Ideas of Poetic Form

Aspects of the Romantic-Symbolist Tradition

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Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of

Master of Arts of Rhodes University

February 2016

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Acknowledgements

My greatest debt and gratitude is naturally to the poets and critics who are the subject of this work.
Thanks are due to my adviser for his patience and to my father for his generous support.
Rhodes University gave this work no financial assistance.

Abstract

The subject of the work is some of the formal and technical developments of modern poetry in the Romantic-Symbolist tradition. These developments were stimulated partly by the ideas of the non-intellectual Symbol inherited from the Romantics and the idea that poetry could be a musical medium inherited from some of the French Symbolists. Their combined influence led to a number of technical problems in the structuring of imagery and the handling of syntax. The work begins, therefore, by tracing the philosophical assumptions behind the ideas of the Symbol and of the musical analogy. I then go on to examine two of the difficulties that these ideas produced. One is the tension between the analogical structure of a poem's imagery and its metaphorical texture: quite simply, the more compressed and complex a poet's metaphors become, the more they tend to disrupt the poem's structure of imagery. The other problem is obscurity, which is caused by insufficient objectification of private images in a symbolic structure, and by fused metaphor, which is essentially a metaphor with an obscured ground of resemblance. Finally, I show how these difficulties were solved by poets outside the tradition who used a more articulate kind of syntax, yet who also managed to combine that syntax with the ideal of symbolic form. The implicit argument, then, is that the Romantic-Symbolist ideas of form, and the New Critics' theories of form which were largely based on them, are able to elucidate an essentially different kind of poetry, and thus have some degree of truth and use beyond the tradition that generated them.

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Introduction

The Place of Formal Criticism

It was generally recognized by the 1950s that what we have come to call Modernist poetry was in many ways a development of the Romantic-Symbolist tradition: the tradition running principally from Blake and Shelley to Yeats, with Coleridge at the philosophical helm, and branching out into Stevens, Hart Crane, Dylan Thomas, and others. Two of the ideas that shaped the forms of that tradition were (appropriately enough) the idea of the Romantic Symbol and the idea idolized by certain French Symbolists that poetry could be made as pure a medium as music. However, those ideas also caused a number of technical difficulties in the handling of syntax and the structuring of imagery, which were partly responsible for some of the notorious difficulty and occasional obscurity of modernist poetry. The history of those ideas, the nature of the difficulties they produced, and the way in which those difficulties were solved by later modern poets is the subject of the following work.

The Romantic Symbol also had an important influence on the theories of the so-called New Critics, whose main concern was of course with the formal and technical aspects of poetry, though this supposedly narrow focus gave the group an unfavourable reputation after the decline of its academic prominence. And since this unfavourable and often mistaken reputation may linger on in certain quarters, and since our concern here will also largely be with form and technique, I ought to begin by briefly setting the New Criticism within its historical and theoretical context. One hardly needs to point out that criticism has always been concerned with form and technique, with rhetoric in the broad sense, and that the New Criticism was not a "formalist" school but simply the full development of that level or domain of criticism. One of the reasons that it developed alongside Modernism was the rhetorical difficulty of much of the poetry; and the method of elucidating that difficulty was naturally the close analysis of technique and form. The New Critics were often attacked for this closeness, however, because it was said to insulate the work from its social or historical context. But the contentions of that controversy are of no importance here. What the controversy signified, from our point of view, was a recognition that the rhetorical focus lacked a sense of its place in literary criticism as a whole—though the New Critics themselves were quite aware of this, and cannot fairly be blamed, moreover, for failing to know their place in a subject that was yet to receive a theoretical grounding. Hence by the middle

of the century Allen Tate, for one, had begun to wonder whether literary criticism was possible without a total rhetoric or a systematic philosophy.[1] Efforts to construct such a rhetoric had already been amply performed by Kenneth Burke, and the attempt to turn criticism into philosophy has occupied much of the Theory of the last half-century. But literary criticism is neither rhetoric nor philosophy, though it partakes of elements of both.

The predicament of criticism in 1950 was recognized most insightfully, in my view, by R. P. Blackmur.[2] He compared it to the impasse which he suggested ancient philosophy had reached after the gradual disintegration of the poetic, dialectical, and rhetorical modes of thought. Greek philosophy in general—Plato's *Phaedrus* in particular—displays the modes at a high level of integration; but a couple of centuries later, in Cicero, dialectic has been swallowed up by rhetoric, and by the time we reach Quintillian rhetoric has become the maid-of-all-work. The result of this presumed "omnicompetence" in the absence of a co-ordinated body of knowledge Blackmur believed to be the decline of method into methodology: thus rhetoric dwindles into the taxonomy of tropes, and poetics confines itself to prosody. (For comparison, it may be noted that Paul Ricoeur and Tzvetan Todorov later identified the same decline and attributed it chiefly to the false conception of the figure as a deviation from normal speech.[3]) Blackmur thought the same disintegration had occurred in modern thought, resulting in the limited rhetorical focus of the New Critics. The solution he proposed was a synthesis of Aristotle and Coleridge, a poetic that would combine both a theory of the objective work—one which went beyond the New-Critical apparatus designed primarily for the short poem—and a theory of the imagination. It wouldn't be adequate to say that Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* was that synthesis, for its achievement goes well beyond that, but it may be classified as an Aristotelian summa of Romantic-Symbolist criticism.

Frye distinguished rhetorical criticism into the biographical and technical kinds, according to whether the critic's interest is more in the author or in the work. Both kinds, he argued, concern themselves with value-judgements, the one of personality, the other of craft and style—judgements which Frye rather negatively believed to be based on taste, fashion, or social attitude—changeable things.[4] Frye was right, I believe, in arguing that the attempt to *prove* a value-judgement is futile, and that no criticism founded on value-judgements can make a progressive contribution to scholarship or the theory of criticism. But to claim that such judgements can only

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[1] "Is Literary Criticism Possible?" *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago, Ill.: Swallow, 1968), pp. 30–44.
[2] "The Lion and the Honeycomb," *The Lion and the Honeycomb* (London: Methuen, 1956), pp. 176–97.
[3] See Ricoeur's *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. R. Czerny et al (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), Ch. 2 and Todorov's *Theories of the Symbol*, trans. C. Porter (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), Chs. 2 and 3.
[4] See *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1957), pp. 20–29 and "On Value-Judgements," *The Stubborn Structure* (London: Methuen, 1970), pp. 66–73; and for incidental discussion *Fables of Identity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), pp. 8–9, 43–44, 128.

produce "one more document in the history of taste" is largely to assert a rhetoric of one's own. Frye under-rated the powers of sensibility and intelligence, and it is from the exercise of those powers that the more durable value-judgements come. Sensibility is certainly affected by taste to some extent, but it at least attempts to see what is *there*, so far as it can; whereas taste, in the sense of personal preference rather than cultivated discrimination, is mainly concerned with whether or not a work is to its liking. And no doubt the sort of criticism that operates on that level tends to sink into the tides of history fairly quickly. Frye's position on value-judgements was calculated to free all the potential values of past culture from all the prejudice and ignorance that prevents us from seeing them, and his immense possession of the literature and culture of the West testifies to a scope and knowledge which it would be no exaggeration to call visionary.

Criticism based on taste is shaped by the present and has little need of scholarship; but without scholarship, as Blackmur noted, it is impossible to do justice to any literature except that of the age preceding one's own.[5] And it was for that reason that Frye put more faith in scholarly criticism. There is no need to rake up the old debate here about the relation between scholar and critic, as I take it to be generally established now that the relationship is complementary: knowledge about literature, to some extent in its own time and place, naturally requiring *possession* of it as a living power, here and now. And it was righting the balance between the two, after the dominance of historical criticism in the universities, that was one of the New Critics' motives. As Lionel Trilling pointed out in a remarkably circumspect essay, their aim was to restore the literary work to its status "as the agent of power rather than as the object of knowledge."[6] One of the limits of the program, Frye argued, was its lack of a theoretical foundation, which he proposed to be the theory of genre and of archetypal themes—important parts of poetic structure to which he made substantial theoretical contributions. Frye's theory adopts, of course, an archetypal point of view, which by its nature can never get very involved in the details of any single work. Furthermore, his purpose in the *Anatomy* was expressly theoretical, so he cannot be criticized for failing to do what he did not intend. But, generally speaking, to give little attention to the executive and formal techniques of poetry, whether on the verbal, syntactic, or symbolic levels, is to ignore practically everything in which the art of poetry, and the quality of the particular poem, consists. And it is partly with a poet's form and technique that any criticism sensitive to literary quality must be concerned; for its interest is not in the typical but the individual. It should also be remarked, perhaps, in the aftermath of Theory's assault on the values of practical discrimination, that the ability to elucidate a poet's peculiar quality is a rare and difficult skill—and one too subtle, perhaps, for the conceptual abstraction and systematic rigour of theory. And the fact is

[5] "Notes on Four Categories in Criticism," *The Lion and the Honeycomb*, p. 218.
[6] "The Sense of the Past," *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Viking, 1950), p. 178.

that many of the most perceptive practical critics in the language are those associated with that now long-defunct spectre, the New Criticism. One incidental aim of this study is to pass on some of these critics' insights into form and technique, and to suggest how those insights might be framed within the context of the Romantic-Symbolist tradition.

Now, to suggest that the New Critics—or the Modernists for that matter—were influenced by Romanticism at all may still strike some readers as odd, for were not the poets and critics alike expressly opposed to Romanticism? Hulme, Eliot, and Tate certainly were; Yeats, Pound, and Stevens had little to do with their polemic. And so far as the polemic was aimed at Romanticism's decadent vices—vague emotion, intellectual confusion, and stale convention—it had some validity. But it also bred some prejudice towards Romantic poetry, and it was only in the 1950s that scholars and critics began to see through the polemical bias to the Romantic inheritance. And in the technical sphere, as Frank Kermode showed, that inheritance was chiefly the idea of the Romantic Image, the organic whole which contains a truth inaccessible to the discursive intellect. (The terms Romantic Image and Romantic Symbol are largely interchangeable. I opt for the latter here because it is more customarily and appropriately used to denote an image invested with an intellectual or spiritual meaning; for by image we usually mean something more purely descriptive.) It was the idea of a non-intellectual truth, together with the *symboliste* idolization of poetry's musical properties, that caused some of the formal and technical difficulties I have mentioned. And when those ideas were combined with a highly compressed metaphorical technique, which was most controlled in Stevens and most licentious in Crane and Thomas, a fair bit of extravagance and obscurity was the result. The root of both ideas may be traced to a confusion which appears in the Romantic tradition whenever its philosophical premises become oversimplified; and one such simplification was the error of assuming a division between intuitive and discursive thought. The natural inference is that the different kinds of thought correspond to different kinds of language (an inference not entirely false but not wholly true either), and thus the way is opened to thinking discourse unsuitable for the expression of intuitive thought or feeling. The technical difficulties which that assumption produced were best solved within the tradition by Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens, but solutions were also offered by poets outside the tradition, such as Marianne Moore, Auden, and Charles Tomlinson, who started from essentially different technical and philosophical assumptions. What we find, however, is that the idea of the Romantic Symbol nonetheless shapes and elucidates the forms of some of this more discursive poetry.

Much of the following work, then, is what Pound called excernment, "the general ordering and weeding out of what has actually been performed."[7] So for those already familiar with the tradition, I can only hope to have provided a new if very partial synthesis. Some of it is an attempt at a common pursuit. Ultimately it is an effort to pass on the fruits of a tradition, one which I believe has lasting value, but which recent vogues and tendencies seem to have sidelined.

[7] "Date Line," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p. 75.

2

Romantic-Symbolist Poetics

Some Divisions and Confusions

The Romantic Symbol, as conceived by thinkers like Schelling, Coleridge, and Hegel, is usually formulated as an incarnation of either the general in the particular, the universal in the concrete, or the eternal in the temporal; in short, in Yeats's beautiful phrase, as a "transparent lamp about a spiritual flame."[1] Unlike the symbol of allegory, which merely represents an idea, the Romantic Symbol *presents* it in a sensuous fusion of image and meaning. It is what we find in Yeats's:

> Labour is blossoming or dancing where
> The body is not bruised to pleasure soul . . .

In Crane's:

> The imaged Word, it is, that holds
> Hushed willows anchored in its glow. . . .

And in Thomas's:

> The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
> Drives my green age, that blasts the roots of trees
> Is my destroyer. . . .

