 At the recurrent end of the unending
 After the dark dove with the flickering tongue
 Had passed below the horizon of his homing
 While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin
 Over the asphalt where no other sound was
 Between three districts whence the smoke arose
 I met one walking, loitering and hurried....⁷³

The lines would, in fact, offer a good opportunity for a Richards to display the intense "activity" of poetry; as, for instance, in the complex inter-action between tenor (a departing bomber) and

72. To Criticize the Critic, p.129.

73. "Little Gidding", ll.73-86.

vehicle in,

After the dark dove with the flickering tongue
Had passed below the horizon of his homing.

The reader has to search among the possibilities, and his search, being successful, is the re-creation of what the lines are about.

In claiming that Dante is "simple", Eliot also uses, for purposes of contrast, some lines from Antony and Cleopatra:

she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.⁷⁴

This, I think, is a loaded example, because it is highly complex, even for Shakespeare, but it is, in any case, not difficult to pick lines from Eliot's own Dante-esque passage, which approach it:

First, the cold friction of expiring sense⁷⁵

or,

The bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit.⁷⁶

It is probable that one of the reasons why Eliot liked to use the word "simple" of this sort of writing, is connected with that feature of his later poetry which caused Dr. Leavis to remark,

74. "Dante", Selected Essays, p.244.

75. "Little Gidding", l.131.

76. *ibid.*, l.133

"Eliot's poetic technique is a technique for sincerity".⁷⁷ There is no indulgence in spectacular effects or "brilliant" ironies; or, to use the terms by which we have described Eliot's notion of complexity, there are no mysteriously haunting images, no daring distortions of language, and no "witty" stances. However, though it lacks such things, it is not "simple", but highly complex.

VIII.

It is in the idea of a "dissociation of sensibility" that Eliot's unsatisfactory notions of simplicity and complexity are most damaging. The two key poets here are Dryden and Milton. We will deal first with Dryden.

The idea of a "dissociation of sensibility" is that the ability to fuse thought with feeling in poetry, conspicuous in "the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury" has disappeared from English poetry. In Eliot's view Dryden and Milton were instrumental in hastening the disappearance.⁷⁸

77. F.R. Leavis, English Literature in Our Time and The University, London, 1969, p.120.

78. "The Metaphysical Poets", Selected Essays, pp.287-288.

The way in which Dryden's role is discussed may most conveniently be recalled by quoting Eliot's comparison of him with Swinburne; Dryden, Eliot says,

bears a curious antithetical resemblance to Swinburne. Swinburne was also a master of words, but Swinburne's words are all suggestions and no denotation; if they suggest nothing, it is because they suggest too much. Dryden's words, on the other hand, are precise, they state immensely, but their suggestiveness is often nothing.⁷⁹

This relates very directly to Eliot's comparison of Marvell with William Morris; Morris, like Swinburne, is all suggestion, whereas Marvell is both precise and suggestive, and fuses thought with feeling.⁸⁰ After some very fine comments on Dryden, Eliot remarks:

The question, which has certainly been waiting, may justly be asked: whether, without this which Dryden lacks [i.e. suggestiveness], verse can be poetry?⁸¹

Eliot then notes the impossibility of giving a definition of "poetry", quotes from Dryden's elegy on Oldham, and says:

From the perfection of such an elegy we cannot detract; the lack of suggestiveness is

79. "John Dryden", Selected Essays, pp.314-315.

80. "Andrew Marvell", *ibid.*, pp.299-300.

81. "John Dryden", *ibid.*, p.315.

compensated by the satisfying completeness of the statement.⁸²

In spite of all his insight, Eliot is, in the end, adopting the "romantic" attitude to Dryden; the bent of his argument is towards the view that Dryden thinks powerfully, but feels insufficiently. But, in fact, the excellence of his account of Dryden is that it points to the triviality of the criterion of "suggestiveness", exposes the falsity of equating "suggestiveness" with "feeling", and gives the essential hint about the complexity of Dryden's language.

For instance, Eliot quotes the famous lines on Shaftesbury (Achitophel):

A fiery soul, which working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy body to decay:
And o'er informed the tenement of clay,

and comments: "These lines are not merely a magnificent tribute. They create the object which they contemplate".⁸³ This is so, and in creating the object they go beyond anything that might be implied by the idea of "statement". The creativeness, further, involves complexity of language. This is most obvious in the multiple exploitation of "fretted". The M.E.D. gives three

82. "John Dryden", Selected Essays, p.316.

83. *ibid.*, pp.310-311.

strands of meaning, all of which are here relevant. I. "Of slow and gradual destructive action...as of corrosives": II. "To distress oneself with constant regret or discontent; to chafe, worry. Often with additional notion of querulous utterances": III. "To move in agitation or turmoil". These meanings interact with "working out", which is also complex. First, "leaving the body which has been destroyed by the corrosive fretting"; second, "plotting its political course, which involves a lot of worry". But "working out" has also the kind of meaning which appears in such phrases as "working out his apprenticeship"; Shaftesbury is completing an allotted task, so there is a suggestion that he is, in the end, merely working out his allotted destiny.

This analysis is useful because it indicates the way in which a large number of feelings enter into the creative effect; by "feelings" is meant all the implications or connotations which the meanings involve. In a real sense the lines suggest immensely, though their suggestiveness is not of the kind that one associates with Swinburne.

That the quality of hauntingness, or suggestiveness (in Eliot's sense) upon which the idea of a "dissociation of sensibility" so much depends, is a trivial criterion, is also apparent in Eliot's essay on Blake, another of his best performances as a critic. Eliot says memorably, of Blake

because he was not distracted, or frightened, or occupied in anything but exact statements, he

understood. He was naked, and saw men naked,
from the centre of his own crystal.⁸⁴

This feature of Blake is illustrated by:

Love seeketh only self to please,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.⁸⁵

Eliot is here talking about Blake in the way that he talks about Dryden; they both excel at "exact statements". It is unlikely that Eliot wished to suggest that Blake and Dryden have anything in common, of course, but he is, in any case, making an essential point. The point is that to which I drew attention in my discussion of Richards' comparison of Blake with Gray.⁸⁶ Whatever be the difference between Blake and the "neo-classical" poets, it cannot be convincingly demonstrated as differing degrees of complexity in the use of language.

Eliot's impression of Blake here records itself in language similar to that in which he recorded his impression of Dryden. In one sense, he is mistaken in both cases; the language of Blake is as complex as that of Dryden, and the phrase "exact statements" is

84. "William Blake", Selected Essays, p.319.

85. *ibid.*, p.320.

86. See above, pp.118-123.

consequently misleading. But it is hard to see anything intrinsically objectionable in this collocation of the two poets, insofar as poetic language is concerned. Had Richards, for instance, taken the above stanza by Blake for comparison with some representative lines by an Augustan poet, he would have found it impossible to even embark on an attempt to distinguish them in terms of different kinds of complexity. In Eliot's case what is here demonstrated, as was noted above, is the unimportance of "suggestiveness".

IX.

About Milton, the other key poet in the disappearance of a unified sensibility, I have already made my basic contention; his poetry responds to analysis in the same way as does Dryden's, or Donne's, or Shakespeare's. It is creative, and reveals to a high degree the complexity which Coleridge attributes to "imaginative" poetry.⁸⁷ But some further remarks about Eliot on Milton are in place, since they illustrate some other features of Eliot's views on poetic language.

87. See above, pp.299-308.

The essential case against Milton is implied in the term "magniloquence".⁸⁸ In his critique of Milton, Eliot remarked that he found it necessary to read Milton twice - once for the sound and once for the sense. The swell of the Miltonic music distracted Eliot from the meaning of the words, and closer inspection revealed that it had already distracted Milton himself in the same way.⁸⁹ "Magniloquence" involves insensitivity to subtlety of sense, hence Milton is the opposite of Dryden, whose poetry exhibits precision of statement. To illustrate the point, Eliot quotes a typically long sentence from Paradise Lost and says, "the complication is dictated by a demand of verbal music, instead of by any demand of sense".⁹⁰ Eliot's view is summarized in the remark that in Milton there is a "hypertrophy of the auditory imagination at the expense of the visual and tactile".⁹¹

We have already illustrated the fact that Milton's language is complex, and the chief question here is what Eliot meant by "verbal music". An investigation of it throws light on Eliot's second Milton essay, which Dr. Leavis thinks was merely the result of a

88. See, for example, Selected Essays, p.301.

89. "Milton I", On Poetry and Poets, pp.142-143.

90. *ibid.*, p.141.

91. *ibid.*, p.143.

loss of nerve on Eliot's part.⁹² It seems more likely, in fact, that it represents a failure of critical rather than of general principles.

Eliot has two distinct ideas about "music" in poetry, and we will describe them in turn.

The most clear formulation of the first indicates its resemblance to that offered by Richards in Coleridge on Imagination.⁹³ In "The Music of Poetry" Eliot insists that "the music of poetry is not something that exists apart from the meaning",⁹⁴ and goes on to say:

My purpose here is to insist that a 'musical poem' is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one.⁹⁵

Alongside this one may set Richards' remark:

The perceived relations between temporal parts of an utterance, which seem to the ear to constitute good metre, derive from relations between parts of its meaning.⁹⁶

92. See, for example, English Literature in Our Time and The University, p.138.

93. See above, pp.95-97.

94. On Poetry and Poets, p.29.

95. *ibid.*, p.33.

96. Coleridge on Imagination, London, 1934, p.120.

For Richards, that is, metre heightens the process of inter-
 inanimation. Another quotation from Eliot makes the resemblance
 more clear:

The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of
 intersection: it arises from its relation first to the
 words immediately preceding and following it, and
 indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from
 another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that
 context to all the other meanings which it has had in
 other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of
 association.⁹⁷

It may well be that Eliot is at this point specifically indebted to
 Richards, because there is some reason to believe that he is not
 really in command of the implications of this view. This is clear
 in the same essay, when he says, discussing successive poetic schools,
 "when we reach a point at which the poetic idiom can be stabilized,
 then a period of musical elaboration can follow".⁹⁸ If one really
 accepts the theory of meaning assumed by Richards' account of music,
 then to talk of a "poetic idiom" being "stabilized" is impossible,
 since the powers exerted by a word in one context will be different
 from those it exerts in any other context. It may also be noted
 that, if one accepts Richards' definition of music in poetry, and

97. On Poetry and Poets, pp.32-33.

98. *ibid.*, p.38.

Eliot's account of Milton's language, then Milton cannot be "musical". Music involves complexity of meaning, and Milton's language, according to Eliot, is not complex.

When Eliot talks of Milton's music he is, in fact, appealing to an idea different from that of Richards. This idea appears, for instance, when Eliot notes the importance of "definiteness" as a condition for successful "music" in the diction of Pound.⁹⁹

Eliot here makes this observation:

Words are perhaps the hardest of all material of art:
for they must be used to express both visual beauty
and beauty of sound, as well as communicating a
grammatical statement.¹⁰⁰

This implies a separation of music and meaning, and the point is made explicitly in a comparison of Swinburne with Campion. Eliot quotes Campion's lines;

Shall I come, if I swim? wide are the waves, you see;
Shall I come, if I fly, my dear Love to thee?

and comments:

It is an arrangement and choice of words which has a sound-value and at the same time a coherent comprehensible meaning, and the two things - the musical value and

99. "Ezra Pound : His Metric And Poetry", To Criticize the Critic, p.170.

100. *ibid.*, p.171.

meaning— are two things, not one.¹⁰¹

Campion's special relation with music is not here regarded as making him an unusual case, and Eliot, on the same page, makes the same point about some lines by Shelley, which are said to be like Campion's in that they have "a beauty of music and a beauty of content".¹⁰²

This idea, evidently, is directly opposed to that expounded in "The Music of Poetry", where the patterns of music and meaning are said to be "indissoluble and one".¹⁰³ Further, it is not a very far step from the comment on Campion to the critique of Milton's "magniloquence":

To extract everything possible from Paradise Lost, it would seem necessary to read it in two different ways, first solely for the sound, and second for the sense.¹⁰⁴

Consequently, it is no surprise that Eliot, in his second Milton essay, and wishing to praise Milton, says that Milton can teach the modern poet that "the music of verse is strongest in poetry which has a definite meaning expressed in the properest words".¹⁰⁵ The

101. "Swinburne As Poet", Selected Essays, pp.324-5.

102. *ibid.*, p.325.

103. See above, p.333.

104. "Milton I", On Poetry and Poets, p.143.

105. "Milton II", On Poetry and Poets, p.160.

word "definite" here is pointing in the same direction as the remarks on Pound, Campion and Shelley and is also, it may be suggested, hinting at a rejection of Richards' sort of theory, which sees "music" as necessarily connected with complexity of meaning, rather than with "definiteness".

There is, essentially, little difference between Eliot's critique of Milton and his "recantation". In the "recantation" it is still noted that Milton lacks "particularity",¹⁰⁶ and, as we have said, there is little change in the account of Milton's "music", except that what is now called "music" was previously dismissed as "magniloquence".

The important point is that neither the critique nor the recantation gives any indication of the complexity of Milton's poetry, nor, consequently, any indication of what the Miltonic "music" is doing. In fact, as has always been said, his music is "sublime" and is in the closest relation with his imaginative power, so that the music and the meaning are perfectly consonant. In Eliot's second essay on Milton, the Miltonic "music" seems to be felt merely as an abstract pattern of sound, beautiful for its own sake.

Eliot nowhere shows any interest in the "sublime", and, evidently, it is harder to imagine a mode more alien from his

106. "Milton II", On Poetry and Poets, p.156.

own poetry. Here, probably, is the root of his lack of sympathy for Milton, in much the same way as Johnson's critique of Donne springs from his lack of sympathy with Donne's subject matter.¹⁰⁷ Further, just as Johnson's antipathy was confirmed by his use of eighteenth century literary principles, so is Eliot's by certain features in his notion of complexity. Milton is not "witty", he does not cultivate the hauntingly suggestive line, and he does not dislocate language in the way that some Elizabethan poets do. It is not, consequently, surprising that Eliot fails to point out the ways in which Milton's language is complex.

X.

In my account of Eliot's views on poetic language, I have concentrated on the distinctive elements, and, more particularly, on the points at which those distinctive elements are of dubious value. This may seem rather like giving an account of Dr. Johnson by referring only to his views on "metaphysical" poetry. I should, therefore, stress again the importance of that valuable core in Eliot's criticism, and especially in his early criticism, which was described at the beginning of my account.

107. See above, pp.230-231.

That valuable core was present in the form of suggestive hints, rather than of consistent exposition. Its value, and the difficulties that lie in the way of extracting it, are recorded in Dr. Leavis' account of Eliot's criticism.¹⁰⁸ Dr. Leavis, as he continued over the years to read and re-read Eliot found much, in the early criticism, to ponder upon and learn from. He also found much to reject, and, in Eliot's later criticism, a distinct falling off.

That is an account from which it is difficult to dissent, but it may be suggested that the falling off was due not to a lapse of integrity on Eliot's part, but to the fact that his criticism had always been impressionistic. It is, certainly, not possible to trace in Eliot's work the coherent and consistent appeal to fully grasped critical principles that one finds in Dr. Leavis' own work.

As far as our own particular interests are concerned, Eliot's failure to extract principles from his impressions, is reflected in the fact that there is very little analysis in his criticism. It is, in fact, somewhat puzzling that he should have

108. English Literature In Our Time And The University, London, 1969, pp.70-80.

acquired such a reputation for analysis. Eliot's unwillingness to test his notions by sustained and detailed analysis is the factor which allows free play to the distinctive features, or biases, in his idea of complexity.

It is apparent that these biases (in favour of wit, suggestiveness and distortion of language) correspond with important features in modern poetic taste, though an illustration of this is beyond the scope of my enquiry. Perhaps what most needs insisting upon is that in Eliot's criticism, as in the criticism of other innovators, such as Dryden and Wordsworth, the biases are less important than the core of true insight. It would be unfortunate were Eliot eventually to be treated in the same way as Dr. Johnson, and his biases presented as a full account of his criticism.

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109. See above, p.186.

CHAPTER 9

THE IDEA OF COMPLEXITY IN THE CRITICISM OF F.R. LEAVIS

I.

My account of Dr. Leavis will follow the same pattern as my account of Eliot; I will describe first the common ground between Dr. Leavis and Richards and then the distinctive features of Dr. Leavis' views on poetic language. Since, again, I shall be concentrating on what I think are doubtful points in Dr. Leavis' work, I should stress that he is, in my opinion, the best of the modern English critics, because he keeps to the central road of criticism, responding as a full human being to literature seen as full human utterance, and because his power to respond has shown itself over a very wide area of English literature. Further, he has shown great consistency in the application of sound literary principles, without allowing theory to outweigh his strength and delicacy of response to actual works. In all of this he resembles Dr. Johnson, though this is not, of course, to claim that his literary genius is comparable with Johnson's.

To take first the common ground with Richards, we may say immediately that Dr. Leavis' key critical terms are "complexity", "realisation", and "self-realisation". The poet, by a complex use of language, enables us to grasp fully, or realise, whatever it is that he is talking about, and the grasping involves

awareness or self-realisation. The process is sometimes described in Coleridgean terms by Dr. Leavis, as a fusion of thought with feeling; the reader has the experience and knows what it is. These ideas result in a view like that of Richards' theory of "pseudo-statement". For Dr. Leavis the "truth" of poetry is a question of degree of realisation.

It is not necessary to illustrate these ideas at great length, since they will be familiar to any reader of Dr. Leavis' work, but a few quotations may be adduced as reminders. With regard to complexity, Dr. Leavis says, in a Scrutiny article: "What we are concerned with in analysis are always matters of complex verbal organisation".¹ The relation between this and realisation is exemplified in the following comment on James Joyce:

There is prose in Ulysses, the description, for instance, of Stephen Dedalus walking over the beach, of a Shakespearean concreteness; the rich complexity it offers to analysis derives from the intensely imagined experience realized in the words.²

The relation, in turn, between that and self-realisation is exemplified in the following remark:

[the poet's] capacity for experiencing and his power of communicating are indistinguishable; not merely because we should

1. "Imagery and Movement", Scrutiny, xiii (1945-46), 119.

2. "Joyce and 'The Revolution of the Word'", Scrutiny, ii (1933-34), 194.

not know of the one without the other, but because his power of making words express what he feels is indistinguishable from his awareness of what he feels.³

The essence of poetry for Dr. Leavis, as for Warburton or Coleridge, self-knowledge. The idea of self-realisation should be further illustrated with reference to specific poets:

The activity of the thinking mind, the energy of intelligence, involved in the Metaphysical habit means that, when the poet has urgent personal experience to deal with it is attended to and contemplated - which in turn means some kind of separation, or distinction, between experiencer and experience. 'Their attempts were always analytic' - to analyse your experience you must, while keeping it alive and immediately present as experience, treat it in some sense as an object.⁴

This may be put simply in terms of "sincerity", as in Dr. Leavis' comment on Ash Wednesday:

it is impossible not to see in it a process of self-scrutiny, of self-exploration; or not to feel that the poetical problem at any point was a spiritual problem, a problem in the attainment of a difficult sincerity.⁵

3. New Bearings in English Poetry, London, 1959, p.13.

4. "'Thought' and Emotional Quality", Scrutiny, xiii (1945-46), 61.

5. New Bearings in English Poetry, pp.117-118.

These inter-related ideas of complexity, realisation and self-realisation will be further illustrated when we discuss the distinctive features of Dr. Leavis' thinking, so we may rest for the moment with that brief preliminary outline.⁶

II.

A more detailed probing of the basic ideas, as they appear in Dr. Leavis' work, is afforded by his **view** of poetry as pseudo-statement; to put it in that way is justifiable even though he does not use the word "pseudo-statement" or present an explicit theory. Dr. Leavis' way of putting it is to say that poetry is "enactment" as opposed to "statement". We have already seen examples of this line of thought, in our discussion of Dr. Johnson's Shakespeare criticism,⁷ so we will now concentrate, without further illustration, on a point at which the ideas appear in a rather interesting and provocative way.

The case is Dr. Leavis' discussion of Lawrence's St. Mawr,⁸

6. For an account of Richards' concepts of "pseudo-statement", "complexity", "realisation" and "self-realisation", see above, pp.29-31 and pp.90-94.

7. See above, p.246.

8. F.R. Leavis, D.H. Lawrence, Novelist, London, 1955, pp.225-245.

with which Professor Buckley has registered disagreement;⁹ this disagreement offers an opportunity to make some necessary points.

Dr. Leavis' argument about St. Mawr runs as follows. He begins, if the metaphor is permissible, from the "surface", the words on the page:

Lawrence writes out of the full living language with a flexibility and a creative freedom for which I can think of no parallel in modern times.¹⁰

The power of the language is, Dr. Leavis claims, a realizing power which presents its subject fully; it gives us the "potent actuality of Mrs Witt"; ensures that the mountains (the setting of the close of the story) are "marvellously evoked"; and gives us the horse, St. Mawr, "by a wealth of poetic and dramatic means".¹¹ Dr. Leavis offers no detailed analysis of this, and restricts himself largely to general comments on the complexity of tone. He quotes, for instance, a conversation between the heroine and her mother and says:

These exchanges, intimately tête-a-tête, between Lou and her mother are marvellous in their range and suppleness, their harmonic richness, and the sureness

9. V. Buckley, Poetry and Morality, London, 1959, pp.210-212.

10. D.H. Lawrence, Novelist, p.226.

11. *ibid.*, p.235, p.244, and p.231.

of their inflexion, which, since the surface, belonging to the conversational everyday world, is always kept in touch with the depths, can blend in one utterance the hard-boiled sardonic with the poignant.¹²

The subtly conveyed tones of the dialogue set before us not stereotypes, but people who seem to live. That Dr. Leavis offers no close analysis is an interesting point, which will be commented upon later.

Implicit in this realisation are moral judgements, which are not stated but enacted. The most interesting example of this, is the enactment of the positive values by which the various characters are dramatically "placed". These values may be pointed to in some such phrase as "integrity of being", or "sincerity", in the sense in which it appears in Richards' utilisation of Confucianism.¹³ Of these values the whole story itself is the enactment. The heroine, for example, wants a man with such integrity, and Dr. Leavis comments:

The kind of intelligence, 'burning like a flame fed straight from underneath', that Lou postulates - the intelligence of a full thinking man who, more than merely intuitive, can sit the stallion as Lewis does - doesn't prove its possibility by being presented

12. D.H. Lawrence, Novelist, p.237.

13. See above, pp.80-82.

in any character: Lou, at the close, has little hope of meeting the man she would care to mate with. But it is, nevertheless, irresistibly present in St. Mawr the dramatic poem; it is no mere abstract postulate. It is present as the marvellous creative intelligence of the author.¹⁴

A further quotation, along the same lines, is useful, because it serves fully to clarify the issues involved:

The power of the affirmation lies, not in any insistence or assertion or argument, but in the creative fact, his art; it is that which bears irrefutable witness. What his art does is beyond argument or doubt. It is not a question of metaphysics or theology - though no doubt there are questions presented for the metaphysician and the theologian. Great art, something created and there, is what Lawrence gives us. And there we undeniably have a world of wonder and reverence, where life wells up from mysterious springs. It is no merely imagined world; what the creative imagination of the artist makes us contemplate bears an unanswerable testimony.¹⁵

It will be seen that Dr. Lewis' path from the surface of the work to this final position is very direct; poetic realisation is testimony of spiritual health. The train of thought is, in important respects, like that pursued by Richards in Coleridge

14. D.H. Lawrence, Novelist, p.234.

15. ibid., p.235.

on Imagination; the poet gives us the "fact of mind", which may be translated into doctrines, of various kinds, and these doctrines are open to doubt, argument, questioning, disagreement, and so on.¹⁶ The "fact of mind", realised by the poet's complex use of language, is not open to questioning of that kind, and the only relevant question is, "Is it realised?" That question is evidently important. It may be just as difficult to answer as any question raised in theology or metaphysics, and it will be discussed later. For the moment we may fairly summarize Dr. Leavis' argument as follows: the central value of St. Mawr is realised with such power that it has the irresistible immediacy of fact.

The assertion that realisation is rectitude, if one may so put it, seems a bold view, and it is this assertion with which Professor Buckley disagrees.¹⁷ However, if one accepts what may be called the Coleridgean definition of the "imagination", the assertion, so far from being bold, is included in the definition.

Coleridge, at the beginning of his description of the "imagination", says:

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination

16. See above, p.106.

17. Poetry and Morality, p.211.

of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity.¹⁸

Imaginative language, as defined by Coleridge, is witness to the presence of imagination; imagination is essentially defined in terms of spiritual health; hence realisation is rectitude. With regard to the moral element, Coleridge's definition is like Richards' definition of value in Principles of Literary Criticism, which says that the highest value is attained by an organisation of impulses in which the less important are arranged so as not to interfere with the more important. It also resembles that harmony of being which Richards later tried to describe by using some Confucian passages.¹⁹

How the Coleridgean definition of imagination relates to Dr. Leavis' discussion of St. Mawr may be indicated by a remark from Richards' commentary on Coleridge:

The extracted abstract doctrine (if we arrive at any such) is a skeleton of the living knowledge [given by the poem], deformed and schematized for the legitimate purposes of comparison (as well as for the irrelevant purposes of argument). In the poem [the ideas]...are autonomous, sanctioned by their acceptability to the whole being of the reader. Out of the poem, they

18. Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross, Oxford, 1954, ii, 12.

19. See above, p.35, and pp.80-82.

are doctrine merely, and a temptation to dispute.²⁰

Dr. Leavis' "unanswerable testimony" corresponds with Richards' "acceptability to the whole being of the reader", and his "questions presented for the metaphysician and theologian" correspond with Richards' "extracted abstract doctrine".

The Coleridgean basis of Dr. Leavis' views on poetic language may be conveniently recalled by his remark on Coleridge's distinction between fancy and imagination:

[it] is a way of calling attention to the organic complexities of verbal life, metaphorical and other, in which Imagination manifests itself locally.²¹

The moral element in the definition of imagination implies that the language of poetry has an inescapably evaluative function. This point is made, and accepted, by Dr. Leavis, in his essay "Literary Criticism and Philosophy", in the remark that words in poetry "realize a complex experience...[and] a certain valuing is implicit in the realizing".²² That words in poetry have an evaluative function follows from their possession of elements of tone and feeling, for whenever tone and feeling are present the question of their appropriateness must always arise.

20. I.A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, London, 1950, p.211.

21. "Coleridge in Criticism", Scrutiny, ix (1940-41), 63.

22. F.R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit, London, 1952, pp.212-213.

As Richards emphasizes, Coleridge's definition of the imagination contains the idea of "impersonality", which Coleridge describes as the appeal of imaginative poetry to the "all in each of human nature".²³ The idea of "impersonality" occupies a similar place in Dr. Leavis' thinking, and it is fully illustrated in Professor Buckley's chapter, "F.R. Leavis : Impersonality and Values".²⁴ The way in which Dr. Leavis uses the term may be recalled by his remark that in Lawrence's fictional presentation, in The Rainbow, of a child-parent relation similar to that between himself and his mother, "the experience is wholly impersonalized (and, in being impersonalized, extended)".²⁵

The importance of the idea of "impersonality", here, serves as a reminder that the high claims for the poet made by Coleridge and Dr. Leavis are not, of course, new-fangled. In Dr. Johnson's Rasselas, Imlac says of the poet:

He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and

23. Biographia Literaria, ii, 64. Cf. Coleridge on Imagination, p.97.

24. Poetry and Morality, pp.184-213.

25. D.H. Lawrence, Novelist, p.131.

and transcendent truths which will always be the same.... He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superiour to time and place.²⁶

Imlac is described here as feeling the "enthusiastic fit" upon him, but the joke is against the enthusiasm and not against the ideal. It is in the light of the same ideal that Johnson himself gives Shakespeare a supreme place. This perennial claim for poetry arises from the acute sense of "there-ness" felt by the reader, who seems to be in the presence of experiences undistorted by the poet's personality or time. To pursue further the foregoing ideas with reference to Dr. Leavis' discussion of St. Mawr, I will consider briefly one of his quotations from the story. Lou sees the stallion for the first time:

The wild, brilliant, alert head of St. Mawr seemed to look at her out of another world. It was as if she had had a vision, as if the walls of her own world had suddenly melted away, leaving her in a great darkness, in the midst of which the large, brilliant eyes of that horse looked at her with demonish question, while his naked ears stood up like daggers from the naked lines of his inhuman head, and his great body glowed red with power.

26. Rasselas (Chapter X), Works, 1825, vi, 186-187.

What was it? Almost like a god looking at her terribly out of the everlasting dark, she had felt the eyes of that horse; great, glowing, fearsome eyes, arched with a question, and containing a white blade of light like a thread. What was his non-human question, and his uncanny threat? She didn't know.²⁷

Dr. Leavis says that this is not "an indulgence of the imagination or fancy that cannot, by the mature, be credited with any real significance or taken seriously".²⁸ The woman's vision of the horse is "realised", and it is also, as the story and Dr. Leavis' further commentary make clear, Lawrence's own vision, with the addition that Lawrence does know what St. Mawr's question is.²⁹

If we look even cursorily at the passage we see that there is a process of valuing involved in the presentation. It is not a picture which we first absorb and then judge. The opening predominantly carries a feeling of approval and admiration, as do phrases like "the large, brilliant eyes". But the resemblance of the ears to "daggers", the "inhuman head", and the eyes "arched with a question" and containing a "white blade of light", carry feelings of fear. In an account of St. Mawr analysis would go

27. D.H. Lawrence, Novelist, p.229.

28. *ibid.*

29. *ibid.*, p.230.

into more detail, but those few points are sufficient to show the inevitably evaluative function of the language.

Consequently, any adverse moral judgement of a work must be translatable into a literary judgement. Indeed, to put it in that way is to falsify, because the moral judgement and the literary judgement are inseparable. By "literary judgement", here, is meant the kind of judgement that is connected with the idea of "realisation". For example, of the above passage, the critic who finds Lawrence unsatisfactory will say: "the tone and feeling here indicate that the horse and its significance for Lou, and for Lawrence, are intended to be of great importance. I myself cannot attach that degree of importance to these things, and I therefore judge the tone and feeling to be inappropriate". In Coleridgean terms it would be said that the faculties of the soul are not here subordinated to each other according to their relative worth and dignity.³⁰

I believe, therefore, that Professor Buckley's disagreement with Dr. Leavis is ill-founded; but I will outline it briefly since it may be said to be typical.