And when this form of expression is expanded analogically into the formal principle of an entire poem, the product is the organic whole, the poem itself as a complete Symbol or verbal icon, as it has also been called it (though, as I hope to show later, symbolic and iconic forms of poetry are in fact distinct). Geoffrey Hill's "In Piam Memoriam" is a powerful example:

> I
>
> Created purely from glass the saint stands,
> Exposing his gifted quite empty hands
> Like a conjurer about to begin,
> A righteous man begging of righteous men.
>
> II
>
> In the sun lily-and-gold-coloured,
> Filtering the cruder light, he has endured,
> A feature for our regard; and will keep;
> Of worldly purity the stained archetype.

[1] "William Blake and his Illustrations to the *Divine Comedy*," *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 116.

III

The scummed pond twitches. The great holly-tree,
Emptied and shut, blows clear of wasting snow,
The common, puddled substance: beneath,
Like a revealed mineral, a new earth.

The idea of a divine presence—eternal yet frangible, pure and yet stained—enduring through all the destruction and generation of nature is so embodied in the images themselves, without any explicit articulation of their relations, that it attains an absolute formal unity. It is difficult to see how any form of language other than a rival poem could better present the idea. There is an organic relation of parts to whole, an integrity of meaning, which, even though it could be paraphrased, is unlikely to be equalled in expository or discursive language.

The idea of organic form was part of the whole organic analogy between art and nature that developed during the later eighteenth century, the history of which may be traced in detail in M. H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp*. The important point to be noted here is that, when the mechanistic theory of composition as an imitation according to classical models and technical rules was gradually replaced by the theory of natural genius, writers like Edward Young in England and the Schlegels and Schelling in Germany put forward the idea of unconscious workings to explain it. This was generally understood to be either the traditional divine afflatus or a more instinctual force, but in both cases it was a power the poet was given and not something under his conscious control. Herbert Read's exposition of the idea remains the concisest I know:

> the romantic principle asserts that form is an organic event, proceeding from the intuitive experience of the artist. . . . Such a spontaneously emergent *form* must be sharply distinguished from a superinduced *shape*. A shape is something pre-existent, belonging to the realm of existence, and essence can be only deformed by being forced into such a ready-made container. Our practical faculties, that is to say, cannot consciously predetermine the form that will fitly express an intuitive experience. Form belongs to the realm of essence and is abstracted from it by the mediating genius of the artist—genius, in this sense, being not the artist himself, but an unconscious power which he possesses (or which possesses him) and which enables him for a moment to identify himself with the formative energy of the universe . . . [2]

Now, so far as the highest poetry reveals an apparently innate gift for the perfect rhythm and the immortal phrase and so forth, the principle of organic form is simply another name for creative genius and is not a specially Romantic concept. The danger with the naive or vulgar notion of it, as Pater intimated long ago in his essay on Coleridge,[3] is that it seems to license all sorts of irrational attitudes towards poetic composition: automatism, expressionism, or spontaneous overflows of incompetence and sentiment. It may happen that a poem comes to a poet's pen fully

[2] *The True Voice of Feeling* (London: Faber & Faber, 1953), pp. 16–17.
[3] *Appreciations* (1889; repr. London: Macmillan, 1924), pp. 64–106.

formed, as Coleridge claimed "Kubla Kahn" did; but on the whole what we find when we study poets' drafts is a long labour of visions and revisions.

The natural corollary of the ideas of the Symbol and unconscious genius is the belief that poetic truth is imaginative and can be grasped only by intuition; for if the creative process is unconscious (or at least partly unconscious), and if the truth of the Symbol cannot be analysed or paraphrased, then the reader can only participate in the poem—as one participates in a ritual—by suspending the "machinery" of the discursive intellect. In other words, imaginative language can be grasped only when, in Coleridge's famous phrase, the whole soul of man is brought into activity, or when a wider consciousness is awakened, be it Yeats's Great Memory, or Jung's collective unconscious, or the Platonic realm of Ideas. As L. C. Knights said, "it is essentially an inward process in which we can only hope for understanding to the extent that our own experience—at different levels of consciousness—is brought to a focus in the symbolic structure."[4] But it is a Romantic superstition to believe that reason or intellect—the two are often confused—plays no part in this process, either in the writing or in the reading of poetry. Irving Babbitt sought to diagnose its sources in his *New Laokoon*, which in his view was the Romantic theory of spontaneity and the pseudo-mystical confusion of the spiritual and the instinctual. Thus, instead of pursuing an insight yielded by intellectual clarity and discipline of the will (true mysticism, for Babbitt), the Romantic longs for a childlike unity of instinct and emotion undivided by intellect, which he therefore renounces in favour of spontaneous impulse and feeling. Such generalizations about Romanticism are notoriously risky, so it must be stressed that this merely identifies a *weakness* of Romantic thought. It is given typical expression in Wordsworth's

> Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things;
> —We murder to dissect.

It may be deemed uncharitable to take the letter rather than the spirit here, but the fundamental belief cannot be ignored. And we will find the same implicit belief in some of the modern Romantic-Symbolists. We also find it in some of D. H. Lawrence's works; indeed, the tension between intellect and instinct is the major theme of *St Mawr*, where Lawrence's sympathies are clearly with the more instinctive, intuitive characters. But again, this is merely a weakness of Romanticism, and not a characteristic of the whole tradition.

My tenor here is not to suggest that poets have no business with the intuitive or subconscious parts of the psyche—or with the supernatural realm for that matter. Blake claimed quite seriously

[4] "Idea and Symbol: Some Hints from Coleridge," *Metaphor and Symbol*, ed. Knights & B. Cottle (London: Butterworth, 1960), p. 140.

that *Jerusalem* was dictated to him, and we know that Yeats claimed the same for *A Vision*. We also know that James Merrill used a ouija board to channel the voices of various people in the writing of his *Divine Comedies*. And perhaps the less inspired of us have something to learn from these techniques. But when the blind belief in the inviolability of spontaneous impulse or divine inspiration produces work unintelligible to all but the initiated, then poetry may be losing its way in spectral vapours. There are genuine difficulties in religious poetry, the difficulties of expressing feelings and meanings on the threshold of what language can express; but these are not necessarily an excuse for obscure or incoherent language. Yvor Winters led a fairly zealous attack on this sort of thing, and I think his criticism of the vices it sows was and remains valuable. But to banish all irrational feeling from art—which need not be *un*-rational feeling and may only be feeling that reason cannot "explain"—is to risk losing great riches of sensibility. For as Stevens wrote, with characteristic eloquence:

> You can compose poetry in whatever form you like. . . . It is not that nobody cares. It matters immensely. The slightest sound matters. The most momentary rhythm matters. . . . You have somehow to know the sound that is the exact sound; and you do in fact know, without knowing how. Your knowledge is irrational. In that sense life is mysterious; and if it is mysterious at all, I suppose that it is cosmically mysterious. . . . There is, in short, an unwritten rhetoric that is always changing and to which the poet must always be turning. That is the book in which he learns that the desire for literature is the desire for life.[5]

The division between reason and imagination is generally more pronounced in Romantic criticism than in the poets themselves, but of the poets it was Blake who gave it its most forceful expression. What Blake was opposed to was the disembodied *intellect*, the abstract mathematical conception of reason encouraged by the success of mechanistic science—though some confusion might stem from the fact that Blake's sense of the word intellectual, as in his definition of "the Most Sublime Poetry" as "Allegory addressed to the Intellectual powers," is associated with the imaginative and creative faculties. Another potential source of confusion is that his statement of the conflict between the faculties in "There is no Natural Religion" is somewhat blunter than his representation of it in, say, *The First Book of Urizen*, which isn't surprising given that Blake was a poet and not a philosopher (or not in form at least). And it is Blake's more cryptic aphorisms and annotations, taken outside the context of his imaginative vision, that are liable to be misinterpreted. Frye's study of Blake is particularly helpful in explaining some of these weightier oracles, such as "Mental Things are alone Real" or "Science is the Tree of Death," which on their own have a rather peremptory sapience. Shelley's contrast between reason and imagination in his *Defence of Poetry* is similar to Blake's, reason being conceived in mathematical, and imagina-

[5] "The Irrational Element in Poetry," *Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Kermode & J. Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997), pp. 789–90.

tion in organic, terms, though his view of their relation is subtler, and his demonstration of rational thought in the *Defence* far more cogent than any definition can be. But for a fully philosophical conception of reason we have to turn to Coleridge. Coleridge's theory of the faculties is essentially adopted from Kant, except that he inverts Kant's subordination of Reason to Understanding so as to synthesize his idealism with his Christian faith. Thus speculative Reason is the spiritual power capable of recognizing ideal truths, and Understanding is the discursive faculty that forms judgements in accordance with its authority. The difference between them Coleridge famously illustrated as the difference between Plato and Aristotle:

> Aristotle was . . . and still is, the sovereign lord of the understanding; the faculty judging by the senses. He was a conceptualist, and never could raise himself into that higher state which was natural to Plato, and has been so to others, in which the understanding is distinctly contemplated, and, as it were, looked down upon from the throne of actual ideas, or living, inborn, essential truths.[6]

It is true, of course, that Coleridge thought Imagination the essentially *creative* power, but he did not believe that Reason constricted it.

The division between reason and imagination is often aligned with another division that runs very deep in Western philosophy, the division between intuitive and discursive thought. It appears in Bergson, Kant, Pascal, and Descartes and has its roots in Plato—and probably even further back, as Ernst Cassirer has argued, in the mythic substrata of the mind. In Plato's *Republic* different levels of reality are linked to different states of cognition, such that the object of belief is appearances and the object of knowledge the Idea. The Ideas can be represented in a mathematical form, but Plato thought that direct acquaintance with them could only be attained in a kind of mystical vision. Kant's division between phenomena and noumena is not quite the same, for Kant's noumenon is unknowable, but the Platonic schema remained in the background of his aesthetics; and that is what underlies the Symbolist doctrine that the apprehension of the poetic idea transcends the limits of conceptual or intellectual thought. The aesthetic Idea Kant defined as "that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought, i.e. *concept*, being adequate to it."[7] And something like this definition seems to be behind Coleridge's statement that "An Idea, in the *highest* sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*."[8] And this, as we have seen, is one of the central doctrines of the Romantic-Symbolist poetic.

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[6] *Select Poetry and Prose*, ed. S. Potter (London: Nonesuch, 1933), p. 491.
[7] *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911), pp. 175–6.
[8] *Biographia Literaria*, ed. G. Watson (London: Dent, 1965), p. 85.

The distinction between intuitive and discursive thought is, I believe, valid: they are two distinct kinds of cognition. Cassirer has given a thorough description of the difference, so I shall quote it in full:

> The aim of theoretical thinking . . . is primarily to deliver the contents of sensory or intuitive experience from the isolation in which they originally occur. It causes these contents to transcend their narrow limits, combines them with others, compares them, and concatenates them in a definite order, in an all-inclusive context. It proceeds "discursively," in that it treats the immediate content only as a point of departure, from which it can run the whole gamut of impressions in various directions, until these impressions are fitted together into one unified conception, one closed system. In this system there are no more isolated points; all its members are reciprocally related, refer to one another, illumine and explain each other. Thus every separate event is ensnared, as it were, by invisible threads of thought, that bind it to the whole.

In mythic and intuitive thought, on the other hand ("language" here meaning language in its primitive mythopoeic state):

> things are not taken for what they mean indirectly, but for their immediate appearance; they are taken as pure presentations, and embodied in the imagination. . . . Only when this intense individuation has been consummated, when the immediate intuition has been focused and, one might say, reduced to a single point, does the mythic or linguistic form emerge . . . And this peculiar genesis determines the type of intellectual content that is common to language and myth; for where the process of apprehension aims not at an expansion, extension, universalizing of the content, but rather at its highest intensification, this fact cannot fail to influence human consciousness. All other things are lost to a mind thus enthralled; only the present reality, as mythic or linguistic conception stresses and shapes it, fills the entire subjective realm. . . . At this point, the word which denotes that thought content is not a mere conventional symbol, but is merged with its object in an indissoluble unity. The conscious experience is not merely wedded to the word, but is consumed by it. Whatever has been fixed by a name, henceforth is not only real, but is Reality. The potential between "symbol" and "meaning" is resolved; in place of a more or less adequate "expression," we find a relation of identity, of complete congruence between "image" and "object," between the name and the thing.[9]

Cassirer's emphasis here on the *origin* of mythical ideas might give a somewhat misleading impression of mythical ideation; for it is often held, of course, that the power of myths and archetypes lies in their universality. The difference is simply that unlike the scientific universal, the abstract entity or law in the form of a general theory, the myth is present only *in* the particular story, the archetype present only *in* the concrete symbol, the meaning of which, again, can only be known intuitively. The trouble with making this distinction abstractly is that in the actual workings of thought the intuitive and discursive powers are often inextricably entwined. One cannot even perform the simplest logical inferences, for instance, without grasping each step in the process intuitively. As Susanne Langer pointed out, "Anyone who, convinced that all men are mortal and even granting that Socrates is a man, still does not recognize that *therefore* Socrates

[9] *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer (1946; repr. New York: Dover, 1953), pp. 32, 56–8.

is mortal, is devoid of logical understanding because he does not respond with normal intuition at each station of the discourse."[10] And naturally thought more broadly conceived involves more than only logical operations. So there is a *distinction* between the two powers, but not a division—a confusion which, according to Coleridge, is "the source of superstition and idolatry."[11]

However, the distinction was assumed to be a division by many modern poets and critics, most famously by T. E. Hulme. Hulme's theory of poetic language is based on the central division of Bergson's philosophy, which splits the world into the discontinuous orders of matter and life, and splits the mind into the corresponding faculties of intellect and intuition. The intellect works by analysis: it tries to explain or literally *unfold* its thought, and thus can understand the world only as an "extensive manifold," as a system of relations spread out in conceptual space. But whenever the intellect encounters anything in the "intensive" realm, it is unable to represent it according to its schemes. And so, as Hulme put it, "to deal with the intensive you must use intuition."[12] This division then becomes the basis of Hulme's antithesis between poetry and prose, so that prose is merely a shuffling of abstract counters, as in algebra, while poetry is the discovery of precise epithets and metaphors for the "exact curve"—the fresh, vivid feeling or perception. (Philip Wheelwright's opposition between "tensive" and "steno-language" is a variety of the same division.) There is a basic truth here which should not be ignored, however simplistic Hulme's semantics may be, since genuine poetry does break through, or was simply never trammelled by, stock feelings and stale perceptions. One limitation of Hulme's theory, as many critics have pointed out, is the belief that this fresh perception is always visual. But the more important idea for the practice of the wilder modern Romantics, whether they came by it in Hulme or through their own assumptions, was the division between intellect and intuition.

There is a similar dichotomy in Frye's theory between the "centripetal" tendency of literature and the "centrifugal" tendency of discourse, the first of which aims to construct a verbal pattern or autonomous structure, the second to correspond with a conceptual scheme or objective phenomena.[13] The distinction, Frye adds, is based on the "*final* direction of meaning," and in broad terms I think it does capture the different tendencies of the two kinds of language: literature contains its own meaning, whereas discourse is always pointing beyond itself—though naturally literature also aims to "correspond" in some sense, and discourse has its own principles of construction independent of the "nature" of the world. The distinction serves its theoretical purpose. And Frye thought that the centripetal tendency of literature was illustrated most clearly

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[10] *Feeling and Form* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 378–9.
[11] "Aids to Reflection: Aphorism XXVI," *Select Poetry and Prose*, pp. 452–3.
[12] "Romanticism and Classicism," *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. K. Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), p. 72.
[13] See *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 73–81.

in the *symboliste* poem, since *symbolisme* regards poetry more as a literal pattern of words than as a descriptive medium; and hence, he says, "the immediate impact *symbolisme* makes on the reader is that of incantation, a harmony of sounds and the sense of a growing richness of meaning unlimited by denotation."[14] And that statement very accurately describes the effect of Symbolist poetry at its most evocative. There is a classic example of this in *Ash Wednesday*:

> If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
> If the unheard, spoken
> Word is unspoken, unheard;
> Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
> The Word without a word, the Word within
> The world and for the world;
> And the light shone in the darkness and
> Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
> About the centre of the silent Word.

The idea of the Word has obvious associations with the religious Logos: there is Mallarmé's "intellectual word at its utmost . . . drawing to itself all the correspondences of the universe, the supreme Music,"[15] and the "entire word" of which Yeats speaks, "the signature or symbol of a mood of the divine imagination."[16] And this idea has ancient links with primitive word-magic and the mythic conception of language. Indeed, Cassirer's central thesis in *Language and Myth* is that for the mythic consciousness, "the name does not merely denote but actually *is* the essence of its object, that the potency of the real thing is contained in the name."[17] And the sacramental conception of language is essentially an extension of that notion—except that it is not the object's essence or power that the word contains, but the Word that the poem evokes. The source of the idea in Romantic criticism is Edgar Allan Poe, who held that the Poetic Sentiment, or supernal Beauty, which he believed all poetry seeks to express, could never be represented but only evoked.[18] Poe associated this Beauty with the "suggestive indefiniteness" of music, but it has never been clear what he meant by that. But what the musical ideal came to mean, as developed by the French Symbolists, was the self-enclosed poem, the poem without reference to a world outside itself, or anything other than the feeling that composes it, which, as in music, is the feeling that the composition expresses. One problem with this ideal is that it tends to purge poetry of any "impurities," such as descriptive content or discursive language—anything that might tie the poem to a reality beyond itself. And this produces what Tate defined as

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[14] *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 81.
[15] Quoted by Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (New York: Dutton, 1899), p. 136.
[16] "The Autumn of the Body," *Essays and Introductions*, p. 193.
[17] *Language and Myth*, p. 3.
[18] "The Poetic Principle," *Essays and Reviews*, ed. G. R. Thompson (New York: Library of America, 1984), pp. 71–94.

that idolatrous dissolution of language from the grammar of a possible world, which results from the belief that language can create a reality: a superstition that comes down in French from Lautréamont, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé to the Surrealists, and in English to Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, and Dylan Thomas.[19]

It was to this dissolution that Crane and Thomas sometimes succumbed.

Here is Crane's "Lachrymae Christi," for example, a poem that displays a fascination with the musical properties of language at the expense of any cogent meaning:

> Whitely, while benzine
> Rinsings from the moon
> Dissolve all but the windows of the mills
> (Inside the sure machinery
> Is still
> And curdled only where a sill
> Sluices its one unyielding smile)
>
> Immaculate venom binds
> The fox's teeth, and swart
> Thorns freshen on the year's
> First blood. From flanks unfended,
> Twanged red perfidies of spring
> Are trillion on the hill. . . .

It is possible to gain an intuitive "feel" for this poem after long acquaintance with Crane's sensibility and idiom. But even at a glance we notice that one motif of the verse is a complex association of alliterative and assonantal sounds which drives the poetry on almost independently of any meaning (though the images here, however weird, are in fact very precisely described). One might hazard an interpretation by noting that the title alludes to both the Neapolitan wine and the tears that Christ shed when Lucifer, traditionally symbolized by a fox, was banished from heaven—tears which fell to Earth and imbued the vines that grew on Vesuvius with divine inspiration (tears, as Blackmur noted, being Crane's "vehicle-image of insight"[20]). And in a similar way, when Dionysus was torn apart, a pomegranate-tree grew from the soil where his blood had fallen. And perhaps this is what the "twanged red perfidies of spring" refer to. But it is all highly conjectural. Crane is expressing the feeling of mystical insight and a sense of vague threat or evil—that much is palpable. But what all these images mean, even within the context of the whole poem, is hard to say. These kinds of obscurities arise partly from the attempt to turn those properties of language merely *analogous* to music into the very substance of a different medium. They are the result, fundamentally, of a distorted conception of the nature of language.

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[19] "The Angelic Imagination," *Essays of Four Decades*, p. 406.
[20] "New Thresholds, New Anatomies," *Language as Gesture* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), p. 312.

Corresponding distortions sometimes arise in Symbolist criticism, and for a similar reason, which is that the critics try to make a single formal analogy account for the formal qualities of an entire work. G. Wilson Knight was of course the first modern critic to approach Shakespeare's plays as complete symbolic patterns existing in a continuous space-time, believing this to be the best way to interpret the creative spirit of the work. He noted that chess masters can visualize extensive patterns of moves without intellectually working them out; and he also noted the well-known report that "Mozart saw, or heard, a complete work as a single whole before setting it down in the time-sequence of composition," and added that "it is reasonable to suppose that *King Lear* was created in some such fashion."[21] And of that I have no doubt. But the spatial analogy does have its limitations: it is excellent on *The Tempest*, for instance, in which the imagery does form a complete symbolic pattern, but not so good on *Measure for Measure*, in which plot and character are far more important. Empson criticized similar distortions in R. P. Warren's interpretation of "The Ancient Mariner" which arose for the same reason—concentration on the symbolism at the expense of the plot.[22] These are simply the shortcomings of a partial analogy, which need to be guarded against whatever one's "method" or approach. As Frye pointed out in several places:

> . . . all arts possess both a temporal and a spatial aspect, whichever takes the lead when they are presented. The score of a symphony may be studied all at once, as a spread-out pattern: a painting may be studied as the track of an intricate dance of the eye. Works of literature also move in time like music and spread out in images like painting. . . . We *listen to* the poem as it moves from beginning to end, but as soon as the whole of it is in our minds at once we "see" what it means.[23]

Naturally whether the critic should give more attention to the spatial or temporal aspect, to imagery and theme rather than narrative and plot, will depend on the character of the particular work. This would seem an elementary point, but some critics of Symbolism have considered the spatial analogy erroneous.

Kermode, for instance, denied that literary comprehension is "spatial" at all.[24] There is no difference, he argued, between the act of grasping a sentence and the act of grasping the larger structures of fiction: in both cases the meaning is understood sequentially. And that is certainly true of the apprehension of narrative. But it is important to remember the differences between literary forms here, because it is relatively easy to memorize a short poem, perhaps even possible for an actor to "hold" a whole play in mind, but impossible to "see" an entire novel in your head; and it is the comprehension of large forms like the novel that is the hardest process to

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[21] *The Christian Renaissance* (1933; rev. ed. London: Methuen, 1962), p. 11.
[22] See Warren's "A Poem of Pure Imagination," *The Kenyon Review* 8:3 (1946), pp. 391–427 and Empson's "The Ancient Mariner: An Answer to Warren," *The Kenyon Review*, New Series, 15:1 (1993), pp. 155–77.
[23] *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 77.
[24] "A Reply to Joseph Frank," *Critical Inquiry* 4:3 (1978), pp. 579–88.

discuss. Certainly, as Kermode says, it is unlikely that anyone has attained a "unified spatial apprehension" of *Ulysses*. But one still gains a *sense* of the whole as one reads and a general view of a novel's total form—of its thematic shape. Our understanding of the theme happens throughout the story at the crucial knots, though one doesn't actually sketch thematic developments into little diagrams at such points, as Kermode would have it. However, there is a simultaneous comprehension—"simultaneous" relative to the sequential apprehension of narrative—of various strands of meaning, though it is difficult to convey this intuitive comprehension in language because as soon as you do so, you begin to recollect your own discursive allegory of the story and enter the temporal sequence of analysis or commentary—an act which has substantial differences from the process of grasping the work in the act of reading.[25] And at those crucial points in a story one's comprehension occurs in something *like* a spatial way: those flashes of intuition happen so quickly that for the purposes of discussion it is enough to say that one "sees" the whole; we do not require scientific precision from the concept. Criticism is partly an art, and I suspect as much time would be spent in trying to establish a standard "scientific" vocabulary for the subject as there would be in finding words adequate to the task at hand. And in the end the critic has to respond creatively to the individual work.

The burden of this little excursus is simply to indicate that theoretical analogies serve a purpose but may always be stretched too far. Blackmur's conception of all the arts as expressions of "gesture," for example, is clearly a bit strained when applied to architecture (not that this theory ever got in the way of Blackmur's extraordinarily subtle mind). And on the other hand Anthony Hecht's recent analogy between the proportions of the sonnet and certain Renaissance buildings sheds an interesting light on the structure of that particular verse-form.[26] Theories and analogies may lead us towards a valid conception of form, but the poetic form itself can only be perceived as the absolute thing it is, as the *claritas* of Stephen Daedalus's aesthetics or the inscape of Hopkins'. Crane described the experience of this perception with much insight:

> It may not be possible to say that there is, strictly speaking, any "absolute" experience. But it seems evident that [a] certain aesthetic experience (and this may for a time engross the total faculties of the spectator) can be called absolute, inasmuch as it approximates a formally convincing statement of a conception or apprehension of life that gains our unquestioning assent, and under the conditions of which our imagination is unable to suggest a further detail consistent with the design of the aesthetic whole.[27]

Or as Coleridge put it a century earlier, in distinguishing the agreeable from the beautiful:

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[25] This is all explained at greater length by Frye in "Myth, Fiction, and Displacement," *Fables of Identity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), pp. 21–38 and "The Road of Excess," *The Stubborn Structure*, pp. 160–74.
[26] See *On the Laws of the Poetic Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1995).
[27] "General Aims and Theories" (1925), *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. L. Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), p. 162.