Professor Buckley's central argument is that literature cannot be its own sanction; we should test literary works as follows:

not only be referring them to our own personal 'sense of health', but by referring them, as well, to

30. See above, p.111.

whatever institutions or bodies of belief from which that sense is partly derived, and by which, too, it is tested.³¹

This sounds just a little like reading a poem and then going to ask a priest what one ought to think about it. However, the chief point is that Professor Buckley seems to have an odd idea of what Dr. Leavis means in claiming that St. Mawr is its own sanction. In fact, Dr. Leavis' whole point is that St. Mawr is "unanswerable" precisely because of the response it elicits from our deepest self, and that deepest self includes our "sense of health" and the beliefs involved in that "sense". Dr. Leavis is claiming that St. Mawr exhibits that transcendence which Imlac attributes to great poetry.

Professor Buckley appears to be disagreeing with Dr. Leavis' theory but he is, in fact, merely disagreeing with Dr. Leavis' estimate of St. Mawr, and he only appears to himself not to be doing so because he uses the word "great" in a different sense from Dr. Leavis. Professor Buckley's position is this: "While finding Lawrence a great artist, I find much of his work hateful in some of its tendencies".³² Exactly what this means is not explained, but, Professor Buckley's argument being what it is, it can only mean that he finds Lawrence "great" and "hateful" simultaneously. For

31. Poetry and Morality, p.233.

32. ibid., p.211.

Dr. Leavis, who is adopting a Coleridgean view of the function of imagination, this is merely a self-contradiction.

There is, of course, a sense in which we can call an artist "great" but "hateful". In one form or another this is a common type of literary judgement. Dr. Leavis himself makes that type of judgement about Milton or Shelley, but "great" in that sense means something different from what it means when Dr. Leavis applies it to St. Mawr. Further, Dr. Leavis attempts, in the case of Milton and Shelley, to also make a literary judgement, whatever we may think of his success, or lack of it, in doing so.

Granted the Coleridgean definition, there can be no theoretical objection to Dr. Leavis' discussion of St. Mawr, but even if we grant it, there are obvious and important difficulties. In the first place, Coleridge is, like Imlac, describing the imagination in "ideal perfection", and when we descend, as we must, to discussing poetry written by mere mortals we shall find less than perfect harmony of soul. In the second place, we are far from any state of perfection in our methods of analysing poetic language. Consequently, the question as to whether or not a given work is "realised", or "imaginative" (in Coleridge's sense) is one that can elicit no easy or certain answers.

In the case of St. Mawr the second of those difficulties is particularly prominent, because it is a prose work, and so lacks the local concentration which makes the language of poetry more responsive to analysis. The point can be conveniently

illustrated by referring to another description of a horse, highly admired by Coleridge, but not commented on in detail by him, because he thought it rather too "strong" for a public lecture.³³ Adonis' horse, in Venus and Adonis, sees a "breeding jennet":

Imperiously he leaps, he neighs, he bounds,
And now his woven girths he breaks asunder;
The bearing earth with his hard hoof he wounds,
Whose hollow womb resounds like heaven's thunder;
The iron bit he crusheth 'tween his teeth,
Controlling what he was controlled with.³⁴

To recall this is to see that when Dr. Leavis says that Lawrence, "invoking the essential resources of poetic expression, can hazard the most intense emotional and imaginative heightening" is pressing a little too hard. It is not merely that prose cannot encompass the rhythmic effects of poetry, so powerful in the lines above, but also that it cannot, I think, achieve quite the direct concentration here shown in words like "bearing", "wound" and "hollow womb". That may be the reason why Dr. Leavis offers, in fact, no detailed analysis in his account of St. Mawr.

The first of the difficulties (that actual writers do not attain "ideal perfection") is also prominent. Professor Buckley,

33. Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, ed. T.M. Raysor, Everyman, 1960, i, 191.

34. Venus and Adonis, ll.265-270.

considering Dr. Leavis' assertion that St. Mawr "bears an unanswerable testimony" says, "Leavis can say this here with such conviction only because he so obviously assents to Lawrence's attitudes".³⁵ This is an easy remark and Professor Buckley does not say how it is obvious, any more than he says why he finds Lawrence "hateful", but it is obviously true that there will always be room for error in such matters. A conviction that a work is of the highest imaginative power may turn out to be a delusion. In this case the difficulty is prominent because Lawrence is a recent and in some respects a controversial writer. To say, as Dr. Johnson used to say, that time plays an essential part in the settling of judgements of literary merit, is not to assume some mysterious and automatic process, but to see the necessity for long testing, involving a whole succession of individual judgements.

Dr. Leavis has no illusions on this score, and has always insisted on the collaborative nature of criticism. He takes as his description of the critical enterprise Eliot's phrase "the common pursuit of true judgement".³⁶ Consequently he has no illusions about the power of analysis:

A critical account of any poetry can only point, or draw a line round. It must always be left to

35. Poetry and Morality, p.211.

36. The Common Pursuit, Preface, v.

each reader to grasp for himself what is concretely presented.³⁷

There is no question of "proof". Dr. Leavis also describes very well the use of analysis in inculcating a habit of careful reading:

What we call analysis is, of course, a constructive or creative process. It is a more deliberate following-through of that process of creation in response to the poet's words which reading is.

By this deliberateness "we ensure a more than ordinary faithfulness and completeness".³⁸

The advantage of the ideas used by Dr. Leavis in his discussion of St. Mawr is that they open the road for literary enquiry, whereas Professor Buckley's position, by separating literary judgements from moral judgements, closes that road. Professor Buckley's procedure is to extract the doctrine from a work and then conduct a discussion (moral, metaphysical, theological, and so on) of that.³⁹ There are many difficulties in Dr. Leavis' path, but it is a path that always leads towards literature, not away from it.

37. "'Little Gidding'", Scrutiny, xi (1942-43), 267.

38. F.R. Leavis, Education and the University, New Edition, London, 1948, p. 70.

39. See, for example, Poetry and Morality, p. 211.

III.

Having outlined Dr. Leavis' use of the ideas of complexity and realisation, and having noted their resemblance to the work of Richards, I will examine some of the distinctive features of Dr. Leavis' development of them.

One of the most important of these distinctive features is the idea of "exploration". The idea (it is, of course, by no means unique to Dr. Leavis) points simply to the poet's ability to bring language to bear upon experience in an unusually intimate way; but Dr. Leavis' applications of it indicate, I think, an important bias, which bias may be summed up by saying that Dr. Leavis tends to assume that Eliot's Four Quartets are the standard manifestation of the "exploratory-creative" use of language.⁴⁰ This bias is very much like that we saw when discussing Richards' use of Coleridge's lines,

To thee do all things live from pole to pole
Their life the eddying of thy living soul.⁴¹

I argued there that Richards was misled by concentrating on an example which is about a philosophical problem. The similarity

40. See F.R. Leavis, English Literature in our Time and the University, London, 1969, p.104, for a typical occurrence of the phrase "exploratory-creative". This book is the published version of the Clark lectures of 1967. I shall refer to it henceforth as English Literature in our Time.

41. See above, p.115.

between that and Dr. Leavis' use of Eliot can be indicated by quoting a remark by Dr. Leavis about Burnt Norton:

it seems to me to be the equivalent in poetry of a philosophical work - to do by strictly poetical means the business of an epistemological and metaphysical enquiry. Of course, in this given case examination of the instruments is necessarily at the same time a use of them in the poet's characteristic kind of exploration.⁴²

Whether or not the word "instruments" (one of Richards' favourite words) is a nod in Richards' direction, the ideas here are certainly like those of Richards.⁴³ This may be more fully illustrated by Dr. Leavis' summary of his discussion of Four Quartets, in the Clark Lectures. He says that Eliot's poem,

compels a close attention to the subtleties of linguistic expression—to the ways in which the conceptual currency may affect the problem of how and what one believes and what believing is, and in which linguistic conventions and habits partly determine experience. That the creative battle to vindicate spiritual values should be associated, as it is in Four Quartets, with the subtlest kind of analytic interest in language seems to me a piece of good

42. Education and the University, p.94.

43. As in the title of Richards' collection of essays, Speculative Instruments.

fortune that we, who are concerned for humane education at a time when linguistic science, or scientific linguistics, is making its victorious advances, have a duty to exploit.⁴⁴

Four Quartets demands, that is, the sort of attention to language which we saw in Richards' programme for the further use of the study of poetry — a programme demanding not only awareness of what the words are doing, but also of how they are doing it.⁴⁵ Herein lies the peculiarity of Four Quartets, and one has no wish to quarrel with Dr. Leavis' account of it. It is the use of Four Quartets as a standard which is unjust, and it is interesting to see how this injustice comes about.

Dr. Leavis' account of the language of Four Quartets, sketched above, dovetails very readily with a similar but more general sort of remark that he is wont to make. In Education and the University, for example, he says that Eliot, in Burnt Norton, is essentially faced with certain difficulties of belief, and adds: "Those difficulties are such that they certainly cannot be met by any simple re-imposition of traditional frames". What we find

44. English Literature in our Time, pp.131-132.

45. See above, pp.112-115.

in Eliot, rather than such re-impositions, are the following:

explorations into the concrete actualities of experience below the conceptual currency; into the life that must be the raison d'être of any frame - while there is life at all.⁴⁶

This is more general because it does not involve, necessarily, a linguistic interest of the peculiar type described above. It is, I would say, an account of what any poet ought to be doing, if he is to avoid mere cliché.

The phrase "conceptual currency" is directly connected with Dr. Leavis' grand indictment of the eighteenth century:

The Augustan cannot conceive the need for...[the exploratory-creative] use of language. The ideas he wants to express are adequately provided for— and this is true of poetry as of prose—in the common currency of terms, put together according to the conventions of grammar and logic.⁴⁷

The charge is repeated in the Clark Lectures, in the context of a discussion of Eliot. The eighteenth century "had no place for the distinctively poetic use of language, the exploratory-creative, exemplified supremely by Shakespeare".⁴⁸ Although Shakespeare is

46. Education and the University, p.103. Cf. English Literature in our Time, p.117 and Lectures in America, London, 1969, p.46.

47. "Johnson as Critic", Scrutiny, xii (1944-45), 194.

48. English Literature in our Time, p.104.

the stated standard here, I would suggest that, in view of the context, Eliot's Four Quartets are the actual standard. That point may be pressed by noting an important link between Dr. Leavis' account of Four Quartets and his discussion of exploratory-creative language in the essay "Tragedy and the 'Medium'", which also contains an adverse account of the eighteenth century.

In "Tragedy and the 'Medium'", Dr. Leavis says that Santayana, in some remarks on Macbeth, is "proposing for the poet as his true business the lucid arrangement of ready-minted concepts".⁴⁹ Against this Dr. Leavis quotes Professor Harding's account of Isaac Rosenberg:

Usually when we speak of finding words to express a thought we seem to mean that we have the thought rather close to formulation and use it to measure the adequacy of any possible phrasing that occurs to us, treating words as servants of the idea. 'Clothing a thought in language', whatever it means psychologically, seems a fair metaphorical description of most speaking and writing. Of Rosenberg's work it would be misleading. He - like many poets in some degree, one supposes - brought language to bear on the incipient thought at an earlier stage of its development. Instead of the emerging idea being racked slightly so as to fit a more familiar approximation of itself, and words found for that, Rosenberg let it manipulate words almost from

49. The Common Pursuit, p.130.

the beginning, often without insisting on the controls of logic and intelligibility.⁵⁰

Dr. Leavis also notes that Professor Harding connects this use of language with Rosenberg's open-ness to experience, and quotes Professor Harding's following comment on Rosenberg:

[he had a] willingness... to let himself be new-born into the new situation, not subduing his experience to his established personality.⁵¹

Dr. Leavis makes the same association of a breaking down of language, as it were, with a breaking down of the "established personality", in his account of Shakespearean tragedy:

The sense of heightened life that goes with the tragic experience is conditioned by a transcending of the ego —an escape from all attitudes of self-assertion.⁵²

This, for Dr. Leavis, is the essence of the tragic effect. When we respond to a Shakespearean tragedy in the following way:

It is as if we were challenged at the profoundest level with the question, 'In what does the significance of life reside?', and found ourselves contemplating, for answer, a view of life, and of the things giving it

50. The Common Pursuit, p.124. Dr. Leavis is quoting from "Aspects of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg", Scrutiny, iii (1934-35), 365.

51. *ibid.*, p.133. Cf. Scrutiny, iii, 363.

52. The Common Pursuit, p.131.

value, that makes the valued appear unquestionably more important than the valuer, so that the significance lies, clearly and inescapably, in the willing adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself.⁵³

In linking this with the exploratory-creative use of language Dr. Leavis shows a certain tentativeness:

The attainment in literature of this level, and of organisation at this level, would seem to involve the poetic use of language, or of processes that amount to that.⁵⁴

Dr. Leavis does not explain what these other "processes" might be. There is a similar tentativeness in his account of the non-exploratory use of language and its relation with an incapacity for expressing tragic experience:

It may not be altogether true to say that in such a use of language - in the business of expressing 'previously definite' ideas - one is necessarily confined to one's 'established ego', one's 'ready-defined self'. But it does seem as if the 'tragic' transcendence of ordinary experience that can be attained by a mind tied to such a use must inevitably tend towards the rhetorical order represented by Mr. Santayana's account of Seneca's tragic philosophy.⁵⁵

53. The Common Pursuit, p.132.

54. *ibid.*, p.130.

55. *ibid.*

Despite the tentativeness, however, the point is clear, and it is a very interesting one. The place allotted in this scheme to eighteenth century literature is indicated by the assertion that Dr. Johnson is even less perceptive than Santayana: he is incapable of understanding language used for "exploratory creation".⁵⁶

It is in the idea of a defeating of the ego that this essay links very closely with Dr. Leavis' account of Eliot's later poetry. In "Tragedy and the 'Medium'" the idea is developed by reference to D.H. Lawrence. Dr. Leavis quotes an attack, from one of Lawrence's letters, on some of the political thinkers of Lawrence's day:

They all want the same thing: a continuing in this state of disintegration wherein each separate little ego is an independant little principality by itself. What does Russell really want? He wants to keep his own established ego, his finite and ready-defined self intact, free from contact and connection. He wants to be ultimately a free agent.⁵⁷

As opposed to this, the "tragic experience" involves an "adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself". Dr. Leavis is talking about what is in a general sense a religious impulse, and here lies a central part of his interest in D.H. Lawrence, of

56. The Common Pursuit, p.125 and p.130.

57. *ibid.*, p.129.

course. For instance, Dr. Leavis elsewhere says that the remark sometimes made about George Eliot, that she is "ethical" rather than "religious", could not have been made about Lawrence, and gives, as a brief example, Lawrence's account of Tom Brangwen, in

The Rainbow:

But during the long February nights with the ewes in labour, looking out from the shelter into the flashing stars, he knew he did not belong to himself. He must admit that he was only fragmentary, something incomplete and subject. There were stars in the dark heaven travelling, the whole host passing by on some eternal voyage. So he sat small and submissive to the great ordering.⁵⁸

The defeat of the ego is a large theme in Dr. Leavis' account of Eliot in the Clark Lectures. He says, for example, that the "unwilled" quality of East Coker, "is given in the opening lines of the poem":

Because I do not hope to turn again
 Because I do not hope
 Because I do not hope to turn
 Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
 I no longer strive to strive towards such things.