> The sense of beauty subsists in simultaneous intuition of the relation of parts, each to each, and of all to a whole: exciting an immediate and absolute complacency, without intervenence, therefore, of any interest, sensual or intellectual.[28]

And it is in those poems in which the parts are so organically integrated as to become a single unity that we feel an idea or emotion or experience has achieved its absolute form. To say that the subject so formed can only be perceived directly is not to slip into a Symbolist dogma; it is only to recognize that there are forms of thought and feeling that the discursive intellect cannot *contain*. The heresy of paraphrase, as Cleanth Brooks rather solemnly called it, is simply a defence of the poem's aesthetic wholeness against the partial analyses of the discursive intellect; for the poem *as a whole* always means more—or means something more exactly—than any analysis or elucidation of it can do. If the commentary could say it better, then the poem would have no reason for being. And by the same token, anyone who comes to know a poem, after however much study of criticism, feels that they have come to know the poem itself more and more truly. Indeed, this knowledge is one of the ends of criticism—to lead the mind into the full possession of the work, into the "peculiar completeness of response" that Leavis desired.[29] Completeness of response *in action* is intuitive comprehension. And this is a distinct kind of knowledge from historical or philosophical or technical knowledge about a work.

The intention of the next chapter is to provide some technical knowledge about some of the structures and difficulties of symbolic form.

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[28] *Select Poetry and Prose*, p. 313.
[29] "Literary Criticism and Philosophy" (1937), *The Common Pursuit* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 213.

3

Structure and Metaphor

Some Sources of Tension and Obscurity

The idea of the poem as a microcosm is an ancient one, but it was Frye who demonstrated that the worlds of many Romantic poets are organized by a structure or system (Blake and Yeats both use the latter word). The organizing principle of these systems is analogy, and at their most organized, as in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and Yeats's later poetry, they are easy to represent as schemas or diagrams, which is indeed how they are represented in some of the commentaries on those works. One reason for this, Frye suggested, is that poetic thought organizes its imagery schematically (though, to be strict, we should say symbolic thought).[1] The idea of poets walking around with schemes of images in their heads might seem a little forced, though Yeats's *Vision* clearly demonstrates the schematic form a poet's symbolism may take when elaborated. But however the images and symbols are organized in the mind, their structure is clearly discernible on the page. And it is in those poets whose imaginations are most organized that we find intellectual order and clarity of vision, qualities that in the less disciplined poets of this tradition are somewhat deficient. As Tate profoundly understood, in the midst of complication the modern romantic "falls back on the intensity of consciousness, rather than the clarity, for his center of vision."[2]

One source of the tension and confusion in some of Crane's and Thomas's poetry is the conflict between their intense visions and feelings, as expressed through their condensed or intricate metaphors, and their efforts to construct an imaginative order. It produces what Cleanth Brooks defined as paradox: "'The poet must work by analogies," he says, "but the metaphors do not lie in the same plane or fit neatly edge to edge. There is a continual tilting of the planes; necessary overlappings, discrepancies, contradictions."[3] Brooks here equates analogy and metaphor, as they generally are equated, and for most purposes unproblematically. But what I wish to show is that analogy and metaphor are in certain cases distinct aspects of a symbolic form, and that the paradoxes and discrepancies one sometimes finds in Crane and Thomas lie between the analogical structure of the poem's imagery and the texture of metaphors that complicate or convolute it. It is a tension between the analogical *relations* that structure the imagery and the *resemblances* between

[1] "The Keys to the Gates," *The Stubborn Structure*, pp. 175–99.
[2] "Hart Crane," *Essays of Four Decades*, p. 321.
[3] *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947; repr. London: Methuen, 1968), p. 6.

the representational content of the images.[4] And ideally, in this particular symbolic form, the Romantic-Symbolist aims to achieve a unity in which the analogical structure and the texture of imagery are proportionate.

Every poet's imagination is naturally organized in its own way, but, as several scholars have shown, the same structure may be found in a great deal of poetry from the Middle Ages down to the eighteenth century. That structure is the world-picture of medieval cosmology, and it has been given thorough expositions in Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture* and C. S. Lewis's *The Discarded Image*, so I shall merely sketch the principles of its architecture here. And those are the principles of analogy, sympathy, and contiguity, which Sir James Frazer identified as the three laws of magic and which Michel Foucault regarded as three of the four similitudes of the medieval world (the fourth being what he called *aemulatio*, i.e. correspondence).[5] Sympathy is the principle that relates the Four Humours to the Four Elements, the melancholic humour, for instance, being a mixture of coldness and dryness. Each personality also has its associated metal, which by the same principle is paired with one of the zodiacal signs (hence *saturnine*: cold and leaden in temperament). And analogy and contiguity are the structural principles in the Great Chain of Being, where analogy arranges the correspondences between the different orders of things, and contiguity forges the links between them. Thus, as the celestial and terrestrial realms have a natural order crowned by the sun, so the body politic has an order of classes ruled by the king, and so the mind has a natural order which ought to be ruled by reason. Disorder in mind or state is like a storm or earthquake; and so on. Finally, the law of contiguity asserts that all things are part of a single graduated scale, in which each order of nature participates to some degree in all the others—the natural in the vegetable, the vegetable in man, man in the angelic, and the angelic in God. And thus we have a hierarchy of Being, or for the poet levels of imagery, linked by analogy into a microcosm of the world.

The symbolic imagination has the same fundamental structure, and so it too culminates in a supreme Idea of total analogy, or the potential identity of all things. Richard Wilbur once remarked on the "natural disposition of the poetic mind to assert that all things are one" and added that "if anything may be compared to anything else, the ground of the comparison is likely to be divine."[6] Frye puts the same idea in mythological terms: "The world of mythical imagery is usually represented by the conception of heaven or Paradise in religion . . . a world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside

[4] A distinction I owe to Stephen J. Brown, *The World of Imagery* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), pp. 66–73.
[5] See *The Golden Bough*, abr. ed. (London: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 14–16 and *The Order of Things*, Engl. trans. (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 17–30.
[6] *Conversations with Richard Wilbur*, ed. W. Butts (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1990), p. 25.

a single infinite body."[7] When the symbolic imagination endeavours to create such a body, it enters the realm of mythopoeia. The clearest example is *Paradise Lost*, which draws its myth and its symbolism directly from the Bible. The structure of Blake's cosmos, by contrast, has an equally biblical background, but the symbolism is largely of his own invention. And whether a poet makes use of traditional symbolism or invents his own is largely a matter of temperament, mode, and convention. There is a similar structure of imagery in both, but each poet's body of imagery is naturally distinctive. For as Tate said:

> the poet . . . has got to do his work with the body of this world, whatever that body may look like to him, in his time and place—the whirling atoms, the body of a beautiful woman, or a deformed body, or the body of Christ, or even the body of death. If the poet is able to put into this moving body, or to find in it, a coherent chain of analogies, he will inform an intuitive act with symbolism; his will be in one degree or another the symbolic imagination.[8]

It is beyond the scope of this work to examine the structure of any poet's whole imagination. All I wish to illustrate here is the structure of a symbolic form, and the failure to achieve it, in two particular poems. A nearly perfect example of the form is James Merrill's "Upon a Second Marriage":

> Orchards, we linger here because
> Women we love stand propped in your green prisons,
> Obedient to such justly bending laws
> Each one longs to take root,
> Lives to confess whatever season's
> Pride of blossom or endeavor's fruit
> May to her rustling boughs have risen.
>
> Then autumn reddens the whole mind.
> No more, she vows, the dazzle of a year
> Shall woo her from your bare cage of loud wind,
> Promise the ring and run
> To burn the altar, reappear
> With apple blossoms for the credulous one.
> Orchards, we wonder that we linger here!
>
> Orchards we planted, trees we shook
> To learn what you were bearing, say we stayed
> Because one winter dusk we half-mistook
> Frost on a bleakened bough
> For blossoms, and were half-afraid
> To miss the old persuasion, should we go,
> And spring did come, and discourse made

[7] *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 136.
[8] "The Symbolic Imagination," *Essays of Four Decades*, p. 428.

Enough of weddings to us all
That, loving her for whom the whole world grows
Fragrant and white, we linger to recall
As down aisles of cut trees
How a tall trunk's cross-section shows
Concentric rings, those many marriages
That life on each live thing bestows.

The central analogy here is clearly between the seasonal cycle and the women's retreat from and return to love, each phase of love being associated with a different part of the apple trees. The women are first imprisoned in them, proud in their independent summery ripeness, which gradually falls into a precious barrenness. The change in their resignation is beautiful symbolized when the speakers metaphorically, and with an almost magically regenerative effect, "half-mistake" the colour on the boughs, the white frost becoming once again the white and fragrant blossoms. White connotes marriage of course, and the aisles and rings of the trees condense the ideas of the natural cycle and marriage into a single symbol. It is all a gentle concerto of imagery, metaphor, and analogy.

If we compare this with Thomas's "Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines," we find a poem that fails to unify its analogical structure and its texture of imagery. Thomas begins by developing a relatively coherent analogy between the cosmos and the human body, but as the poem proceeds his metaphors gradually twist and warp that structure and lead the poem into confusion and obscurity (though the obscurity is in some respects excused by the metaphysical difficulties of the poem's idea).

Light breaks where no sun shines;
Where no sea runs, the waters of the heart
Push in their tides;
And, broken ghosts with glow-worms in their heads,
The things of light
File through the flesh where no flesh decks the bones.

A candle in the thighs
Warms youth and seed and burns the seeds of age;
Where no seed stirs,
The fruit of man unwrinkles in the stars,
Bright as a fig;
Where no wax is, the candle shows its hairs.

The first stanza sets up the paradoxical motif of the whole poem—that where something's source is not, its substance or product is. Thomas is invoking a sense of the spiritual world behind or within the visible (*broken ghost* is Thomas's term for a spirit or a soul) and also intro-

ducing the analogy between the body and the world ("Where no sea runs, the waters of the heart . . ."). Now there seems to be an extension of this analogy in the second stanza, given that the *things of light* have an apparent relation to the *candle*, i.e. the phallus; souls have to start somewhere, after all, and presumably they begin as *seeds*. But the logic becomes tricky with the next metaphor, "Where no seed stirs, / The fruit of man unwrinkles in the stars." For the natural resemblance that comes to mind here is that between scattered seeds and stars, but in fact that is not the identification that the metaphor makes: "Where *no seed stirs*, / The fruit of man unwrinkles in the stars." Again, we have the metaphysical paradox, but at the same time we are forced to wonder what exactly Thomas is saying here; for if the *fruit of man* is not his seed, then what *unwrinkles* (to be quite explicit) must be his scrotum, which would seem to be confirmed by the image of the *fig*. On the conceptual or spiritual level, the image suggests that the realm of death, where no seed stirs, and the point of procreation—which (again to be quite explicit) must be interpreted here as the point of ejaculation, after which the fruit unwrinkles—are somehow linked. That "makes sense" according to the paradoxical logic of the poem: where the source is not, its fruit is. But in that case the *seeds* and the *stars* are not identified. So why is "in the stars" there? Was Thomas simply clinching the rhyme? Or are we meant to imagine a scrotum superimposed onto the night sky? Now I am aware that what I am doing in pushing this image perhaps further than it was meant to go is getting myself tangled up in confusions between the idea and the image, the spirit and the letter. But what I am trying to illustrate is that the tension between the poem's literal and metaphorical dimensions produces a serious conflict between conception and imagination. For if we stick with the spiritual meaning—to illustrate further—then the last image has the bathos of a literal statement without any spiritual implication: yes, where no wax is, the candle quite literally shows its hairs. If we are to interpret this consistently according to the metaphor of the opening line ("A candle in the thighs"), then what the final line means is that where there is no flesh on the phallus, there remains presumably only the veins and the nerves, which is an utterly grotesque and inappropriate image. But again, we might be charitable and ask, Has Thomas perhaps changed tack and now identified the *wax* with the *flesh?* For if the "things of light" (here interpreted to be *seeds*) "file through the flesh," then perhaps they are what burn the *candle*; and thus what Thomas really means is that where no wax or flesh is, there is only a skeleton. But do we really have any grounds for thinking that? I think not. And especially not if we follow the poem's own logic.