--if striving involves the will, and willing involves self-assertion and the desire to exalt the self, then there is to be no more striving.⁵⁹

58. D.H. Lawrence, Novelist, p.110.

59. English Literature in Our Time, pp.118-119.

In Dr. Leavis' account, the self-searching implied here involves the exploratory use of language.⁶⁰

Such are the ways in which, for Dr. Leavis, the idea of the of the exploratory-creative use of language is linked with Eliot's later poetry. He needs that poetry, peculiar as it is (in the way I have defined), to buttress his critique of eighteenth century literature, because, without it, his critique will not stand. It is true that eighteenth century writers did not use language for exploration of the kind exhibited in Four Quartets - an exploration which involves a scrutiny of the linguistic instrument that can only be called philosophical. It is not true that their language is not exploratory-creative in the more general sense.

That last claim can, in fact, be amply supported by referring to Dr. Leavis' own account of Pope or Johnson. In his chapter on Pope in Revaluation, Dr. Leavis gives a forceful account of Pope's poetic creativity. He says, for instance, of a passage from The Rape of the Lock:

The beauty here is, for our contemplation, created, just as the immediately following lines evoke the delighted eagerness of the chase.⁶¹

60. English Literature in Our Time, pp.114-115.

61. F.R. Leavis, Revaluation, Tradition and Development in English Poetry, London, 1936, p.96.

He notes, elsewhere, of Johnson:

[he gives] moral declamation the weight of lived experience and transformshis eighteenth-century generalities into an ...extraordinary kind of concreteness.⁶²

In that word "transform" there is indicated a different relation between experience and the "common currency of terms" from that postulated in Dr. Leavis' adverse account of eighteenth century literature.⁶³ The point can be reinforced by Dr. Leavis' remark that, in The Dunciad, "'Order' for Pope is no mere word, but a rich concept imaginatively realized".⁶⁴ The exploratory-creative use of language does not necessarily require an abandonment of the "common currency of terms"; such terms may simply be enriched by being re-soaked in experience.

Dr. Leavis' phrase "imaginatively realized" brings in, of course, that cluster of ideas which we have seen as central in his literary criticism. What is important here is not that Dr. Leavis is contradicting himself, but that his positive account of eighteenth century poetry is the correct one, and that it should be pressed a little further. When Dr. Leavis remarks on the "weight of lived

62. The Common Pursuit, p.119.

63. See above, p.363.

64. The Common Pursuit, p.92.

experience" felt behind The Vanity of Human Wishes, he is on the way to noting that the poem deals with experience of a kind very urgent to Dr. Johnson. The view of life it expresses is very grim. Its grim-ness is brought out strongly in the one passage in the poem which may be said to strike a false note—the appeal to Democritus:

Once more, Democritus, arise on earth,
 With chearful wisdom and instructive mirth,
 See motley life in modern trappings dress'd,
 And feed with varied fools th'eternal jest.⁶⁵

It is no jest to Johnson, and to see this no recourse to biography, easy as that would be, is needed; the poem itself is sufficient testimony. The poem, however, conveys resolution as well as an acute sense of the grim-ness of life, and we might draw attention to this not only by reading out passages to get the feel of it, but by pointing to the recurrent metaphor of life as a battle which runs through the whole poem. The feelings attendant upon that recurrent metaphor fuse with the characteristic tone of the poem.

It is convenient, at this point, to generalize by referring to some remarks by Professor Harding. In "The Hinterland of Thought", he pursues the line of thought that we have seen in his account of Rosenberg. He uses Susanne Langer's account of "presentational

65. The Vanity of Human Wishes, ll.49-52.

symbolism", and associates it with Jung's idea of "archetypes".⁶⁶ "Presentational symbolism" occurs when a word or image carries a number of meanings simultaneously, without putting these meanings into an explicit and logical relation with each other.⁶⁷ The horse St. Mawr is for us a convenient example of such a symbol.

Professor Harding makes, for our purposes, two important points about presentational symbols: first, that they may carry with them traces of pre-conscious activity, second, that the symbol itself need not arise from the pre-conscious. His registering of a disagreement with Jung most conveniently conveys the two points:

The difficulty I find in accepting Jung's full idea of the archetype is the implication that the image itself which conveys the meaning arises from the depths or remotenesses of the body. For instance some sense of surging animal vitality and its huge potential power may arise in any of us and may emerge into conscious experience from below, in the way that the experience of hunger emerges out of bodily processes. As it comes towards 'symbolic transformation' the most appropriate image to hand may be, or may have been for many centuries past, the horse; and the horse may then serve as the symbol of a very complex mass of inarticulate potential experience, including a sense of the delight, the danger, the power, the vulnerability, the wildness

66. D.W. Harding, Experience into Words, London, 1963, p.180 and pp.193-194.

67. *ibid.*, p.180.

and the managableness of animal vitality. But although the meaning of the symbol may have come towards definition out of the remotenesses of the whole psychosomatic person, the image - the horse - seems most likely to have entered by way of the sensory surfaces, especially the eye.⁶⁸

Professor Harding then points out that:

The choice of objects to carry the symbolic meaning may be largely an individual matter, or it may be culturally institutionalized.⁶⁹

If we transfer these ideas to The Vanity of Human Wishes, we can say that the image of life as a battle is a presentational symbol. The image in itself is commonplace and does not rise from the depths of Johnson's pre-conscious. However, it carries with it a complex of attitudes, present in the tone and feeling of the poem, which have been partly formed at the pre-conscious level, and the presence of this complex of attitudes is what makes the poem "Johnsonian"— the poet has articulated his deepest self by an exploratory creative use of language.

Professor Harding remarks that:

The less sensitive writer skids from the potentially new thought into the fluent old words, accepting a

68. D.W. Harding, Experience into Words, London, 1963, pp. 194-195.

69. *ibid.*, p. 195.

compromise which burkes what might have been an original creation.⁷⁰

That is, the "fluent old words" are not faithful to the writer's deeper experience - they do not carry with them traces of pre-conscious activity. The following is a representative example from The Vanity of Human Wishes of the way in which the complex of attitudes referred to above carries itself into the language of the poem:

Should Beauty blunt on fops her fatal dart,
 Nor claim the triumph of a letter'd heart;
 Should no disease thy torpid veins invade,
 Nor Melancholy's phantoms haunt thy shade;
 Yet hope not life from grief or danger free,
 Nor think the doom of man revers'd for thee:
 Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes,
 And pause awhile from letters, to be wise;
 There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
 Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.⁷¹

The recurrent image is plain throughout this: "blunt", "fatal dart", "triumph", "invade", "danger", "assail". The lines carry a strong feeling of the hostility of life and, at the same time, a great energy of resolution; the more the hostility is stressed, the greater the resoluteness seems to be.

70. D.W. Harding, Experience into Words, p.185.

71. ll.151-160.

Further, it is important to take into account here the effects of sound and rhythm. It is there above all that one would expect to find the sort of faithfulness to the depths of experience that Professor Harding describes. As has often been said, analysis of sound and rhythm is always difficult, but it seems safe to remark upon the energy of Johnson's lines, and to suggest that this energy is largely a matter of a strategic deployment of powerful verbs. "Blunt", "invade" and "assail" are here particularly noticeable, and particularly relevant to our other comments on the passage. It is also important to note the general effect of Johnson's "medium". Its dignity, in both diction and movement, is a large element in what one means by calling the poem "Johnsonian". This dignity, which is suggested, not stated, ensures that, despite the overtly destructive tenour of the poem—its setting up and knocking down of a variety of human aspirations—there is no sense of mere carping or belittlement. It is, it appears to me, this dignity which qualifies the poem for the adjective "tragic", a word to which, in its general applicability to Johnson, Dr. Leavis draws attention.⁷²

Since I feel that The Vanity of Human Wishes successfully embodies Johnson's deepest and most urgent experience, and since it is so thoroughly an Augustan poem, I cannot agree with Dr. Leavis'

72. The Common Pursuit, p.115.

view of the Augustan "use of language":

[it] must tend to turn forms and conventions from agents of life into debilitating conventionalities, such as forbid the development of the individual sensibility and set up an insulation against any vitalizing recourse to the concrete.⁷³

Why must the medium which is successful in Dr. Johnson's poem be doomed to failure elsewhere? I would like to pursue the point a little further, again with regard to Dr. Leavis' admiration for Eliot.

IV.

I have argued that Dr. Leavis' view that the eighteenth century denied itself the exploratory-creative use of language is related to his taking Four Quartets, which explores the linguistic instrument itself in an unusually conscious manner, as a standard. Professor Harding's account offers an opportunity for noting another way in which Dr. Leavis seems to take Eliot as a standard.

Eliot's poetry is remarkable in its use of images which are individual rather than "culturally institutionalized", and he is

73. The Common Pursuit, p. 111.

in this respect, one supposes, a typical modern poet. The figure of Coriolanus, the voices of children in an apple-tree, a girl with hyacinths, a figure opening a door along a corridor, a bird singing in the mist, come to random recollection. Eliot's own metaphor of images "rising like Anadyomene from the sea" conveys very vividly the process which seems to be involved here.⁷⁴ The images appear to come from the depths of the poet's personal experience.

The exploration of images from specific personal experiences is a key element in Dr. Leavis' account of Eliot. In Lectures in America he deals at length with La figlia che piange, of which I will quote the opening lines:

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair -
 Lean on a garden urn -
 Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair -
 Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise -
 Fling them to the ground and turn
 With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
 But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

Dr. Leavis says :

the memory obviously represents something very important for Eliot, some vital node of experience - something felt as perhaps a possibility of transcending disgust,

74. See above, p.309.

rejection and protest. We know this not just from the power of the poem itself, but from the part played by closely related evocations in his later poetry.⁷⁵

I am not here concerned with the validity of Dr. Leavis' point, but with the importance he attaches to the image which is ingrained into "some vital node of experience".

When Dr. Leavis discusses Eliot's later poetry, in the Clark Lectures, an important feature is the contrast between Eliot and the eighteenth century poets. He says of Four Quartets:

It required a capacity for intensely private or non-social (or non-currency) experience — which amounts to saying, for bringing to expression in language what language doesn't readily lend itself to.⁷⁶

He says of eighteenth century poetry:

what...the poet 'has to say' must be suited to a mode that implies overtly social and 'civilized' presentation: experience that doesn't lend itself to such treatment is implicitly told that it doesn't exist, or is of no consequence.⁷⁷

The eighteenth century "in essential intention, eliminated creativity", and this elimination is, for Dr. Leavis, to be largely explained by

75. Lectures in America, p.43.

76. English Literature in our Time, p.115.

77. *ibid.*, p.105.

referring to Locke and Newton the prophets of mechanism as opposed to creativity.⁷⁸

To discuss the large implications of Locke and Newton is beyond my competence. What I think is doubtful in Dr. Leavis' thinking, is the implication that where there is no overt exploration of specific private experience, there is no creativity of poetic language—that the eighteenth century "had no place for the distinctively poetic use of language, the exploratory-creative".⁷⁹ There are, evidently, great differences of some kind between Eliot's poetry and Johnson's, but they are not to be explained in terms of fundamental differences of language. This is the same point as we made earlier when discussing Richards' comparison of Gray with Blake, or Dorne with Dryden.⁸⁰

At the risk of pursuing the point into tedium, one might finally note that a work like Gulliver's Travels, which very fully exemplifies the Augustan virtues of clear prose statement (virtues which Dr. Leavis finds debilitating), is exploratory-creative in a high degree. The Yahoos, for instance, are imaginatively realised presentational symbols which embody Swiftian experience

78. English Literature in our Time, p.105.

79. *ibid.*, p.104.

80. See above, pp.118-127.

of an intimate nature. That they are presented in language which has the form of clear prose statement, and that the words have an air of simplicity, has no effect whatever upon the creative process. As Professor Harding points out, it is not necessary for the presentational symbol itself to emerge from the depths, for it to embody deeply personal experience.

V.

I would like next to examine Dr. Leavis' over-emphasis on the importance of disparity-action in the language of poetry --an over-emphasis re-inforced by Dr. Leavis' interest in "wit". I will first outline his interest in "wit".

For Dr. Leavis, "wit" involves much the same as it involves in Eliot's definition.⁸¹ Dr. Leavis says, for example, of Pope's "wit":

[it creates] a readiness for surprise that amounts in the end to an implicit recognition, at any point, in accepting what is given, of other and complementary possibilities.⁸²

81. See above, pp.318-319.

82. Revaluation, pp.72-73.

We recall Eliot's saying that wit "involves, probably, a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible".⁸³

The idea of wit, as used by Dr. Leavis, also glances at Richards' idea of "irony", or the reconciliation of opposed attitudes. This is seen in such remarks as that, in The Waste Land, there is a "co-presence in the mind of a number of different orientations, fundamental attitudes, orders of experience"; or that in Mauberry, "there is a subtlety of tone, a complexity of attitude, such as we associate with seventeenth century wit".⁸⁴

The relation between Dr. Leavis and Richards here is worth looking at in a little more detail. It is most clear in the essay "Tragedy and the Medium".⁸⁵ Dr. Leavis uses, again, Professor Harding's account of Rosenberg, which contains the following remark about Rosenberg's poetry about death in battle:

The value of what was destroyed seemed to him to have been brought into sight only by the destruction, and he had to respond to both facts without allowing either to neutralize the other. It is this which is most impressive in Rosenberg - the complexity of experience which he was strong enough to permit himself.⁸⁶

83. T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, London, 1951, p.303.

84. New Bearings in English Poetry, p.107 and p.141.

85. The Common Pursuit, pp.121-135.

86. *ibid.*, pp.132-133. Dr. Leavis is quoting from Scrutiny, iii, 363.

This is close to Richards' idea of a reconciliation of opposed attitudes. Dr. Leavis, who does not like that idea, says, having quoted Professor Harding, that he will merely "note the stress laid by Harding on 'complexity' and 'technique'".⁸⁷ Dr. Leavis is toning down the idea so that it will dovetail with a more general notion of "complexity of attitude".

This cluster of notions, comprising "wit", "poise", "complexity of attitude" and so on, in itself is unobjectionable, particularly since Dr. Leavis is quite happy to waive it when confronted with "un-witty" poetry which he likes. Being a first-hand critic he is no wooden applier of principles. For example he says of Hardy:

Hardy is a naive poet of simple attitudes and outlook....

His greatness lies in the integrity with which he accepted the conclusion, enforced, he believed, by science, that nature is indifferent to human values....⁸⁸

Hopkins, too, is "in a certain obvious sense simple-minded", and is contrasted with the seventeenth century poets in this respect.⁸⁹ Dr. Leavis, of course, has a very high regard for both Hardy and Hopkins.

87. The Common Pursuit, p.133.

88. New Bearings in English Poetry, pp.57-58.

89. The Common Pursuit, p.50 and p.52.

Further, the ideas of "wit" and "complexity of attitude" refer, for Dr. Leavis, to a deeper and simpler criterion - the presence of "thought" in poetry. This is apparent in the Clark Lectures where Dr. Leavis says that the importance of seventeenth century "wit", as an influence on Eliot's earlier poetry, is that it "implies that the poet appeals to the full waking and thinking mind of the reader".⁹⁰ The point appears earlier in Dr. Leavis' comment on Coleridge's account of Venus and Adonis. Coleridge noted the "perpetual activity of attention" required on the part of the reader, and Dr. Leavis remarks that "Coleridge has given an account of the element of 'wit' that is in Venus and Adonis".⁹¹ Dr. Leavis, in the same vein, says elsewhere;

an essential part of the strength of good Metaphysical poetry turns out to be of the same order as the strength of all the most satisfying poetry: the conceitedness, the Metaphysicality, is the obtrusive accompaniment of an essential presence of 'thought' such as we have in the best work of all great poets.⁹²

Coleridge's phrase "perpetual activity of attention", above, is a reminder of the connection between all this and Richards' idea of "realisation".⁹³ Dr. Leavis' point about the metaphysical poets

90. English Literature in our Time, pp.102-103.

91. "Coleridge in Criticism", Scrutiny, ix (1940-41), 68.