Fortunately we will not have to repeat such a painful Empsonian sort of analysis again, for the problem has been illustrated, and so the same difficulties in later stanzas may be more briefly pointed out. The poem continues:

Dawn breaks behind the eyes;
From poles of skull and toe the windy blood
Slides like a sea;
Nor fenced, nor staked, the gushers of the sky
Spout to the rod
Divining in a smile the oil of tears.

Here we see Thomas attempting to develop the poem's original metaphor, the association between the *sea* and the *waters of the heart*, into a larger analogy. But in trying to determine its logic we find that it involves us in the same confusions; for the blood that was identified with the sea is now *windy*. It is possible that by *windy* Thomas means blown *by* the wind, in which case we may imagine a sea of windblown blood. But then what are the *gushers of the sky?* On the grounds of *gush*, one can only presume that they are streaks of cloud, mirroring, as it were, the slides or perhaps spindrift of the windy sea-blood. But again, there is nothing else to confirm that reading. And then what is the *rod?* If by some mysterious logic it is the *candle* of the previous stanza, then Thomas is merely rehashing the sexual idea in different images. I don't know what else it could be, other than a foreign ecclesiastical symbol suddenly forced into the world of the poem. And what in the end does it all mean? There is no discernible spiritual meaning here. We have a vague suggestion of anointment and a sexual innuendo, but the meaning is ultimately obscure.

The following stanza confuses matters even more; for while in the previous stanza Thomas identified the body with the Earth, the planet is now identified with eyeballs through a pun on *globes*, and with the joints of the body through a strained pun on *sockets*:

Night in the sockets rounds,
Like some pitch moon, the limit of the globes;
Day lights the bone;
Where no cold is, the skinning gales unpin
The winter's robes;
The film of spring is hanging from the lids.

Possibly what Thomas means by the first image is that without a spiritual "light," the eyes are unable to perceive spiritual meanings. But then we are forced to take "Day lights the bone" literally, which means imagining a body with eyes at all of its joints—another bizarre image. And the imagery only gets more bizarre; for if the globes are indeed planets, then are we meant to actually visualize an eyeball floating in space with frosty icicles hanging off its "eyelid"? If not, then again, the last line has the bathos of a literal statement without any spiritual significance; it is merely a functional completion of a confused metaphor. We also notice that the continuity of the logic is beginning to break down: What is the connexion between "Day lights the bone" and "Where no cold is"? It is night-time, yes, which is colder than day, and it is possible that Thomas

is picking up the summery association of "fruit" in the second stanza in order to vaguely suggest that the seasonal cycle is somehow related to this confused cosmic metabolism. But the more likely explanation is that Thomas knew he had to somehow finish the poem, and so fished for the nearest variation on the metaphysical paradox so as to give the poem a superficial unity. Thomas tries to resolve it all in the final stanza, but without success:

> Light breaks on secret lots,
> On tips of thought where thoughts smell in the rain;
> When logics die,
> The secret of the soil grows through the eye,
> And blood jumps in the sun;
> Above the waste allotments the dawn halts.

I will spare the reader another tangle. All that needs to be said in conclusion is that the tension between the individual metaphors and the poem's larger but very sketchy analogical structure has created a confusion in which the conceptual paradox that the images are forced to represent voids them of imaginable content or makes them so literal as to be meaningless. The result is a general sense of a mysterious relation between the creative and destructive powers of the universe conveyed through a series of confused images linked by a tenuous metaphorical logic. The general problem has been well described by Christine Brooke-Rose:

> He has himself described his technique of contradicting one "image" by another, and he does in fact frequently destroy his own metaphors, producing a literal/metaphoric/symbolic ambiguity all his own. . . .
>
> It is not so much a sacramental view as a shattered sacramental view: once A is not B, but a symbol for B, it can be a symbol for anything, so that in the extreme one finds oneself in a whirl of meanings, a fragmentary world in which nothing is what it seems, or even what one wants it to be, nothing stays still and every contact, even of thought and object, of word and word, changes things in a chain reaction, like atomic radiation. Each word in Thomas changes the previous word and the next. Absolute reality does not exist, or absolute change: the individual vision has taken complete control, and, as in all revolts against absolutism, has set off a chain of more and more revolts against the first revolt, until the original vision is fragmented into small particles, each whirling around madly on its own. This is an exaggerated version of Thomas' poetry, which at its best is remarkably integrated, but the danger is inherent in it.[9]

In short, the lack of structure in some of Thomas's poetry inclines his metaphors to slip into catechresis.

This metaphorical tension is related to a similar problem for the poet, which Auden and Day Lewis defined as the conflict between denotation and connotation: "between, that is to say, an asceticism tending to kill language by stripping words of all association and a hedonism tending to kill language by dissipating their sense under a multiplicity of associations."[10] Some critics have

[9] *A Grammar of Metaphor* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1958), pp. 320–21.
[10] Preface to *Oxford Poetry 1927*; repr. in *Oxford Poetry 100 Years* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 18–19.

applied this idea to the historical fluctuations of poetic technique, the Elizabethans being more connotative and metaphorical, the Augustans more literal and denotative, and the Romantics once again more metaphorical. And as a general statement that is probably true enough. But more specifically we may say that the poet like Crane, who tends to indulge his interest in connotation, risks licentiousness and obscurity; or, if he uses it effectively, gains richness of implication.[11] And that the poet like Winters—or the later Winters, at least—who believes that the conceptual content of a word determines its connotatory feeling, risks poverty of suggestion and emotional resonance; or, if we value the effect, as Donald Davie does, achieves metaphorical economy and purity of diction.[12] Naturally there are limits in both directions, limits set by decorum, convention, and the nature of language. I suppose some such limits are what Coleridge had in mind when he wondered

> whether or not too great definiteness of terms in any language may not consume too much of the vital and idea-creating force in distinct, clear, full-made images, and so prevent originality. For original might be distinguished from positive thought.[13]

The vitality and originality of Crane's and Thomas's poetry lies largely in their metaphorical flair, which tends to concentrate their meaning into the image, though not always into a clear and distinct image. The reason is that fecund or rank imagery tends to breed incoherence and obscurity, and this may happen either because the poet lets his connotations run wild, or because the poem's imagery lacks a structure, which stabilizes the more reckless impulses of metaphor, or because the poet puts too much faith in his imagery's power to declare its own meaning. Many of the German Romantics distinguished between allegory and symbolism on the grounds that it is just this lack of descriptive reference, this gap between language and what it represents, that constitutes true symbolism: "it partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible," as Coleridge put it.[14] And the belief that there is a natural or divine order of things which certain patterns of imagery can reveal is another central Romantic creed. To quote Coleridge again:

> Man's mind is the very focus of the rays of intellect which are scattered throughout the images of nature. Now so to place these images, totalized, and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit from, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflexions to which they approximate, to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature—this is the mystery of the genius in the Fine Arts.[15]

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[11] See Crane's "Letter to Harriet Monroe," *Collected Poems & Selected Letters*, pp. 165–9 for his justification of his interest in "the so-called illogical impingements" of connotations. See also Gregory R. Zeck's "The Logic of Metaphor: 'At Melville's Tomb'," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 17:3 (1975), pp. 673–86 for an analysis of some of Crane's confusions.

[12] See *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, repr. together with *Articulate Energy* (London: Penguin, 1992).

[13] *Select Poetry and Prose*, p. 159.

[14] *The Statesman's Manual*, p. 37.

[15] "On Poesy or Art," quoted by Read, *The True Voice of Feeling*, p. 177.

Shakespeare is often praised for the naturalness of his imagery, and there is a genuine mystery about a poet who appears to be able to simply *see* such an order in nature. But for those Romantic-Symbolists whose imagination is not so naturally endowed, a structure must be borrowed or built; and if the construction of the imagery is flawed or fails to quite complete itself, then the meaning of the poet's symbolism might remain obscure. One cause of this kind of obscurity is private symbolism—or more exactly private imagery, since it is only within a relatively objective structure, whether it be the poet's own universe or the symbolism of a larger literary or religious tradition, that an image can become symbolic. Another cause is fused metaphor, which so closely identifies its two terms that it eclipses the ground of their resemblance and thus obscures their meaning.

An example of both kinds of obscurity combined may be found in Crane's "Repose of Rivers," a poem in which Crane recalls and reconciles himself to his sexual-poetic initiation.

> The willows carried a slow sound,
> A sarabande the wind mowed on the mead.
> I could never remember
> That seething, steady levelling of the marshes
> Till age had brought me to the sea.

R. W. B. Lewis discovered that these images derive from a passage in *Moby Dick*,[16] but Crane had made them integral parts of his own symbolic world. The willows, as in "Voyages VI," are Crane's symbol for a mystic or gnostic threshold; the wind, as traditionally and in the companion poem "Passage," is the symbol of his afflatus; and the sea is his symbol of poetic and sexual fulfilment. The poem resembles a little allegory in its depiction of the passage from innocence to experience; the difficulty is that unlike allegory, which usually indicates the ideas that it represents, one cannot be certain to what inner experience Crane's symbols correspond. He simply presents them, so that the imagery completely fuses with the theme. And so in the next stanza the meaning turns a little murky:

> Flags, weeds. And remembrance of steep alcoves
> Where cypresses shared the noon's
> Tyranny; they drew me into hades almost.
> And mammoth turtles climbing sulphur dreams
> Yielded, while sun-silt rippled them
> Asunder . . .

As various scholars have noted, these images were borrowed from Melville's *Encantadas*, and they fit the landscape of the poem. But as Winters observed, "these details imply human experiences

[16] See *The Poetry of Hart Crane* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1967), pp. 211–15.

symbolized, and the human experiences can only be vaguely guessed."[17] Even Harold Bloom, Crane's chief enthusiast, can only reveal that the turtles are engaged in an "infernal love-death" while climbing "dreams of self-immolation"[18]—a gloss which tells us little more than the lines themselves. The most we can say is that there is the suggestion of an intensely passionate and perhaps traumatic experience. Indeed that may have been all that Crane intended us to know; but it means that the poem leaves us with more of a surface than a substantial meaning.

So the danger with fused metaphor is that the terms eclipse the ground that gives the metaphor its meaning; for the closer a metaphor's terms come to identity, the more it will approach "the condition of music," the pure fusion of medium and content. French critics recognized the problem early on, and so did Edmund Wilson when he observed that

> the words of our speech are not musical notation, and what the symbols of Symbolism really were, were metaphors detached from their subjects—for one cannot, beyond a certain point, in poetry, merely enjoy colour and sound for their own sake: one has to guess what the images are being applied to.[19]

Much of the discussion of this problem has centred on a famous stanza of Denham's *Cooper's Hill*, which goes:

> O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream
> My great example, as it is my theme!
> Though deep, yet clear, although gentle yet not dull,
> Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full.

I. A. Richards argued that it isn't clear whether the river or the poet's mind is the vehicle or the tenor, a confusion that makes the exact meaning of the epithets uncertain. What exactly is a "deep" mind—mysterious, serious, knowledgeable?[20] One can't look any deeper for the meaning than the images themselves since there is no ground for deciding. Or so Richards would have it. Now what this stanza means in context, clearly, is that Denham wishes his poetry to have the same moderation as the just King. His theme is the right balance of opposed excesses—authority and liberty, zeal and apathy—and the Thames is his symbol of this just proportion.[21]

Nevertheless, in isolation the lines still illustrate the interpretative problem, which, as Empson understood, is that all identities are false identities to the logical mind.[22] The metaphor seems to appeal to a belief in sympathetic magic, and this frustrates our rational distinctions. However, it poses no obstacle to the symbolic imagination, which, as we have seen, is structured by these very sympathies and analogies. Nor does it pose a problem to the Romantic critic, like Owen

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[17] *Forms of Discovery* (Chicago, Ill.: Swallow, 1967), pp. 314–15.
[18] "Hart Crane's Gnosis," *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1982), pp. 256–7.
[19] *Axel's Castle* (1931; repr. London: Collins, 1961), p. 24.
[20] *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London: Oxford U.P., 1936), pp. 121–3.
[21] For a full analysis see Earl R. Wasserman, *The Subtler Language* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1959), Ch. 3.
[22] *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), pp. 344–46 ff.