92. "'Thought' and Emotional Quality", Scrutiny, xiii (1945-46), 61.

93. See above, pp.93-94.

is that made by Dr. Johnson:

To write on their plan it was at least necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet, nor assume the dignity of a writer by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery and hereditary similes, by readiness of rhyme and volubility of syllables.⁹⁴

Dr. Leavis' interest in wit, then, is subject to a number of checks. It does, however, play an important part in his over-stress upon disparity-action in poetic language. This is clear, for example, in his discussion of Pope's Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady, which I will comment on in some detail.

Dr. Leavis' discussion of Pope's Elegy is conducted in a context informed by the idea of wit:

Seriousness for Pope, for the Metaphysicals, for Shakespeare, was not the sustained, simple solemnity it tended to be identified with in the nineteenth century: it might include among its varied and disparate tones the ludicrous, and demand, as essential to the total effect, an accompanying play of the critical intelligence.⁹⁵

94. Lives of the Poets, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, Oxford, 1905, i, 21.

95. Revaluation, p.71.

In the light of this claim Dr. Leavis comments on the lines:

Most souls, 'tis true, but peep out once an age,
 Dull sullen pris'ners in the body's cage:
 Dim lights of life, that burn a length of years
 Useless, unseen, as lamps in sepulchres;
 Like Eastern Kings a lazy state they keep,
 And close confin'd to their own palace, sleep.⁹⁶

His analysis runs as follows:

the associations of 'peep' are not dignified, and one's feelings towards the 'souls' vary, with the changing imagery, from pitying contempt for the timorous peepers, through a shared sense (still qualified with critical contempt, for one is not oneself dull and sullen) of the prisoners' hopeless plight, and a solemn contemplation in the sepulchral couplet of life wasted among shrivelled husks, to that contempt mixed with humour and a sense of opulence that is appropriate to the Kings lazing in their palaces.⁹⁷

This seems persuasive commentary, but the feeling is, I think, a good deal less varying than Dr. Leavis suggests, and I would therefore draw attention to the "propriety"⁹⁸ of the language, rather than to its action through disparity. The central point

96. Revaluation, p.70. (Elegy, ll.17-22.)

97. *ibid.*, pp.71-72.

98. See above, pp.196-197.

is that the prisoners are helpless, as Dr. Leavis indicates in referring to their "hopeless plight". Our feeling that they are helpless mitigates any feeling of contempt for them, and this mitigation is connected with an important element in the whole poem—the fact that the lady's soul is a rare one. She is not, as are the mass of souls, fated to mediocrity. That she is fated is indicated by such lines as,

Why bade ye else, ye Pow'rs! her soul aspire
Above the vulgar flight of low desire?⁹⁹

This touches upon the poem's total "statement", which is: "There are a few remarkable souls, which leaven the heavy lump of mankind, and it is the function of the poet, whose own soul responds to their greatness, to sing their praises". The mediocre souls' helplessness springs from the fact that they too are fated. The phrase "burn a length of years", for instance, carries that feeling. The helplessness is the key point in the final simile. The kings are "close confin'd" (i.e. prisoners), and a "sense of opulence", which Dr. Leavis wants us to feel here, is surely irrelevant. "Opulence" carries with it a broad and generous feeling which is inappropriate to the starved souls that Pope is describing. The passage is characterized, in fact, by a unity of feeling, which readily lends itself for comment in terms of propriety. The

99. 11.11-12.

current of feeling is apparent in words like "dull", "dim" and "lazy", and the three similes have a cumulative effect of oppressive confinement. The propriety of the first and third similes also consists in the fact that the prisoners, though feeling oppressed, are reconciled to their situation. Like some "old lags", they have largely lost the desire for freedom. It is difficult to see, in the sequence of similes of imprisonment, death, and sleep, that one's "feelings towards the 'souls' vary, with the changing imagery".

That Dr. Leavis' eye is rather fixed upon a pre-determined idea that "wit" must be present, is further evidenced by his next comment:

The kings are at least dignified, and they make the transition to the complete dignity of the Lady, who enters again in the next couplet.¹⁰⁰

"Transition" is a word that Dr. Leavis is fond of, and he possibly owes it to Eliot, who uses it in a similar way when comparing Dryden with Milton.¹⁰¹ But if Pope had needed a transition from one tone to another, surely the sepulchre is even more "dignified" than the palace. The fact is that no transition is needed. In a curious sort of way Dr. Leavis' view of Pope is, I think, a

100. Revaluation, p.72.

101. See above, p.319.

post-romantic one, in its assumption that there is great difficulty involved in moving from a serious to a light tone.

This is also the case in Dr. Leavis' comment on the lines:

Is it, in heav'n, a crime to love too well?
 To bear too tender, or too firm a heart,
 To act a Lover's, or a Roman's part?
 Is there no bright reversion in the sky,
 For those who greatly think, or bravely die?¹⁰²

For Dr. Leavis this is an example of the habit of "critical 'placing'" which goes along with the "witty" mode. What is being "placed" here is a "rather histrionic exaltation".¹⁰³ Dr. Leavis offers no analysis, but, if there is such an effect, it must hinge largely on the legal metaphor of "reversion". Dr. Leavis, as I understand it, reads this as introducing, because its surprisingness verges upon conceitedness, that cool note which is characteristic of prominent disparity action in metaphor. But, again, it is the propriety of the metaphor which ~~most~~ needs to be pointed out. The uncle who has driven the girl to suicide was her legal guardian, and the immediate implication of the legal metaphor here is that he has cheated her out of her inheritance — spiritual inheritance, primarily, though there may well be a veiled reference to the literal sense,

102. Revaluation, p.75. (Elegy, ll.6-10)

103. *ibid.*

also. The chief effect is to bring in the idea of the "gods" as just guardians; they not only look after heroic souls but protect cheated orphans. The overall feeling generated is noble and pathetic. Pope is coming on as strong as he can, and would, surely, not have liked to be told that he was "critically placing" the feeling. Dr. Johnson, who much admired the poem, saying that there is no other poem of Pope's in which "the sense predominates more over the diction", at the same time castigated Pope for "the illaudable singularity of treating suicide with respect", and added, more violently, that poetry "has not often been worse employed than in dignifying the amorous fury of a raving girl".¹⁰⁴ Dr. Johnson took the poem "seriously", as I think it should be, and I find his reading more accurate than Dr. Leavis'.

What I have called the post-romantic element in Dr. Leavis' reading also appears in his comment on the lines:

As into air the purer spirits flow,
 And sep'rate from their kindred dregs below;
 So flew the soul to its congenial place,
 Nor left one virtue to redeem her Race.¹⁰⁵

Dr. Leavis says:

The 'mean' element in the texture of the previous passage can be safely carried on in 'dregs'. The

104. Lives of the Poets, iii, 226 and 101.

105. Revaluation, p.70. (Elegy, 11.25-28.)

very violence of this directed as it is upon her contemptible family ('her Race'), draws the attention away from the value it gives, retrospectively, to 'spirits', though enough of this value is felt to salt a little, as it were, the sympathetically tender nobility that is opposed to 'dregs'.¹⁰⁶

This seems a subtle description of the ways in which the words inter-act, and, again, it involves the idea of a disparity action in the metaphor. The contrast of the "mean" element in the vehicle with the exalted element in the tenor is a species of wit ("salt"). The wit ensures that the lady's "dignity is not a precarious one, to be sedulously guarded from all possible visible associations".¹⁰⁷ This last comment is noticeably reminiscent of Richards' account of "irony".¹⁰⁸ But there seem to be no real grounds for supposing that witty salt is being sprinkled here. What is there "mean" about the metaphor of distillation? A romantic poet might find it startling, but not Pope. Pope chiefly needed a metaphor from a natural process, to re-inforce the idea that the conduct of the lady and of her family is, their natures being what they are, inevitable. To point the inter-action of this with the poem as a

106. Revaluation, p.72.

107. *ibid.*

108. Principles of Literary Criticism, p.250.

whole one can quote the beautiful lines:

Yet shall thy grave with rising flow'rs be drest,
 And the green turf lie lightly on thy breast:
 There shall the morn her earliest tears bestow,
 There the first roses of the year shall blow.¹⁰⁹

The suggestion that the girl's greatness of soul is part of the natural scheme of things is here extended into the claim that nature will look after her now that she is dead. In these lines no stretch of ingenuity could discover a "critical placing" of the exalted sentiment.

Such, I think, is the way in which Dr. Leavis' pre-occupation with wit, and his consequent over-emphasis on the action of disparity in the inter-connections of words, distorts his reading of Pope's Elegy.

VI.

The above interest in disparity-effects, there supported by a desire to discover "wit", also stands, of course, in its own right in Dr. Leavis' criticism. He discusses the point in a theoretical

109. Elegy, ll.63-66.

way in a comment on Donne's metaphor comparing farm-labourers with "country-ants":

It is from some such complexity as this, involving the telescoping or focal co-incidence in the mind of contrasting or discrepant impressions or effects that metaphor in general - live metaphor - seems to derive its life: life involves friction and tension - a sense of arrest in some degree.

And this generalization suggests a wider one. Whenever in poetry we come on places of especially striking 'concreteness' - places where the verse has such life and body that we hardly seem to be reading arrangements of words - we may expect analysis to yield notable instances of the co-presence in complex effects of the disparate, the conflicting or the contrasting.¹¹⁰

Dr. Leavis is, initially, talking quite explicitly about disparity action in metaphor, and may be indebted here to Richards. Likewise the word "telescoping" may be an echo of Eliot's comment that in metaphysical poetry there is often a "sudden contrast of associations" or a "telescoping of images".¹¹¹ But the stress is, in any case, highly characteristic of Dr. Leavis' approach to poetic language.

110. "Imagery and Movement", Scrutiny, xiii (1945-46), 120.

111. T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, p.283.

The bias here is exactly the opposite of that to be found in eighteenth century analytic method. While recognizing the value of "surprise", particularly in the matter of distance between tenor and vehicle in metaphor, the eighteenth century critic analyzed predominantly in terms of propriety - of consonance between the "impressions or effects", as Dr. Leavis calls them.¹¹² Dr. Leavis, while perfectly familiar with the general idea of propriety tends to stress the importance of disparity. In criticizing Dr. Leavis, I am not asserting that contrast-effects are unimportant, but that he too much neglects propriety.

This, I think, is clear even in the chief example with which Dr. Leavis immediately illustrates his generalisation - a fragment from the invocation to the corpse, in Tourneur's The Revenger's Tragedy, to which Eliot had drawn attention in his essay on Massinger, while developing the view of poetic language which we have seen as central in Eliot's criticism:¹¹³

Does the silkworm expend her yellow labours
 For thee? For thee does she undo herself?
 Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships
 For the poor benefit of a bewildering minute?

112. See above, p.392.

113. T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, p.209. See also above, pp.290-291.

Dr. Leavis comments:

The key-word in the first line is 'expend'. In touch with 'spin', it acts with its force of 'spend' on the 'yellow', turning it to gold, and so, while adding directly to the suggestion of wealth and luxury, bringing out by a contrasting co-presence in the one word the soft yellowness of silk. To refer to silk, emblem of luxurious leisure, as 'labours' is in itself a telescoping of conflicting associations.¹¹⁴

This seems rather far-fetched. "Yellow labours" is, more obviously, a vehicle for the feeling of disgust at physical corruptibility which pervades the whole speech, and the chief implication is, "The stuff which people prize so much comes from a worm's innards —and indeed this is fitting because the bodies which silk covers are themselves disgusting". The Swiftian possibilities of "yellow labours" need no elaboration. Dr. Leavis' suggestion that "yellow" brings in the idea of "gold" seems merely to distract from the main point. I agree with Dr. Leavis that "expend" is in touch with both "spin" and "spend" in the sense, I think, of "destroy" or "waste", as in phrases like "his strength was spent". This associates it not with an idea of gold but with "undo" and the consequence of the "bewildering minute" of the sexual act. The multiple propriety of "undo" is obvious, and had Dr. Leavis been

114. "Imagery and Movement", Scrutiny, xiii (1945-46), 120-121.

less intent on stressing the importance of contrast effects, he would presumably have noted it. "Undo" means "unwind", "undress" and "ruin". The second and third of these meanings are not logically present, but are imposed by the pervasive feeling of disgust.

Dr. Leavis' commentary on that fragment from Tourneur is not, in itself, important. The misreading, as I think it, of Pope's Elegy is a more important consequence of Dr. Leavis' over-emphasis on contrast effects, not only because the poem is an important one, but also because Dr. Leavis, in placing it in the "metaphysical tradition, as he does by stressing its "wit", is implicitly attempting to remove from the Augustan tradition an essentially Augustan achievement. A still more important consequence is his analysis of Milton.

Of the speech in which Comus tempts the Lady, Dr. Leavis says:

It may look less mature, less developed, than the verse of Paradise Lost; it is, as a matter of fact, richer, subtler and more sensitive than anything in Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, or Samson Agonistes.¹¹⁵

115. Revaluation, p.48.

Dr. Leavis comments specifically on the lines:

And set to work millions of spinning Worms
That in their green shops weave the smooth-hair'd silk....

The Shakespearian life of this is to be explained largely by the swift diversity of associations that are run together. The impression of the swarming worms is telescoped with that of the ordered industry of the workshop, and a further vividness results from the contrasting 'green', with its suggestion of leafy tranquillity. 'Smooth-hair'd' plays off against the energy of the verse the tactual luxury of stroking human hair or the living coat of an animal.¹¹⁶

This is a fine commentary but, again, in omitting any mention of the propriety of the language Dr. Leavis is giving a misleading emphasis. The propriety is dramatic, and in ignoring this and treating the lines almost as if they were a hymn to nature in a lyrical poem, Dr. Leavis is also falling into the tendency, to be discussed later, of inappropriately applying the criterion of "concreteness". It is necessary to set the lines in their immediate context, in order to illustrate my point:

Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth
With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks,
Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,

116. Revaluation, p.48.

But all to please and sate the curious taste?
 And set to work millions of spinning worms,
 That in their green shops weave the smooth-haired silk,
 To deck her sons; and, that no corner might
 Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins
 She hatched th'all-worshipped ore and precious gems
 To store her children with.¹¹⁷

That Comus' exhortation to the Lady to indulge her appetites is supposed to be evil is clear not only from the wider context but from the speech itself. The excessiveness of the thing begins to be felt at "Covering the earth with odours....", which has a smothering feeling, and is carried on in the next line. This excessiveness is commented on in the phrase "sate the curious taste", and the unpleasant fact that the taste is being sated with "spawn innumerable" needs no elaboration. Presumably the meaning is that the fish grow up to be eaten, but the unpleasant notion of sating oneself with spawn still intrudes itself. The feelings thus set in motion inevitably colour the next line, so that the "millions of spinning worms" present by no means an entirely pleasing picture and the redundancy of "haired" in "smooth-haired silk" is a voluptuous excess. The unpleasantness reaches a climax in the grotesquerie of:

in her own loins
 She hatched th'all-worshipped ore and precious gems
 To store her children with.