Barfield, who argues that these sympathies and analogies are indeed the very essence of poetic knowledge. Barfield's theory, which he advanced in *Poetic Diction* (1928), was that the words of primitive language had inherent metaphorical potential, or total meanings, which the development of rational, abstract thought has broken up. Thus, in his favourite example, a single word like *pneuma*, meaning *spirit-wind-breath*, is supposed to contain some deep metaphoric knowledge about *inspiration*. There is of course a natural and ancient association between the spirit and life, but there is no reason to suppose that such associations began as a total meaning. When the two senses are fused, Empson maintained, it is not through metaphor but through a peculiar notion of causation, as is evident in some of Piaget's observations of children's attempts to explain such connexions. Moreover, there is only a vague association in the word and not a complete myth, as Barfield had claimed, and this may well have been the case in the primitive mind (I can't see how we have any way of knowing). There is certainly no myth in *pneuma*, though some of the names of Greek legends do epitomize a myth, or a key part of it, such as Oedipus ("swollen-footed") or Zagreus ("restored to life"). In any case, Barfield's theory is really a theory of etymology, as his later revision of the theory effectively conceded,[23] and part of his motive in advancing it was to revive a sensitivity to the metaphoric weight of a word, or what Empson called its pregnancy. His definition of poetic knowledge as the recognition of "significant resemblances and analogies" was likewise motivated by a desire to reawaken the rationalistic mind—which has more of an eye for differences than resemblances—to the power of poetic imagery to reveal an order that is, or seems to be, in the very nature of things. And this is just what Romantic poetry sometimes achieves: it presents us with a structure of imagery that conveys a meaning which we feel the intellect could never fully explain, or never contain within a discursive form.

We see Samuel Johnson struggling with the problem in his commentary on Denham's stanza:

> The lines are not in themselves perfect; for most of the words, thus artfully opposed, are to be understood simply on one side of the comparison, and metaphorically on the other; and if there be any language which does not express intellectual operations by material images, into that language they cannot be translated.[24]

Empson once remarked that "a profound enough criticism could extract an entire cultural history from a simple lyric,"[25] and Tate's insight into Johnson's judgement perhaps does something of the sort. What Johnson's negatives imply, Tate perceived, is that "'The tenor of the figure, to be convincing, ought to be detachable from the literal image of the flowing river."[26] In other words, Johnson only approved of images that could be *contained* by an abstraction: thus the vehicle of

[23] "The Meaning of the Word 'Literal'," *Metaphor and Symbol*, ed. Knights & Cottle, pp. 48–63.
[24] "Sir John Denham," *The Lives of the Poets*, Vol. 1, ed. R. Lonsdale (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), p. 239.
[25] "The Verbal Analysis," *The Kenyon Review* 12:4 (1950), p. 599.
[26] "Johnson on the Metaphysical Poets," *Essays of Four Decades*, p. 493.

the metaphor may only illustrate the idea; it may not serve as the actual means of ideation. Hence Johnson's view that there is a "deviation from nature" in the Metaphysicals and their use of the conceit. The reason for this Tate understood to be that Johnson's worldview was based on the clear distinction between mind and matter, and on the static relation between them; the conceptual and real worlds are therefore separate and cannot mutually "translate" each other. Donne, on the other hand, lacked such a fixed worldview, which is why his metaphors are more exploratory: they are the very means by which he discovers the meaning of his experience. The philosophical implications that Tate elicits from this analysis are profound.

> A poetry of experience is incipiently a poetry of action; hence of drama, the sense of which Johnson seems to have lacked. The minute particulars of the wrestling with God, which we find in Donne and Crashaw, bring the religious experience into the dimension of immediate time. Johnson's implied division of poetry into the meditative and the descriptive (implied also in his own verse) fixes its limits, arresting the subject within the frame of pictorial space: *ut pictura poesis*, for his typical *period* verb for the poetic effect is that the poet *paints*. The breaking up of the image, of which he accuses the Metaphysical poets, is the discovery of a dynamic relation between the mind and its objects, in a poetry which does not recognize the traditional topic; the subject becomes the metaphorical structure, it is no longer the set theme. The ideas that result from the dynamic perception of objects (language itself is thus an object) are in constant disintegration; so inferentially are the objects themselves. The "object" which poetry like "The Extasie" or "The Canonization" suggests that we locate, is not an existence in space, but an essence created by the junction of the vehicle and the tenor of the leading metaphor. It is not *in* space; it moves with experience in time.[27]

Such philosophical differences are closely related, of course, to the aesthetic qualities of a period; as Wilson observed, "a revolution in the imagery of poetry is in reality a revolution in metaphysics."[28] And in fact two years before that observation, in his brilliantly suggestive and neglected *Poetry and Mathematics* (1929), Scott Buchanan had expounded the full implications of that thesis. Some of his parallels between the major analogical shifts in the two subjects were naturally strained, but many were amazingly prescient of later ideas in critical theory. Among them—to simplify radically for the sake of expediency—were the ideas that myths are like postulates, types with infinite variations (Frye's major thesis, in essence); that metaphors are like equations (an idea later developed by Empson); and that poetic analogies are like arithmetical proportions, symbolic ratios that when expanded create structures of imagery in poetry and the central concepts of a scientific epoch. Thus Pythagoras discovers that the principles of geometry may be applied to music and even to the revolution of the spheres, and infers that the world must be made of numbers—a process which Thomas Kuhn later conceived in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* as the introduction of a new set of assumptions and models of explanation, a new

[27] *Op cit.*, pp. 506–7.
[28] *Axel's Castle*, p. 12.

paradigm, which constructs its own problems and sets the parameters of their hypothetical solutions. Similarly, towards the end of the eighteenth century a general biological analogy crops up and proves fruitful in many fields of thought—aesthetics, philosophy, the psychology of art—and soon enough the entire universe comes to be pictured as an organism—a thesis later given vast support by M. H. Abrams.

It is probably a commonplace now that one such revolution occurred in the seventeenth century when the rise of scientific astronomy caused the medieval world-picture to disintegrate. As Foucault characterized it, the medieval order of resemblance was rearranged into the scientific order of representation, and the categories of signature and correspondence were replaced by those of identity and difference. Thus the hierarchy of analogies collapses into a categorical scheme of thought, and the Great Chain of Being gradually evolves into Linnaean taxonomy.[29] Some critics have taken the view that this revolution led to a major change in poetic technique. Tillyard suggested that the loosening of fixed correspondences between the natural and human orders prompted the shift from allegory, which requires a one-to-one correspondence between things, to the metaphysical conceit, which needs more room for metaphorical play.[30] Others have taken the view that after the Christian myth and its traditional symbolic structure began to breakdown the poet was thrown back on his own resources, like Blake, and forced to invent his own myths and symbolic structures; that in a word, he was forced to become a Romantic-Symbolist. Such historical theses are beyond our scope; but as far as I can judge it is Frye who has advanced the best theory of these revolutions, or what he called modulations in imagery: modulations because, in his view, which is perhaps only an obvious fact, the worlds of science and poetry have different structures and are based on fundamentally different principles, those of the poetic world being ultimately universal.[31] Now, however valid Frye's theory may be in the long run, it is certainly true that many poets since the seventeenth century have tended to use archaic cosmologies regardless of the world-picture of contemporaneous science. One thinks of the elemental correspondences of Blake's system, the astrological structure of Yeats's *Vision*, and the anthropomorphic cosmos of Dylan Thomas.

But the most famous postulated consequence of the disintegration of the medieval worldview was Eliot's dissociation of sensibility, though the idea was long ago discredited as an historical thesis. Various critics pointed out the programmatic slant of Eliot's view, and Kermode showed

[29] See *The Order of Things*, Chs. 2 and 3.
[30] See *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943), p. 92.
[31] See "New Directions from Old," *Fables of Identity*, pp. 52–66, "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism," *The Stubborn Structure*, pp. 200–17, and *The Secular Scripture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1976).

how little historical evidence there was behind it.[32] The real motive for the idea, he argued, was the need to justify Symbolist poetics with a biassed view of literary history. And while that is all true, I believe the idea—as Tate understood it—still remains useful for the purposes of formal criticism. In Tate's view, "what was dissociated—whenever it may have been dissociated—was not thought from feeling, nor feeling from thought; what was dissociated was the external world which by analogy could become the interior world of the mind."[33] And it was from this immanent order of symbolic meaning that Tate believed the modern mind had abstracted itself. The consequence was that religious and secular poets alike had lost

> the power to start with the "common thing": they have lost the gift for concrete experience. The abstraction of the modern mind has obscured their way into the natural order. Nature offers to the symbolic poet clearly denotable objects in depth and in the round, which yield the analogies to the higher syntheses. The modern poet rejects the higher synthesis, or tosses it in a vacuum of abstraction. If he looks at nature he spreads the clear visual image in a complex of metaphor, from one katachresis to another through Aristotle's permutations of genus and species. He cannot sustain the prolonged analogy, the second and superior kind of figure that Aristotle doubtless had in mind when he spoke of metaphor as the key to the resemblances of things, and the mark of genius.[34]

In short, analogy stabilizes metaphor : it establishes a structure that prevents metaphor from making strained or fanciful resemblances. And the effects of a lack of such a structure we have seen in some of Crane's and Thomas's poetry.

Whether such a structure is no longer available to poets, whether there has been a revolution in poetic imagery since the 1950s, is a question beyond our scope. But perhaps some brief discussion of it would not be out of place, seeing that Denis Donoghue recently touched on the question and concurred with Tate that the symbolic imagination is no longer prevalent in literature.[35] The reason Donoghue considered to be—not only, as the New Critics and many others felt, the general decline of symbolic thought in a scientific society—but the "widespread repudiation of myth" (presumably by Lyotard and the like) and a critique launched by various philosophers on the conceptual framework of the symbolic imagination; that is, on the Aristotelian and Thomistic categories of substance, accident, and hierarchy. Now, this is a philosophical criticism of a certain kind of poetic imagination, and it may be valid for whatever philosophical purposes it serves. As Donoghue presents it, at least, the criticism has very little to do with poetry as such and really concerns the old theological problem of analogy: How is one to know that analogies between the visible world and God have any truth? The only relevance this has to symbolic

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[32] See *Romantic Image*, Ch. 8 and J. B. Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit* (London: Hutchinson, 1962), pp. 92–102. F. W. Bateson traces the origins of the idea in "Contributions to a Dictionary of Critical Terms. II," *Essays in Criticism* 1:3 (1951), pp. 302–12.

[33] "The Unliteral Imagination; or, I, too, Dislike It," *Essays of Four Decades*, p. 460.

[34] "The Symbolic Imagination," *ibid*, p. 430.

[35] "The Analogical Imagination: After 'Christ and Apollo'," *Religion & Literature* 32:3 (2000), pp. 1–22.

poetry, as far as I can see, is in the question of what kind of knowledge of the world is found or made by its analogies (a question to which substantial answers have been offered by critics like Wilson Knight, Wheelwright, and Frye). But the problem of how we know whether or not our analogies correspond to a Being beyond observation or conception has nothing to do with this; for the analogies of symbolic poetry are "verifiable" by experience, whereas the theological analogies cannot be. So a critique of the conceptual scheme attached to those structures has no bearing on poetry as an autonomous art—and by autonomous I mean that poetry works according to its own principles of form and its own mode of cognition, and not under any dictates from philosophy. Most poets naturally have their own philosophies or worldviews, and all poets have various beliefs and values, but poetry is not merely a vehicle for a philosophy. If it is taken to be merely that, then one's interest in literature is already determined by a prior commitment to a single form of truth and knowledge. And such determinism is simply another form of the presumed omnicompetence which Blackmur identified—one form of the mind imperiously asserting itself over all the others:

> The temptation is to make some single form of the mind seem omnicompetent; omnicompetence becomes omniscience and asserts for itself closed authority based upon a final revelation. . . . *Fides quaerens intellectus* is a motto meant to redeem that temptation; for it is faith alone that may question the intellect, as it is only the intellect that can curb faith.[36]

Since much of Theory's ambition during the last half-century has been such omnicompetence, one may be excused for reiterating the principle.