117. Comus, ll. 710-720.

This quite explicitly presents the idea of the children ransacking the mother's womb. An analysis of the lines, in terms of unity and propriety, adopts the procedure that was used in our earlier examination of some lines from Paradise Lost.¹¹⁸ Contrast effects do have a vivifying effect, but they are secondary to those inter-connections of meaning which unify the feeling of the passage. The distinction between these lines and anything in Paradise Lost (and, evidently, they are different from anything in Paradise Lost, as Dr. Leavis says) has to be made in terms of rhythm and movement, not in terms of a fuller exploitation of meaning.

Similar comments might be made on the other passage from Milton which Dr. Leavis, in Revaluation, analyzes in terms of contrast-effects:

Not that fair field
Of Enna, where Proserpin gath'ring flow'rs
Herself a fairer Flow'r by gloomy Dis
Was gather'd - which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world - ...
...might with this Paradise
Of Eden strive.¹¹⁹

118. See above, pp.304-306.

119. Revaluation, p.63. I have added a line to Dr. Leavis' quotation. (Paradise Lost, Bk IV, 11.268-275.)

Dr. Leavis comments:

It is in the repeated verb that the realizing imagination is irresistibly manifested; it is the final 'gathered' that gives concrete life to a conventional phrase and makes Proserpin herself a flower. And to make her a flower is to establish the difference between the two gatherings: the design - the gathered gatherer - is subtle in its simplicity.¹²⁰

Again the commentary is impressive, but again one needs, I think, to make the obvious point that the consonances of meaning are more important than the contrasts or disparities. Milton has brought back to full life one of the oldest of metaphors (the girl as flower) and the bringing back to life is very clearly a matter of releasing all the reverberations of feeling and implications that the metaphor can contain. Detailed analysis would be superfluous, and it would be foolish to suppose that Dr. Leavis himself could not have given it.

It is not, I think, possible to say exactly what part this over-emphasis on contrast effects, and the sometimes unsatisfactory style of analysis that goes with it, played in Dr. Leavis' over-all estimation of Milton. It seems likely, in fact, that Dr. Leavis' radical objection to Paradise Lost (which is where the critical focus has been) is moral rather than aesthetic. For example, we

120. Revaluation, p.63.

are told that Milton, in Paradise Lost, "offers as ultimate for our worship mere brute assertive will, though he condemns it unwittingly by his argument and by glimpses of his own finer human standard".¹²¹ Since a sense of God's terrible and overwhelming power is precisely what lies at the heart of the "sublime", one may fairly rephrase Dr. Leavis' comment, and say that the "sublime" is a mode which he finds repellent.¹²² I would say, therefore, that Dr. Leavis' work on Milton is much like that of Dr. Johnson on the metaphysical poets; he has no sympathy with the attitudes and experiences which the poetry characteristically expresses, and his lack of sympathy is readily re-inforced by his habitual style of analysis.¹²³ This point has already been made about Eliot's criticism of Milton,¹²⁴ and it is, of course, evident that the religious poetry in which Dr. Leavis is most interested is Eliot's Four Quartets - poetry as far removed as may be from that of Paradise Lost.

121. Revaluation, p.58.

122. See, for example, Spectator (No.489), ed. D.F. Bond, Oxford, 1965, iv, 233-234.

123. See above, pp.230-231.

124. See above, pp.337-338.

VII.

I have argued that Dr. Leavis holds potentially misleading views about the exploratory use of language and about the importance of contrast effects. I will now look at his occasionally doubtful application of the criterion of "concreteness", and argue that he can, at strategic points, fall into a crudely "imagist" approach, even though he is, at other points, well aware of the limitations of such an approach.

One factor here is Dr. Leavis' view of the "direct effects" of poetic language, and his comments on Keats' apples in the opening lines of Ode to Autumn are an apt starting point:

It is a matter, among other things, of the way in which the analogical suggestions of the varied complex efforts and motions compelled on us as we pronounce and follow the words and hold them properly together (meaning, that is, has from first to last its inseparable and essential part in the effect of the 'sound') enforce and enact the paraphrasable meaning. The action of the packed consonants in 'moss'd cottage trees' is plain enough: there stand the trees gnarled and sturdy, their leafy entanglements thickly loaded. It is not fanciful, I think, to find that (the sense being what it is) the pronouncing of 'cottage-trees' suggests, too, the crisp bite and the flow of juice as the teeth close in on the ripe apple.¹²⁵

125. The Common Pursuit, p.16.

I do not think that Dr. Leavis is being merely fanciful, much as an unsympathetic reader might disagree with him. However, it is useful to remember here, I think, what Richards said about the "direct effects" of language, which he called "tied imagery":

Too much importance has always been attached to the sensory qualities of images. What gives an image efficacy is less its vividness as an image than its character as a mental event peculiarly connected with sensation. It is, in a way which no one yet knows how to explain, a relict of sensation and our intellectual and emotional response to it depends far more upon its being, through this fact, a representative of a sensation, than upon its sensory resemblance to one. An image may lose almost all its sensory nature to the point of becoming scarcely an image at all, a mere skeleton, and yet represent a sensation quite as adequately as if it were flaring with hallucinatory vividity.¹²⁶

In his analysis of Keats, Dr. Leavis takes the "tied imagery" as being imitative of sensation, and is quite justified in doing so. Richards' point, however, seems to be generally valid, and Dr. Leavis, in fact, elsewhere implicitly registers agreement with it, as, I think, can be shown in the following way.

Dr. Leavis, in his analysis of Keats, is seizing upon an

126. Principles of Literary Criticism, London, 1926, pp.119-120.
Cf. above, p.27.

unusually prominent example of the way in which the direct effects work. It is perhaps significant that he twice uses the same lines from the Ode to Autumn, and that he twice uses some lines by Donne for the same sort of purpose.¹²⁷ One might be tempted to conclude that convincing examples are not very easy to come by.

A similar prominence is seized upon by Dr. Leavis in his discussion of Hopkins' use of the direct effects of language. He refers, without quoting it, to Tom's Garland, and to Hopkins' own comments on the poem:

[Hopkins] indicates now and then in notes the kind of thing he is doing. 'Here comes a violent but effective hyperbaton or suspension, in which the action of the mind mimics that of the labourer - surveys his lot, low but free from care; then by a sudden strong act throws it over the shoulder or tosses it away as a light matter.' Effects of this order may be found on any page of his work.¹²⁸

The passage to which Hopkins refers is:

Tom Heart-at-ease, Tom Navy: he is all for his meal
 Sure, 's bed now. Low be it: lustily he his low lot (feel
 That ne'er need hunger, Tom; Tom seldom sick,
 Seldomer heartsore; that treads through, prickproof, thick
 Thousands of thorns, thoughts) swings though.¹²⁹

127. See Revaluation, pp.263-264 and p.13, and English Literature in our Time, pp.88-89.

128. New Bearings in English Poetry, p.172.

129. Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W.H. Gardner, 1956, p.107.

No one would question the success of this bold effect, but its unusualness needs no stressing. Hopkins himself says that it is "in point of execution very highly wrought", and Dr. Leavis refers to "the peculiarities of [Hopkins'] technique".¹³⁰ Dr. Leavis, however, insists at the same time that Hopkins is only accentuating the natural qualities of the language, and tries to enforce the point by comparing Hopkins' lines with two passages from Shakespeare.¹³¹ It is clear to me that neither of these two passages is nearly so "highly wrought" as Hopkins' lines; but there is no need to examine them in detail, because the essential point is conceded elsewhere by Dr. Leavis himself. After a characteristic analysis of Shakespeare's use of the direct effects of language, he says:

In the mature Shakespeare it is pervasive, but it can be fixed on for convincing comment only where the working is comparatively simple and obvious.¹³²

For the most part, that is, the working of the direct effects is not simply imitative and is beyond analysis. These are the points insisted on by Richards.

130. New Bearings in English Poetry, p.167.

131. *ibid.*, p.169.

132. "Antony and Cleopatra and All For Love", Scrutiny, v (1936-37), 162-163.

Dr. Leavis, I have agreed, is justified in his comments on Keats and Hopkins; it is with regard to Milton that his reliance on an imitative theory of the direct effects is suspect. When Dr. Leavis praises this aspect of Milton's language, he appeals to an imitative criterion:

Nor was his name unheard or unador'd
 In ancient Greece; and in Ausonian land
 Men called him Mulciber; and how he fell
 From Heav'n, they fabl'd, thrown by angry Jove
 Sheer o're the Chrystal Battlements: from Morn
 To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve,
 A Summer's day; and with the setting Sun
 Dropt from the Zenith like a falling Star,
 On Lemnos th' Aegean Ile: thus they relate,
 Erring....¹³³

Dr. Leavis comments:

What is most important to note is that the heavy stresses, the characteristic cadences, turns and returns of the verse, have a peculiar expressive felicity.¹³⁴

He makes the same point of the same passage in "Mr. Eliot and Milton", and uses the same criterion when praising the speech of

133. Paradise Lost, Bk.I, ll.738-747.

134. Revaluation, p.45.

Comus, part of which we have already examined.¹³⁵ If the Lady's austere doctrine were universally practised, says Comus, Nature,

would be quite surcharged with her own weight,
 And strangl'd with her waste fertility;
 Th'earth cumber'd, and the wing'd air dark't with plumes,
 The herds would over-multitude their Lords,
 The sea o're fraught would swell, [and th'unsought diamonds
 Would so emblaze the forehead of the deep,
 And so bestud with stars, that they below
 Would grow inur'd to light, and come at last
 To gaze upon the sun with shameless brows.]¹³⁶

Dr. Leavis quotes only as far as "swell" and says:

To cut the passage short here is to lame it, for the effect of Nature's being strangled with her waste fertility is partly conveyed by the ejaculatory piling-up of clauses, as the reader, by turning back, can verify. But one way in which the verse acts the meaning - not merely says but does - is fairly represented in the line,

Th'earth cumber'd, and the wing'd air dark't with plumes,
 Where the crowding of stressed words, the consonantal clusters and the clogged movement have a function that needs no analysis.¹³⁷

135. The Common Pursuit, p.17, footnote.

136. Revaluation, p.51. I have added some lines to Dr. Leavis' quotation (Comus, ll.728-736.)

137. Revaluation, pp.51-52.

Cutting the passage short, in fact, allows Dr. Leavis to evade the difficulty which I raised earlier with regard to this whole speech.¹³⁸ The speech expresses a certain style of exaggeration and the direct effects of the language have reference to that, rather than to the objects which the verse is describing. It would be difficult for Dr. Leavis to comment on "bestud with stars" in the way in which he comments on,

Th'earth cumber'd, and the wing'd air dark't with plumes,
because the sound and rhythm are not simply imitative. Even in the line isolated by Dr. Leavis, the reader's attention, surely, is on Comus rather than on the objects he is describing. Rhythm, as Richards said, is the organisation of the direct effects in the service of the ongoing movement of meaning. In this speech the meaning is primarily a matter of Comus' feelings, tone and intention.

It is when Dr. Leavis adversely criticizes Milton's verse that one is most worried by the consequences of appealing to a simply imitative theory of the function of tied imagery. According to Dr. Leavis, Milton's "characteristic cadences", which have in the Mulciber passage "a peculiar expressive felicity", have, as a rule, a "routine thump".¹³⁹ Those cadences have, in fact, an intimate

138. See above, pp. 396-397.

139. Revaluation, p. 46.

relation with Milton's "sublimity". To use Dr. Johnson's phrasing again, one recalls the remark that Milton's "natural port is gigantick loftiness".¹⁴⁰ "Port" is an apt word for referring to movement, and Johnson is implicitly noting the obvious relation between movement and feeling in Paradise Lost. To revert to Richards' language, the tied imagery of Paradise Lost functions with reference to Milton's characteristic feeling, tone and intention. As we have already noted, Dr. Leavis is far from being in sympathy with that feeling, and it is consequently no surprise that for him Milton's rhythm does not come to life. Further, the lack of sympathy is re-inforced and confirmed by an appeal to a critical principle which is always congenial to Dr. Leavis and, in some cases, valid. In this case the principle is that of "concreteness", with particular reference to the function of the tied imagery.

VIII.

Dr. Leavis is also capable, at strategic points, of misusing the ideal of "concreteness" not simply with reference to tied imagery but in a general way. One says "at strategic points"

140. Lives of the Poets, i, 177.

because he is perfectly well aware in theory of the limitations of such an approach.¹⁴¹ One such strategic point is his critique of Milton, but the necessary comments on that have already been made with regard to Eliot's similar procedure.¹⁴² I will look instead at some of Dr. Leavis' analysis of Shelley's poetry. He comments at length on "When the lamp is shattered" and the final two stanzas receive the severest strictures:

When hearts have once mingled
Love first leaves the well-built nest;
The weak one is singled
To endure what it once possessed.
O Love! who bewailest
The frailty of all things here,
Why choose you the frailest
For your cradle, your home, and your bier?

Its passions will rock thee
As the storms rock the ravens on high;
Bright reason will mock thee,
Like the sun from a wintry sky.
From thy nest every rafter
Will rot, and thine eagle home
Leave thee naked to laughter,
When leaves fall and cold winds come.¹⁴³

141. See, for example, The Common Pursuit, pp.16-17.

142. *ibid.*, pp.19-20. For Eliot on Milton see above, pp.301-308.

143. Revaluation, p.217.

The first two stanzas, which lead into this, consist of a series of figurative illustrations of things dying when their container, so to speak, is broken — for instance, the first two lines of the poem :

When the lamp is shattered
The light in the dust lies dead.

The stanzas we have quoted elaborate this idea with regard to love; when the heart, which contains love, is broken, love dies.

Dr. Leavis professes puzzlement at the penultimate stanza:

It would be unpoetically literal to suggest that, since the weak one is singled, the truant must be the mate, and, besides, it would raise unnecessary difficulties. Perhaps the mate, the strong one, is what the weak one, deserted by Love, whose alliance made possession once possible, now has to endure?¹⁴⁴

He dismisses this last alternative as unlikely, and concludes that we are not being invited to respond to any "realization of the metaphors", but to react unthinkingly to the "sentimental commonplaces".¹⁴⁵ Dr. Leavis then concludes, having decided that there is no "realization" in the penultimate stanza, that "thee" in the first line of the last stanza is the poet himself, and that

144. Revaluation, p.219.

145. *ibid.*

Shelley is making "self-pity a luxury".¹⁴⁶

But the penultimate stanza does, as I read it, have a plain enough meaning, though it does not "realize" its objects in the way that Dr. Leavis demands. Two people fall in love. One of them is level-headed and can exercise emotional control ("the well-built nest"), and he, or she, stops loving before the other. The other is the "weak one", who is left alone, and for him, or her, love is now an unwelcome inmate of the heart, merely to be endured. The question is then asked; why love chooses to stay in such weak hearts, which will be unable to sustain him?

In the last stanza love, as the syntax obviously demands, is still being addressed. The weak heart, subject to wild fluctuations of emotion, will rock love about. Alternating with these fits of passion will be cynical mockery of love. Eventually, the weak heart will rot itself by these various excesses, and reasonable people, having observed the whole sequence of events, will conclude that love is a very silly sort of business. Throughout the poem "love" has the sense "romantic passion".

It is possible that "bright reason" belongs to the people who will also laugh at love at the close of the poem. On the other hand, it is possible that the final laughter will come from the weak one, reacting against his sentimental excess with an ensuing

146. Revaluation, p.221.

cynical excess. I think that the words, and the situation, can, in fact, comfortably bear both of these interpretations simultaneously.