And since the forces of industry and positivistic science have also assumed the same imperiousness in the world at large, one might also take the opportunity to suggest the social "relevance" of the New Critics. Here is Tate in 1952:

> A society of means without ends, in the age of technology, so multiplies the means, in the lack of anything better to do, that it may have to scrap the machines as it makes them; until our descendants will have to dig themselves out of one rubbish heap after another and stand upon it, in order to make more rubbish to make more standing room. The surface of nature will then be literally as well as morally concealed from the eyes of men.[37]

The efficiency with which industrial capitalism continues to fulfill this prophecy needs no elaborating: one hardly needs to mention the environmental crisis we find ourselves in. This is not the fault of Science, of course; it is the fault of the uses to which it has been put. And it seems very likely that without the right use of science—the development of greener technology and a prescient management of natural resources—the crisis may very well end in catastrophe. But one may doubt that that will be enough. These are as much economic and scientific challenges as

[36] "A Burden for Critics," *The Lion and the Honeycomb*, pp. 199–200.
[37] "The Man of Letters in the Modern World," *Essays of Four Decades*, p. 10.

they are challenges for the human spirit—or, if you prefer, humanity. And the spiritual or human challenge ultimately concerns the vision that unites society—not as a mass of workers or as a crowd of consumers, but as human beings—and that governs its relationship with nature. That vision has traditionally been provided by religion, though it seems that in the secular democracies of the West, or that section of it which we like to think of as culturally "liberal," it is more and more becoming the province of the arts and culture. And that seems all to the good: modern secular society has for the most part shown itself to be the kind of society most conducive towards, not merely the tolerance, but the acceptance of different religions and cultures. That its diminished unity of belief and principle leaves it vulnerable to the evils that religion guards against there is also abundant evidence in the vulgarity, extravagance, and philistinism of mass culture. So if the organized practice of Christianity is a declining force in the West, then perhaps it would not be unwise to preserve the religious imagination. For as Blackmur said:

> It is the religious imagination, more than anything else, that unites the actuality of a culture, or a man's life, with its principles, or its standards of judgment; for the religious imagination requires for its functioning a continuous act of piety, a steady consciousness of a charitable understanding, all the way from top to bottom, and without prejudice of balance or proportion, of the human gamut.[38]

Without this religious or spiritual dimension to consciousness, a consciousness unconfined by dogma and ritual, unconfined ultimately by any one religion, it seems doubtful that any vision of a unified society existing in a moral relationship with nature can be possible. I do not mean to reaffirm Arnold's and Richards' belief that poetry can save us; poetry makes nothing happen. But I do believe that modern Romantic-Symbolist poetry, particularly that of Geoffrey Hill, contains some of the finest examples in modern literature of the moral seriousness and the literary power evinced by the religious imagination at its fullest reach and intensity.

The question, then, whether the symbolic imagination is indeed in decline is effectively a dead-end. One must concede that it is probably not a prevalent form of imagination among the general reading public, but the symbolic imagination will always be available to any poet who develops out of the Romantic-Symbolist tradition, or indeed out of any symbolic tradition. It may even be available to him by nature, as it clearly was to Dante, Shakespeare, and Blake—poets who all possessed symbolic imaginations long before any theory of symbolism was formulated. So when Donoghue claims that analogy is still available to the poet but only by allusion, I must disagree. Allusion is indeed a key device in *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, and *The Cantos* (though I would argue that analogy has more of a structural function in *Ulysses* than he suggests); but one need only glance at some of the poetry written since then, chiefly that of Lowell, Hill, Merrill, and Derek Walcott, to see that the symbolic imagination is still very much alive in poetry.

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[38] "Humanism and Symbolic Imagination," *The Lion and the Honeycomb*, p. 151.

Some of the ways in which the idea of symbolic form was altered by the technical developments of a distinct kind of poetry is what we turn to now.

4

Form and Discourse

Proportion and the Articulate Symbol

Symbolist poetry has been criticized for subordinating the things of this world to the forms of its own imagination, for imposing symbols and myths upon reality and so depriving objects and experiences of their material richness. Instead of objects clearly perceived and fully rendered, we get objective correlatives—things used as symbols, but not the things themselves. The criticism is usually directed at the excessive purities of French *symbolisme*, but it has also been levelled against the "insulated" worlds of modern Romantic-Symbolists like Thomas and Stevens, sometimes in ignorance of the structures and conventions of their chosen mode. And in that respect, the criticism is fundamentally a naturalistic prejudice against a form of poetry with metaphysical underpinnings, whether of German Idealism or Platonism or some system of religious ideas. And clearly Naturalism and Romanticism give a literary idea a very different degree of reality; Blake's ideas and symbols, for instance, having for him as much reality as the objects of the ordinary world.

And hence Imagism may be seen as partly a reaction against the tyranny of the Idea; for as Donoghue has pointed out, there is a tendency for ideas to become imperious, to form their own enclosed system which prevents the mind from testing them against the experiences that engender them—or those ideas, at least, that come from experience.[1] The total subjection of experience to a system of ideas some critics like to call Platonism, and that is indeed how Tate and Ransom characterized poetry that subjects the inner meaning of experience to an abstract conception, thereby reducing its imaginative quality to the illustration of a thesis—a procedure which both considered a kind of inferior moral science.[2] Frye criticized this view for being a typically Symbolist prejudice against didactic allegory, which is fair enough so far as a dislike of explicit doctrine obstructs our appreciation of didactic poetry on its own terms. But this doesn't mitigate the defects that appear in non-didactic poetry when the will to explain or instruct violates the imaginative quality of its subject. As Ransom explains:

> Nothing can darken perception better than a repetitive moral earnestness, based on the reputed superiority and higher destiny of the human species. If morality is the code by which we expect the race to achieve the more perfect possession of nature, it is an incitement to a more heroic science, but not to aesthetic

[1] "Ideas and How to Escape from Them," *The Crane Bag* 7:2 (1983), pp. 21–28.
[2] See Tate's "Three Types of Poetry," *Essays of Four Decades*, pp. 173–96.

experience, nor religious; if it is the code of humility, by which we intend to know nature as nature is, that is another matter; but in an age of science morality is inevitably for the general public the former; and so transcendent a morality as the latter is now unheard of.[3]

The ideal kind of poetry, for Ransom, is one that meets its object somewhere between the image and the idea, a poetry which he calls "metaphysical" but which it would be apter to call perceptual or aesthetic. For as Ransom goes on to say,

The aesthetic moment appears as a curious moment of suspension; between the Platonism in us, which is militant, always sciencing and devouring, and a starved inhibited aspiration towards innocence, which, if it could only be free, would like to respect and know the object as it might of its own accord reveal itself.[4]

The aesthetic moment may be regarded as the mental equivalent of the Romantic Symbol or the Concrete Universal, the poetic form in which thought, feeling, and the natural world coalesce into an organic whole.

I have proposed that the doctrine of the non-intellectual Image produced the conflict in the Romantic-Symbolist tradition between the ideals of symbolic form and the inherently discursive nature of language. Kermode's *Romantic Image* traced the history of that conflict with much erudition and insight, but he was not so specific about what he meant by "discourse." Sometimes he meant statement and argument, and at other times articulateness, and these are not quite the same thing. A lack of discourse in the first sense is evident in some of Eliot's early poetry, in the lyrical juxtapositions of "Preludes," for instance, or the weird, dreamlike imagery of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," which proceed according to a logic of feeling and association rather than the logic of statement and argument; so there is no explicit or discursive articulation between the images. In the more dramatic poems like "Prufrock," on the other hand, the feelings are not inarticulate in the sense that they fail to express themselves, but neither are they explicitly stated:

> For I have known them all already, known them all—
> Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
> I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
> I know the voices dying with a dying fall
> Beneath the music from a farther room.
> So how should I presume?

What more *articulate* expression of weary disillusionment could there be? There is a different kind of articulateness in some of Stevens' earlier poems, such as "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" or "The Comedian as the Letter C," in which the argument is propelled through the texture of the imagery by means of the poem's rhetorical structure, as we may see in the following passage from "Sunday Morning":

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[3] "Poetry: A Note on Ontology," *The World's Body* (New York: Scribner's, 1938), pp. 124.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang?

This has a more discursive movement than the passage of Eliot's above, and it is true that the opening statement takes a conceptual form; but it is pursued through a series of images that express the idea of an impossible contact with the divine implicitly. And it is this tendency to prefer the image to the statement that led some of the less articulate Romantic-Symbolists into a technical impasse.

The technical problems caused by the avoidance of discourse were given an extensive treatment by Donald Davie in his *Articulate Energy*. Davie showed that different forms of syntax—by which he meant, not the grammatical form of the poetry, but the form of thought *behind* the grammar, the "rhythm of ideas"—embody different philosophical stances towards the world. The broadest difference is naturally between a more subjective or objective attitude, subjective syntax representing fidelity to a form of thought or mental experience, objective syntax fidelity to a form of physical action. What Davie calls musical syntax is subjective syntax without a definite content, i.e. a syntax that represents fidelity to a form of mental experience, but an experience that remains undefined, typically because the poet uses an objective correlative to suggest it instead of explicitly stating it. And this is the kind of syntax that Symbolist poets sometimes slip into: for, like the structures of music, it does not represent an action or feeling; it presents or evokes it. It should be said that there are moods and feelings which can only be presented or evoked: the finer shades of love, perhaps, or moments of sheer sensibility. And some allowance has to be made for these unless such feelings are to be excluded from poetry altogether. Davie's main criticism of the Symbolists was that they tended to use musical syntax when there wasn't a genuine need for it, which resulted in what he called pseudo-syntax—syntax that fails to imitate what it describes. Davie was no doubt right in criticizing poets whose syntax was inauthentic in this sense; however, his mimetic position also entails a naturalistic conception of poetry, founded on the distinction between subject and object, that cannot quite account for the kind of syntax in poetry like Tomlinson's, which assumes no such distinction.

One of the theories of syntax Davie considered was Susanne Langer's, which he judged the soundest next to Hulme's and Fenollosa's, but also limited like theirs, because it accounted for

only one kind of syntax.[5] It is true that Langer's theory of the Symbol is derived from her theory of music, but Davie neglected the breadth of her aesthetic theory in focussing on only its implications for syntax; and I think this greater breadth offers us the best theoretical account of the synthesis of articulate language and symbolic form that we find in Tomlinson. We may approach her theory by noting that music is the fine art closest to language in that it *articulates* feeling, but unlike language in that it does so without expressing a *meaning*. What it expresses, says Langer, is "vital import," which she defines as "the dynamism of subjective experience." The import of music, therefore, lies in "a highly articulated sensuous object, which by virtue of its dynamic structure can express the forms of vital experience which language is peculiarly unfit to convey"—this vital experience being mainly emotional, of course, which music is so much better than language at expressing. And it is in this respect that significant form in music is not apprehended discursively, since discursive meaning is mostly functional, but felt intuitively, vital import being qualitative. Langer therefore defines poetry as a non-discursive form, even when it appears to be discoursing, since it does not genuinely *assert*. Davie took this to mean that Langer's theory had no place for genuine syntax in poetry, and that may be true in certain cases (it concerns the problem of poetry and belief, which we needn't go into here). But Davie's contention doesn't undermine Langer's theory as a whole, which has more to do with the general form of poetry than with syntax alone. The advantage of Langer's theory, as Kermode suggested, is that it offers the Symbolist poetic a way out of its impasse by showing how articulateness may be incorporated in a symbolic form. And this is precisely what happens to the Romantic Symbol in Tomlinson's hands:

> in the articulate symbol the symbolic import permeates the whole structure, because every articulation of that structure is an articulation of the idea it conveys; the meaning (or, to speak accurately of a non-discursive symbol, the vital import) is the content of the symbolic form, given with it, as it were, to perception.

But in order to gain a fuller understanding of Tomlinson's technique, it would be well to consider the poetry of Marianne Moore, which was an important influence on Tomlinson, and which will also allow us to illustrate some of the New Critics' theories of form. Those theories were framed in different ways, but they all revolved around similar questions, such as: What is the adequate degree of formal objectivity? Or how concrete should the Universal be? Or what is the proper relation of emotion to rational content? As Tate perceived in an essay on Longinus, these are essentially all problems of formal proportion; and for Longinus that meant the right proportion between length and occasion:

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[5] See *Feeling and Form*, Chs. 2, 3, and 4, from which the following exposition is condensed.