The function of the metaphors here is not to achieve "realization", in the simple sense. Its function is that which is generally described in Richards' remark that "the poet's task is constantly...that of finding ways and means of controlling feeling through metaphor".¹⁴⁷ For instance, in,

Bright reason will mock thee
Like the sun from a wintry sky

one notes how "bright", introduced by the metaphor, brings in a certain tone. This tone can be best indicated by saying that "bright" in the sense of "clever" was used, at that time, "chiefly of one's inferiors or children"; and it may fairly be called ironical.¹⁴⁸ If "bright reason" refers to the weak one's own cynical reaction, the implication of childishness has an obvious relevance. If it belongs to mocking observers of the situation, then they are "inferior" because they are mocking, and not helping. The tone of irony modulates into a more strongly critical feeling as the metaphor leads up to the forceful word "rot", and this feeling moves, in turn, into the sharp threat of the last line.

147. I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism, London, 1929, p.223.

148. N.E.D., 8.

It may be that Dr. Leavis, in such analyses, is betraying the tendency which Richards saw in Hulme, and mistakenly demanding realization of the vehicle, rather than realisation of the whole metaphor.¹⁴⁹ This seems to be the case in some comments on Blake, at a point when Blake's "concreteness" is being favourably contrasted with Shelley's lack of it. Dr. Leavis says of the opening of "O Rose thou art sick": "The vocative establishes the Rose 'out there' before us, so that it belongs to the order of visible beings and we don't question that we see it".¹⁵⁰ Dr. Leavis himself notes that "see" can be misleading in a context like this, and insists that he is not guilty of the "visualist fallacy", but even so one feels inclined to insist that Blake is not talking about a real rose; the poem is metaphoric and the rose is the vehicle. The point may be re-inforced by noting that Dr. Leavis' claim is a surprisingly large one for the mere use of a vocative. The same can be said of his remark that "found out thy bed/Of crimson joy", is voluptuously factual in suggestion, and, in ways we needn't try and analyse, more than tactual - we feel ourselves 'bedding down' in the Rose, and there is also a suggestion of a secret heart ('found out'), the focus

149. See above, p.143.

150. "'Thought' and Emotional Quality", Scrutiny, xiii (1945-46), 69.

of life, down there at the core of the closely clustered and enclosing petals.¹⁵¹

If one devotes oneself so strenuously to "realizing" the actual rose, one has insufficient attention left for the tenor of the metaphor, and the evidence, of course, that the poem is more than a literal presentation of a rose is given by the poem itself. It would be a waste of time, for example, to try to "realize" the "invisible worm".

The role played by Dr. Leavis' views on poetic language in his estimate of Shelley is, I think, much the same as in the case of Milton. He has little sympathy with the poet's characteristic attitudes, and possesses convenient, but actually inapplicable critical principles which can be brought to bear to re-inforce the lack of sympathy.

I have already touched upon the other noticeable area in which Dr. Leavis, in my opinion, too simply applies the criterion of concreteness — Shakespeare's dramatic poetry.¹⁵² The process here is like that exhibited in the foregoing analysis of Blake. As we saw, it is, with regard to Shakespeare, only occasionally evident, and Dr. Leavis commonly talks of Shakespeare's poetry in terms of tone, feeling and intention. This is to be expected, since he frequently speaks in those terms when discussing poetry in

151. "'Thought' and Emotional Quality", Scrutiny, xiii (1945-46), 69.

152. See above, pp.249-255.

general. For example, one readily recalls his analyses of Donne.¹⁵³

However, Dr. Leavis' occasional tendency to talk as though a speech in a Shakespeare play is "concrete" in the way that, say, Keats' Ode to Autumn is concrete, is important because it gave powerful impetus to that sort of Shakespeare criticism which is practiced by L.C. Knights, or by Wilson Knight. For instance, Dr. Leavis says:

Shakespeare's marvellous faculty of intense local realisation is a faculty of realizing the whole locally.

A Shakespeare play, says Professor Wilson Knight, may be considered as 'an extended metaphor', and the phrase suggests with great felicity this almost inconceivably close and delicate organic wholeness.¹⁵⁴

A representative remark by L.C. Knights may be set alongside this.

He says of an image in Macbeth:

Previous images of darkness and torpor have helped to determine the way in which we receive the quoted passage when it comes,

and goes on to speak of the "larger pattern that lies behind the plot and the characters".¹⁵⁵ Newton, in a plea for a return to an emphasis upon the study of character in Shakespeare's plays, makes

153. Revaluation, pp.13-14.

154. *ibid.*, pp.60-61.

155. Some Shakespearean Themes, London, 1959, p.18.

a general condemnation of the study of Shakespeare's "themes".¹⁵⁶
 I have no objection to the study of themes. What is untenable, I think, is the view that the study of thematic imagery does greater justice to Shakespeare's poetry, than does the study of "character". As we have seen, the study of thematic imagery inevitably ignores a large part of the subtlety and power of Shakespeare's poetry.¹⁵⁷
 Any analysis of dramatic poetry, unless it is to place artificial restrictions upon itself, must quickly enter into questions of tone, feeling and intention in the language, and, in entering into them, it finds itself discussing "character". A real delicacy of response to Shakespeare's poetry is that which is exemplified in, for example, Dr. Johnson's account of Polonius.¹⁵⁸

IX.

I have argued that Dr. Leavis' views on poetic language contain a basic cluster of ideas which are similar to Richards',

156. J.M. Newton, "Scrutiny's Failure with Shakespeare", Cambridge Quarterly, i (1965-66), 144-177.

157. See above, pp.249-251.

158. See above, pp.252-255.

but that he shows biases in the particular application of them. These biases consist of too narrow a view of the "exploratory-creative" use of language, a tendency to over-emphasize disparity-action, and to apply too simply the principle of "concreteness". These biases are, as one would expect, largely related to certain emphases in the poetry and criticism of T.S. Eliot. They are most noticeable at strategic points where they conveniently re-inforce judgements which spring from Dr. Leavis' lack of sympathy with certain poets.

On the positive side, I am not claiming, of course, that Dr. Leavis is a great critic because he has a core of sound critical principles similar to Richards'. Such principles are worthless unless they are accompanied by a capacity for full response to poetry—a capacity which Dr. Leavis possesses to a rare degree. The role of analysis in such response is, as we have seen, well described by Dr. Leavis himself:

What we call analysis is, of course, a constructive or creative process. It is a more deliberate following through of that process of creation in response to the poet's words which reading is.¹⁵⁹

159. Education and the University, p.70.

The word "creation" here serves as a convenient reminder that Dr. Leavis' style of analysis, being concerned with complexity, is geared to the ideas of "realisation" and "self-realisation" which lie at the heart of his claims for the value of poetry; the analysis is in immediate touch with the wider interest. It is, I think, this effective and simple core of principles which, combining with his gift for vivid and delicate response to poetry, gives Dr. Leavis' criticism its characteristic energy and point.

CHAPTER 10

W. EMPSON: COMPLEXITY AND AMBIGUITY

I.

I wish to examine some aspects of Empson's criticism in the light of the two views which have been recurrent throughout my thesis: the view that modern analytical criticism has more in common with older criticism than is commonly supposed, and the view that modern criticism exaggerates certain features of poetic language, namely, those which come under the general head of "disparity", "contrast" or "irony". Both of these views can be readily illustrated from Seven Types of Ambiguity and my discussion of Empson is therefore brief. What follows does not, of course, pretend to be a complete estimate of Empson's critical achievement.

The chief points to be stressed are that Type I of Empson's seven types of ambiguity closely resembles Richards' notion of "interanimation" and, therefore, the doctrine of "propriety"; that it is different in kind from the other types; that it is the most important type; and that the remaining types, though they are the framework for much fine critical commentary, represent a characteristic bias.

The first of these points can be illustrated from the opening pages of Seven Types of Ambiguity. Empson defines "ambiguity" as what occurs when "a word or a grammatical structure is

effective in several ways at once", and goes on to give his well-known (notorious, one might say) commentary on the line "Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang":

the comparison holds for many reasons; because ruined monastery choirs are places in which to sing, because they involve sitting in a row, because they are made of wood, are carved into knots and so forth, because they used to be surrounded by a sheltering building crystallised out of the likeness of a forest, and coloured with stained glass and painting like flowers and leaves, because they are now abandoned by all but the grey walls coloured like the skies of winter, because the cold and Narcissistic charm suggested by the choir-boys suits well with Shakespeare's feeling for the object of the Sonnets, and for various sociological and historical reasons (the protestant destruction of monasteries; fear of puritanism), which it would be hard now to trace out in their proportions; these reasons, and many more relating the simile to its place in the Sonnet, must all combine to give the line its beauty, and there is a sort of ambiguity in not knowing which of them to hold most clearly in mind. Clearly this is involved in all such richness and heightening of effect, and the machinations of ambiguity are among the very roots of poetry.¹

1. Seven Types of Ambiguity, Third Edition (Revised), London, 1953, pp.2-3.

The bearings of this can be indicated by noting that it could be taken as an elaborate illustration of Richards' view that in "imaginative" metaphors there is a multiplicity of links between tenor and vehicle.² I have already discussed the ways in which Richards' idea of "inter inanimation" resembles the doctrine of "propriety" and do not need to illustrate in any detail the relation between the latter and Empson's first type of ambiguity.³ The general point might be made, however, that Empson in Seven Types of Ambiguity already shows signs of finding the spirit of eighteenth century analytical criticism congenial, as is indicated by his praise of Johnson, who, Empson says, thought "to a great extent rightly" that he possessed a "positive machinery" of analysis.⁴ Empson's liking, of course, comes out particularly strongly in his subsequent work on Milton, both in Some Versions of Pastoral and Milton's God, both of which show close familiarity with eighteenth century analysis of the verbal detail of Paradise Lost.⁵

My second and third points (that the first type of ambiguity is both radically different from and more important than the remaining

2. See above, p.92.

3. See above, p.204.

4. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.255.

5. Empson's chapter on Milton in Some Versions of Pastoral is, of course, acknowledged by Christopher Ricks as the cue for Ricks' own analysis of Milton's style in his Milton's Grand Style, Oxford, 1963, p.9.

types) have both been made by Empson himself, though neither, so far as I know, has been stressed as much as it ought to be.

Empson concedes the radical difference in a discussion with F.W. Bateson in Essays in Criticism. Pressed by Mr. Bateson about some of the details of his commentary on "bare ruined choirs", Empson remarks; "My First Type is meant to be different from the other ones".⁶ The difference is, that in the later types there are conflicts between the various implicit meanings, whereas in the first type there are only different "emphases" all of which are, so to speak, unidirectional.⁷

That the first type is the most important is explicitly noted by Empson. After the commentary on "bare ruined choirs", and the basic definition of ambiguity, which I have quoted above, he says; "Such a definition of the first type of ambiguity covers almost everything of literary importance". He adds that his chapter on the first type ought, therefore, to be his "longest and most illuminating", but immediately goes on to give reasons why this is not the case.⁸ The most important of these reasons is that it is very hard to be sure about the background meanings which Empson claims are enriching

6. "The Critical Forum", Essays in Criticism, iii (1953), 362.

7. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.48

8. *ibid.*, p.3.

"bare ruined choirs". This, of course, is true when analysis is as subtle and fertile as Empson's; and most of the adverse criticism levelled at Empson has tended chiefly to accuse him of, to use his own phrase, "spinning fancies out of his own mind".⁹ Indeed, he seems to have almost wilfully invited that sort of criticism, remarking in a rather casual way, near the end of Seven Types of Ambiguity:

I have, in fact, been as complete as I could in cases that seemed to deserve it, and considered whether each of the details was reasonable, not whether the result was reasonable as a whole.¹⁰

He has, that is, piled up possible meanings for words, phrases and sentences, without intending to claim that they could all be fitted into the total context. This, clearly, is an important reservation and it seems typical of Empson not to have helped the reader by giving it more prominence. Had Elder Olson noticed it, his attack on Empson's "method" would have had, to say the least, to be modified, since he accuses Empson precisely of piling up meanings in that way.¹¹

However, even when that reservation is allowed for, it remains true in general that analysis of the background of meaning which

9. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.49.

10. *ibid.*, p.244.

11. Elder Olson, "William Empson, Contemporary Criticism and Poetic Diction", Critics and Criticism, ed. R.S. Crane, Chicago, 1952, p.48.

may be felt, at any given point, to be giving the language of a poem its penetration and vitality, may easily squander itself in mere fancifulness. I would like here to iterate my own view, that analysis of this kind is valuable not because it can be definitive in particular instances, but because of its cumulative effects. Cumulatively it may develop in the reader a proper attentiveness to full and delicate uses of language; and it may be used to support a general judgement about a body of poetry. As an example of that last point I would take Johnson's claim that "harshness" is one of Shakespeare's characteristic defects. Johnson's analysis does not give conclusive proof in one example but points to significant features in a number of examples.¹²

One would not wish to be too cautious. Analysis can go further than Johnson was wont to take it, and still elicit the reader's full consent. This brief account of the nature of Empson's first type of ambiguity should close with what seems to me a characteristically impressive example. It is from Empson's commentary on the "propriety" of "Dust hath closed Helen's eye"—"propriety" in the sense of fullness of meaning brought out by inter-connections with the surrounding words. Empson quotes;

Beauty is but a flower
Which wrinkles will devour.
Brightness falls from the air.

12. See above, pp. 205-207.

Queens have died young and fair.
 Dust hath closed Helen's eye.
 I am sick, I must die.
 Lord, have mercy upon us.¹³

and, after an expanded account of the various possible meanings of "Brightness falls from the air", comments on "Dust hath closed Helen's eye":

One must think of Helen in part as an undecaying corpse or a statue; it is dust from outside which settles on her eyelids, and shows that it is long since they have been opened; only in the background, as a truth which could not otherwise be faced, is it suggested that the dust is generated from her own corruption. As a result of this ambiguity, the line imposes on brightness a further and more terrible comparison; on the one hand, it is the bright motes dancing in sunbeams, which fall and become dust which is dirty and infectious; on the other, the lightness, gaiety, and activity of humanity, which shall come to dust in the grave.¹⁴

This, I think, is the kind of criticism which genuinely sharpens one's reading of the poem. It is, in an important sense, primary criticism, in that it concerns itself with that without which other kinds of criticism can have no very useful existence. It helps to put the reader in full possession of the statements, and feelings,

13. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.25 (T. Nashe, Summer's Last Will and Testament, ll.1578-1584).

14. *ibid.*, p.27.

about decay and death, of which the poem consists, and in doing so it concentrates attention on what Johnson called "the force of poetry": "that force which calls new powers into being, which embodies sentiment, and animates matter".¹⁵

I think it is necessary, therefore, to disagree (as Empson himself does) with James Smith's limiting criticism of Empson's approach. Smith complains that Empson uses the word "ambiguity" ambiguously and continues:

Is the ambiguity referred to that of life - is it a bundle of diverse forces, bound together only by their co-existence? Or is it that of a literary device - of the allusion, conceit, or pun, in one of their more or less conscious forms? If the first, Mr. Empson's thesis is wholly mistaken; for a poem is not a mere fragment of life; it is a fragment that has been detached, considered, and judged by a mind. A poem is a noumenon rather than a phenomenon. If the second, then at least we can say that Mr. Empson's thesis is exaggerated.¹⁶

Ambiguity of Empson's first type does not involve (as do the remaining types) "a bundle of diverse forces". That is, it does not necessarily involve, either at a conscious or an unconscious level, "irony", "tension", "paradox", or whatever word of that

15. Rambler. (No. 168), Yale, v, 127.

16. Quoted by Empson in Seven Types of Ambiguity, Preface, p. xii. (James Smith, a review of Seven Types of Ambiguity, The Criterion, x(1930-31), 741.)

kind one chooses to employ. And it is much more than a matter of "allusion, conceit or pun". Miss Tuve once remarked that Empson's analytical method is an old one that has been "resuscitated after some four or five hundred years and given a new slant".¹⁷ I believe that, in its most important features, Empson's method is a refinement rather than a "new slant" and a refinement of a method which occupied a central role in English literary criticism as recently as the eighteenth century.

II.

My fourth point about Empson's approach in Seven Types of Ambiguity (that the last six types represent a bias) requires illustration at greater length than do my first three points.

In general, the later types owe much to Richards' concept of "irony". This is evident, for example, in Empson's remark that in Herbert's "The Sacrifice", "the contradictory impulses that are held in equilibrium by the doctrine of atonement may be seen in a luminous juxtaposition".¹⁸ This is the language of Richards'

17. R. Tuve, "On Herbert's 'Sacrifice'", Kenyon Review, xii (1950), p.74.

18. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.224; see above p.28.

Principles of Literary Criticism, and it is here particularly significant because Herbert's poem is a key instance of the seventh type of ambiguity, and the seventh type is the purest of the later types.¹⁹ The conflict between the possible meanings of a poem, or of a part of a poem, need not always be of that kind, but there is, in the later types, always conflict of some kind. This is made clear in Empson's definition of the fourth type:

An ambiguity of the fourth type occurs when two or more meanings of a statement do not agree among themselves, but combine to make clear a more complicated state of mind in the author. Evidently this is a vague enough definition which would cover much of the third type, and almost everything in the types which follow.²⁰

I shall argue that Empson, pressed by his own theory, tends to find conflict where none exists and, more importantly, that the nearer a poem approaches to his seventh type (the purest in the series) the less value it has as a poem. I shall do so by considering a key poem in the seventh type and a key poem in the fourth type, which, as we have just seen is defined in such a way as to cover almost everything in the book outside the first and second types.

It is sufficient to discuss these two examples, since they can, I think, be related to a general principle. I will outline this principle first, by referring again to James Smith's adverse

19. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.192 and p.224.

20. *ibid.*, p.133.

criticism of Empson's approach. The point with which I agree in Smith's critique is that a poem is a "noumenon" rather than a "phenomenon"; that it "has been detached, considered, and judged by a mind".²¹ Empson posits, in crucial instances, a degree of unawareness on the part of the poet, which would, I think, have prevented a successful poem from having been written at all.

The words "unawareness" and "successful" in that last sentence evidently present difficulties. I think these can best be handled here by using Richards' way of working out (insofar as it can, tentatively, be "worked out") the degree of "realisation" exhibited in a poem. As we have seen, "realisation" indicates, for Richards, both the poet's awareness of his experience and his success in putting it into words. Richards' "instrument" for probing these questions is the notion of "interanimation"; "realisation", on this view, is the system of inter-connections between the words of the poem.²² In plain terms, the poet by an unusually full use of language both grasps and presents his experience, instead of merely talking about it or pointing towards it.

As Richards notes, in any such idea as that of a system of inter-connected meanings, the idea of "unity" is also involved.²³

21. See above, p.426.

22. See above, pp.90-93.

23. I.A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, pp.75-76.

My general point is that Empson's approach naturally flouts the "unity" of a poem by introducing meanings which unbalance the system of inter-connected meanings which is the poem. I will try to press the point by looking at two cases where Empson is upsetting a system of meanings in the way I have suggested.

I will take first Hopkins' The Windhover, which is, for Empson, a particularly important case of Type VII, about which type, in general, Empson says:

An example of the seventh type of ambiguity, or at any rate of the last type of this series, as it is the most ambiguous that can be conceived, occurs when the two meanings of the word, the two values of the ambiguity, are the two opposite meanings defined by the context, so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the writer's mind.²⁴

Empson puts The Windhover in this category by claiming that Hopkins, without being aware of what he is doing, is juxtaposing two contradictory impulses: on the one hand, an impulse towards spiritual fulfillment; on the other, an impulse towards physical fulfillment.

In Empson's view, the crucial word in the poem is "buckle", which, he says, has two meanings:

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here

24. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.192. For the importance of Hopkins' poem in Empson's scheme, see p.224.

Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

Empson defines the two meanings as follows;

buckle like a military belt, for the discipline of
heroic action, and buckle like a bicycle wheel, 'make
useless, distorted, and incapable of its natural motion'.

This double meaning reflects, for Empson, the conflict of the whole
poem:

Confronted suddenly with the active physical beauty of
the bird, he [Hopkins] conceives it as the opposite of
his patient spiritual renunciation; the statements of
the poem appear to insist that his own life is superior,
but he cannot decisively judge between them, and holds
both with agony in his mind.²⁵

"Conceives", "judge" and "in his mind" are questionable, to say the
least, because Empson also wants to insist that Hopkins is unaware
of the second meaning of "buckle": "he would have denied with anger
that he had meant 'like a bicycle wheel', and then after much
conscientious self-torture would have suppressed the whole poem".²⁶
However, as I suggested above, it is better to examine the point in
terms of "realisation" and "unity", rather than to tackle directly
the question of "awareness". The important fact, I believe, is
that what Empson calls the second meaning of "buckle" is the

25. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.225. Empson quotes the poem
in full on this page.

26. *ibid.*, p.226, footnote.

primary and obvious meaning, because it is insisted upon by the context. This is most clear in "AND the fire that breaks from thee then", where the vehicle of the metaphor refers to something bending under pressure and emitting sparks —a metaphor, probably, from the forge. That is the system of meanings with which "buckle" is immediately connected. More widely, it is connected with the two final metaphors of the poem; the bending and sparking movement is repeated when the downward pressure on the ploughshare makes it shine, and when the falling of the embers makes them break and glow.

This repeated metaphoric effect grows from the central statement of the poem, which says that self-submission is both more exciting and more beautiful than self-assertion; and the closely inter-connected meanings that I have just roughly sketched are the "realisation" of that statement.

To return to the immediate context of "buckle", the sense "collapse", is also accentuated by the sound and movement of the lines, which closely connect "buckle" with "breaks". Further, it is easy to find a place for the other sense (as in buckling a belt); the poet's feeling for the "brute beauty" of the bird has to be gathered and concentrated before it can be collapsed. In this way the two meanings describe, in my view, that easily recognizable action of the mind by which one brings an impulse to clear definition and then deals with it.

Empson's interpretation destroys not only this coherent system of meanings, but almost everything else in the poem. It

cannot recognise, for instance, the consistent and clear tone in which Hopkins speaks about the bird. The tone is one in which delighted admiration is tempered by a critical note - a note which, to my mind, is particularly clear in such phrases as "brute beauty" and "air, pride, plume", and which has been introduced in the first line of the poem with the rather arresting word "minion". The bird is, after all, a brute, and the tone is that of a man who is in control of the implications of what he is saying. The control manifests itself in the exact and delicate reverberations between the words. "Air" has, for example, a double range of meaning. It refers, in the first place, to the free element in which the bird displays its beauty, and carries on, therefore, the sense of delight which the poet has so powerfully caught in the early part of the poem; but it also carries the meaning which appears in such phrases as "he gives himself airs". This latter sense is brought out by contact with "plume", which has a hint of the phrase "to plume oneself", as well as a reference to beautiful plumage. Further, it seems to me that the tone generated by these meanings is transmitted, by way of "minion" to "dauphin"; the "air, pride" and "plume" are those of the courtly hanger-on. Finally, that atmosphere surrounding the bird is contrasted with the images in which the bird is rejected; the forge, the ploughshare and the hearth all imply the opposite of courtly display.

Language functioning at this level of richness and precision is, surely, incompatible with the degree of unawareness, on the

poet's part, that Empson's interpretation requires. The more successful a poem is, the less can it exhibit that divisiveness of mind with which Empson is pre-occupied.

My second example of the way in which Empson exaggerates divisiveness of mind is his commentary on Donne's "A Valediction, of Weeping", which is a key poem in his fourth type. The conflict Empson sees in this poem is less acute than that he sees in "The Windhover", since the contradictory feelings here are not so diametrically opposed; but the two cases are broadly similar, since Donne's "feelings", like Hopkins', are said to be "painfully mixed".²⁷ The mixture is said to consist of the poet's grief at parting from the woman he loves, and his angry hostility because he thinks that the woman will be unfaithful to him when he has gone.²⁸

The kind of evidence given by Empson to enforce his assertion that the poet is suspicious of the woman, is typified by his comment on,

When a tear falls, that thou falst which it bore,
So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore.

Empson interprets this as saying:

These tears by falling show that you will fall who were
the cause of them. And therefore, because you will

27. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.145.

28. *ibid.*, p.139.

fall when we are separated, when we are separated we shall become nothing.²⁹

There is not, I think, any need to reproduce all of Empson's evidence; the important point is that his interpretation distorts the main system of meanings which constitutes the poem. The case, in this respect too, is similar to his treatment of The Windhover.

It is, I think, most apparent in the final lines of the poem that Empson has gone astray:

Since thou and I sigh one another's breath,
Whoe'er sighs most, is cruellest, and hasts the other's death.

Empson comments:

In itself the notion is a beautiful one, 'our sympathy is so perfect that any expression of sorrow will give more pain to the other party than relief to its owner, so we ought to be trying to cheer each other up', but to say this is to abandon the honest luxuriance of sorrow with which they have been enlivening their parting, to try to forget feeling in a bright, argumentative, hearty quaintness (the good characters in Dickens make the orphan girl smile through her tears in this way); the language itself has become flattened and explanatory: so that he almost seems to be feeling for his hat.³⁰

Empson has to insist on this description of the tone and feeling of these lines, since he is claiming that the poet is still feeling

29. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.141.

30. *ibid.*, pp.144-145.

hostile to the woman. Empson, in the revised edition of the book, does concede that these final lines may imply "that they may choose to do each other less harm than they could" and that the poet "therefore seems to have cured himself of some of the earlier suspicions"; but he still believes "that all this analysis is correct".³¹ It seems to me to be incorrect. Empson gives no indication how a "beautiful" idea can generate the feeling that his desire to find conflict in the poem compels him to impose here. And it is particularly difficult to see any evidence that the poet is "feeling for his hat", since the power of the lines springs largely from the fact that the lovers are embracing. The effect here is typical of Donne, in that it gives new life to a "witty" commonplace; the idea is that "the unifying power of our love has made us one, therefore when you sigh, you are sighing my breath"; but the immediate dramatic point is that, as is stated in the final stanza, they are in one another's arms, so that they are literally sighing one another's breath. The effect is something that Donne has been working for throughout the poem. The first stanza begins with, "Let me powre forth/My tears before thy face"; the second says, "my tears mixed with thine do overflow/This world"; and the third, "Weep me not dead, in thine armes". The feeling of physical closeness thus produced is made to "pay off" in the closing lines of the poem, when it is united with the idea of ~~an~~ interchange of souls; the

31. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.145, footnote.

extraordinary success of the poem, to my mind, is that one momentarily feels that the idea that they have become each other is literally true.

If there is any conflict of the kind that Empson insists on, it is, at most, a minor element in the earlier part of the poem. Empson's own final remark seems, in fact, to half concede the point:

But perhaps I am libelling this masterpiece; all one can say is that its passion exhausts itself; it achieves at the end the sense of reality he was looking for, and some calm of mind.³²

In view of the rather trivializing remark about Dickens' orphan-girls, and the claim that the poet is "feeling for his hat", "libelling" seems the correct word. The important point, however, is that Empson, as in the case of The Windhover, is imposing upon the poem a conflict which breaks up the delicate system of meanings which constitutes the poem. It is, to my mind, not possible to have, at the close of the poem, both the feelings of tender intimacy, for which Donne is so clearly working, and the feeling of merely conventional reassurance which Empson tries to impose; the two feelings are, surely, mutually exclusive.

My general conclusion is that where Empson tries to trace, in a successful poem, an ambiguity of the kind exemplified in his

32. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.145.

commentary on the two poems discussed above, his attempt either breaks down or destroys the poem; in the case of "The Windhover" the poem is destroyed; in the case of "A Valediction, of Weeping", Empson seems to half confess that his attempt has broken down. The conclusion can be applied to Empson's general comment on the problem that his method raises with regard to the idea of a poem's unity:

all the subsidiary meanings must be relevant, because anything (phrase, sentence, or poem) meant to be considered as a unit must be unitary, must stand for a single order of the mind. In complicated situations this unity is threatened; you are thinking of several things, or one thing as it is shown by several things, or one thing in several ways. A sort of unity may be given by the knowledge of a scheme on which all the things occur; so that the scheme itself becomes the one thing which is being considered.³³

Hence, as I understand it, Empson's view that "The Windhover", for example, embodies an unresolved and unperceived conflict in the poet, is the "scheme" which incorporates all the meanings which Empson finds in the poem. I have already argued that a poem, insofar as it is "realised", cannot exhibit conflict of that kind; to put the point in terms of Empson's remarks about unity one may say that the poet himself, and not merely the reader, must be in possession of the "scheme", if a proper unity is to subsist.

33. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.234.

That this is the case is indicated, I think, by the poem with which Empson deals immediately after "The Windhover" - Herbert's "The Sacrifice". This poem, Empson remarks, deals with "the various sets of conflicts in the Christian doctrine of the Sacrifice", but the conflicting ideas,

are no longer thought of as contradictory by the author, or if so, then only from a stylistic point of view; he has no doubt that they can be reconciled, and that he is stating their reconciliation.³⁴

For this reason, Empson says, "the poem is outside the 'conflict' theory of poetry".³⁵ Herbert, that is, is himself aware of the "scheme", and the poem, to use James Smith's words, is a "noumenon" rather than a "phenomenon". I believe that this will always be the case; the more a poem is "realised", the less will it exhibit conflict of the kind to which Empson's approach commits him. Exactly what kind of "awareness" of his experience the poet has, may be disputable, and it probably varies a good deal from case to case; but it seems that a successful attempt to put an experience into words inevitably involves "awareness" in a real and important sense of the word.

34. Seven Types of Ambiguity, p.224.

35. ibid., p.227.

III.

In my prefatory remarks about the critics I have been discussing I spoke, on the one hand, of a common core of literary principles and, on the other, of distinctive features. I have stressed the distinctive features of the criticism of Eliot, Empson and Leavis, and particularly examined these features at points where they may be felt to be somewhat unsatisfactory. With regard to Johnson, and the other eighteenth century critics whom I have briefly mentioned, I have stressed the common core. Further, my account of Richards occupied itself chiefly with his notion of interanimation and neglected his notion of "irony".³⁶ Needless to say, it is the latter term which has had much the wider currency in modern criticism.

I hope that this has not seemed an unjust procedure. I have not wished to suggest that the eighteenth century critics are without their own bias, nor, of course, that the bias of the modern critics has been merely a "mistake". It would have been easy to expose the weaknesses of eighteenth century criticism and equally easy to have examined points at which the bias of modern criticism has been fruitful. With regard to that last point, I have not even touched upon the work of such American critics as Brooks, Tate or Blackmur.

I have refrained from dwelling on the bias of the eighteenth century critics and have expressed reservations about the bias of the modern critics in order to bring out the centrality of the common ground occupied by both groups.

36. See above, pp.75-76.

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