The "right length" is the adaptation of form to subject; and is not the "occasion" the relation between the poet and the person to whom the poem is addressed? We have, foreshadowed here, I think, a principle of dramatic propriety, a sense of the "point of view" in composition, the prime literary strategy which can never be made prescriptive, but which exhibits its necessity equally in its operation and in its lapse. . . . And if we look at "length" and "occasion" in somewhat different terms, we shall find ourselves again in the thick of one of our own controversies. Does not the occasion force upon the poet the objective and communicable features of his work? Are they not Mr. Winters's theory of the relation of "feeling" to "rational content" and Mr. Ransom's theory of a "texture" within a "structure"?[6]

What I wish to illustrate here is how disproportions in some of these formal relations occur in Moore's poetry. The causes are chiefly the difficulty of giving discourse a form, since discourse by its very nature tends towards the tentative, the elaborate, the parenthetical, and the difficulty of keeping the feeling of a poem and its objective content proportionate.

But we ought to begin by acknowledging Moore's intentions, for the qualities of her poetry are rare and valuable, and it would be unfair to approach them with preconceptions. Those qualities have been aptly described by Donoghue as follows:

. . . she does not endorse a predatory grasp of reality. Instead, she is the first to concede to a thing its own independent right; an acknowledgement rather than a concession. In her colony of the spirit there are no chain gangs. It does not gratify her to bring things to heel, seeing them cower. She is a poet of finite things; she does not lust for the absolute. She is always patient in the presence of limitation.[7]

This excellently characterizes Moore's humility and curiosity before a world of immense riches so often impoverished by cursory attention. So "the question to ask," Donoghue proposes,

about a poem by Marianne Moore is not: what are all these details doing here?; but rather, what, given these details, is the principle of their relation? The ethic of Miss Moore's verse implies that if we treat objects as objects, rather than as functions of ourselves, and if we send the mind to explore them in their own terms, the encounter of subject and object is likely to be rewarding. If the spaces of life are occupied by generous perception, there is less room for nasty things; belligerence, bravado, cruelty, condescension.[8]

Moore's ethos is again aptly described. However, I'm not so sure the question Donoghue advises us to ask is very different from the one he dismisses; for what I hope to show is that Moore's poetry does sometimes present us with a texture of details that do not all know what they are doing there; that, in other words, have a deficient principle of relation, a deficient sense of form.

"Ecstasy affords the occasion and expediency determines the form," Moore wrote in "'The Past is the Present'"—a sentence which has often been taken as a statement of her aesthetic. And it is just this expediency, I submit, that is at once her excellence and her defect. It should be noted at once that Moore's intention is not always to produce good form, in the sense of a pleasingly proportioned object; in her more discursive poems she is often more interested in truth

[6] "Longinus and the New Criticism," *Essays of Four Decades*, pp. 475–6.
[7] "The Proper Plenitude of Fact," *The Ordinary Universe* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 44.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

than in form, however inelegant the truth may be. Hence she will write, in "When I Buy Pictures,"

> or what is closer to the truth,
> when I look at that of which I may regard myself as the imaginary possessor . . .

thus sacrificing elegance of statement for precision of qualification. And as she says in "In the Days of Prismatic Color" (a poem which recommends artistic simplicity in language that, one has to say, has a complexity that verges on murkiness in places): "'Truth is no Apollo Belvedere, no formal thing. The wave may go over it if it likes." Judgements of the Apollo Belvedere may differ, but as an argument against sophisticated or academic forms which falsify truth by contorting it to an adventitious shape, one may respectfully add that there must be some allowance for artifice in art, and that Moore's own verse has its fair share of artifice, especially in the designs of her syllabic stanzas.

This is not meant to detract from the suppleness and accuracy that Moore's technique gives to her language; though it is to suggest that, in those poems which use a fixed stanza, the rigid adherence to a shape which, separated from the impulse that generated it, is essentially arbitrary sometimes twists and warps the form of her thought. As Hugh Kenner pointed out, the syllabic arrangement of her stanzas does not always have an intrinsic relation to the rhythm of the lines:[9] the syllabic pattern of the initial stanza (wherever it may end up later, as the stanza written first would not always begin the finished poem[10]) is sometimes not the most natural form for Moore's thought to take. Moore tacitly acknowledged this in a late interview:

> I never "plan" a stanza. Words cluster like chromosomes, determining the procedure. I may influence an arrangement, or thin it, then try to have successive stanzas identical with the first. Spontaneous initial originality—say, impetus—seems difficult to reproduce consciously later. As Stravinsky said about pitch: "If I transpose it for some reason, I am in danger of losing the freshness of first contact and will have difficulty in recapturing its attractiveness."[11]

Nevertheless, there is much virtuosity in Moore's adaptation of material to a pattern prescribed by the initial impetus. Any traditional poet who commits to a certain metre and verse-form faces the same technical challenges. And perhaps it is a test of artistry to make the element of artifice in one's craft so deft that it seems natural. Yet within these limits Moore occasionally compromises her fidelity and precision of expression—compromises it a lot less, probably, than she would by working in traditional verse-shapes—in her determination to conform her language to the syllabic pattern.

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[9] "Meditation and Enactment," *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 159.
[10] See Margaret Holley, "The Model Stanza: The Organic Origin of Moore's Syllabic Verse," *Twentieth Century Literature* 30:2/3 (1984), pp. 181–91.
[11] "The Art of Poetry: Marianne Moore," *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 34.

But let us consider some of Moore's best formal achievements. She excels in poems such as "The Steamroller" which have the trenchancy of short aphorisms or witty sallies:

> The illustration
> is nothing to you without the application.
> You lack half wit. You crush all the particles down
> into close conformity, and then walk back and forth on them.
>
> Sparkling chips of rock
> are crushed down to the level of the parent block.
> Were not "impersonal judgement in aesthetic
> matters, a metaphysical impossibility," you
>
> might fairly achieve
> it. As for butterflies, I can hardly conceive
> of one's attending upon you, but to question
> the congruence of the complement is vain, if it exists.

The clipped rhythm together with the off-hand and matter-of-fact tone conveys an amused insouciance which gives the utterance the kind of good form we associate with polite manners. There is a similar kind of counterpointing of elaborated clauses in "The Hero":

> Where there is personal liking we go.
> Where the ground is sour; where there are
> weeds of beanstalk height,
> snakes' hypodermic teeth, or
> the wind brings the "scarebabe voice"
> from the neglected yew set with
> the semiprecious cat's eyes of the owl—
> awake, asleep, "raised ears extended to fine points," and so
> on—love won't grow. . . .

But here we may feel that the variety of detail, despite its necessity in creating the full body of the rhythm and the rhetoric, somewhat exceeds the objective content required to sufficiently represent the feeling. Does the description of "the semiprecious cat's eyes of the owl" really add anything to the feeling that "love won't grow"? Eliot drew attention to Moore's "minute detail rather than emotional unity" and argued that, despite a tendency for the intellectual quality of the poems to cloud their emotional value, "the detail has always its service to perform to the whole."[12] But that "always" requires qualification, I think.

In "The Fish," for example (a title which, like many of Moore's titles, has significantly little to do with the theme), we find a similar deficiency of form:

[12] "Introduction to *Selected Poems*," *ibid*., p. 62.

THE FISH

wade
through black jade.
    Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
    adjusting the ash-heaps;
        opening and shutting itself like

an
injured fan.
    The barnacles which encrust the side
    of the wave, cannot hide
        there for the submerged shafts of the

sun,
split like spun
    glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness
    into the crevices—
        in and out, illuminating

the
turqoise sea
    of bodies. The water drives a wedge
    of iron through the iron edge
        of the cliff; whereupon the stars,

pink
rice-grains, ink-
    bespattered jelly fish, crabs like green
    lilies, and submarine
        toadstools, slide each on the other. . . .

Moore goes on to describe the battered condition of the cliff and then elicits the general statement: "Repeated evidence has proved that it can live on what can not revive its youth. The sea grows old in it." Now, if we regard this poem's form under the principle that all parts ought to organically merge into a unity determined by a presiding idea, then we will find much of the foregoing detail irrelevant to that general statement. There would be an intimation of the general meaning in the image of the water's "wedge of iron" being driven into the cliff; and one might argue that the sea-life serves as a contrast to the cliff that "lives" on the force that weathers it, since the creatures thrive on the elements but are also threatened by them. But the connexion is tenuous. And so one would be forced to ask, What are all these details *for?* Moore might reply, "for their own sakes; because they deserve as much attention as anything else." And on its own terms, one can hardly argue with that: the poem is an observation (*Observations* was the title of Moore's first collection). Yet if it is an observation, then the final statement serves more of a

rhetorical than an integral function, since the string of details has to be brought to an end somehow, and the general statement gives the feeling of reflective finality, a falling cadence as it were, even though it doesn't really *conclude* what has preceded it. Now, again, that might not be considered a problem if the statement is seen as simply another observation, this one only being more general. But if the poem's main purpose is to observe the world objectively, then to end by introducing a general meaning encourages us to look for the sources of that meaning in the descriptive details. And thus, formally considered, there remains a series of beautifully vivid details, but details which do not quite cohere into the formal unity that the general observation suggests they have.

Again, I would not wilfully mistake Moore's intentions; I am only trying to illustrate the formal problem. But if the reader contrasts "The Fish" with "Nevertheless," I believe a better-proportioned poem will be found (it must be quoted in full):

NEVERTHELESS

you've seen a strawberry
    that's had a struggle; yet
    was, where the fragments met,

a hedgehog or a star-
    fish for the multitude
    of seeds. What better food

than apple seeds—the fruit
    within the fruit—locked in
    like counter-curved twin

hazelnuts? Frost that kills
    the little rubber-plant-
    leaves of *kok-saghyz*-stalks, can't

harm the roots; they still grow
    in frozen ground. Once where
    there was a prickly-pear-

leaf clinging to barbed wire,
    a root shot down to grow
    in earth two feet below;

as carrots form mandrakes
    or a ram's-horn root some-
    times. Victory won't come

to me unless I go
    to it; a grape tendril
    ties a knot in knots till

knotted thirty times—so
the bound twig that's under-
gone and over-gone, can't stir.

The weak overcomes its
menace, the strong over-
comes itself. What is there

like fortitude! What sap
went through that little thread
to make the cherry red!

Here there is a consistent thematic progression which almost every image develops. The exclamation about the apple seeds seems irrelevant, but besides that every subsequent image—the "frost that kills," the "prickly-pear-leaf clinging to barbed wire," the "grape tendril," and so on—serves to enrich or advance the theme. Idea and imagery are proportionate, well-formed.

A related disproportion sometimes occurs in Moore's poetry between the nature of the feeling expressed and the amount of imagery used to objectify that feeling. We see it in:

THOSE VARIOUS SCALPELS

those
various sounds consistently indistinct, like intermingled echoes
struck from thin glasses successively at random—
the inflection disguised: your hair, the tails of two
fighting-cocks head to head in stone like sculptured scimitars re-
peating the curve of your ears in reverse order: your eyes,
flowers of ice and snow

sown by tearing winds on the cordage of disabled ships; your raised hand,
an ambiguous signature: your cheeks, those rosettes
of blood on the stone floors of French châteaux,
with regard to which the guides are so affirmative—your other hand

a bundle of lances all alike, partly hid by emeralds from Persia
and the fractional magnificence of Florentine
goldwork—a collection of little objects—
sapphires set with emeralds, and pearls with a moonstone, made fine
with enamel in gray, yellow, and dragonfly blue . . .

And so on. I couldn't improve on the appreciative commentary of Jean Garrigue:

all this wrought artfulness of appearance, this Renaissance-jewel-encrusted and farthingaled semblance of the utmost of aristocratic vanity—for what? Nothing more than *conventional opinion?* . . . That this epitome of sterile cruelty whose arrows are lances (nicely hid by jewels), whose weapons are surgical instruments,

that this idol of a frigid self-involvement whose beauty can give nothing but pain, is rebuked with a brilliance surpassing the brilliances that described her is a spectacular achievement.[13]

It certainly is. Yet even in the excess of florid detail, in the exhibition of "sounds consistently indistinct," crowded sounds that, like the adornments they mock, dull their brilliance by their very profusion ("sculptured scimitars," "your eyes, flowers of ice and snow sown," "your raised hand, an ambiguous signature")—in this excess of florid detail one might say that Moore enacts her theme, which she states to be "the hard majesty of that sophistication which is superior to opportunity," this sophistication presumably being the intuitive knowledge of "destiny" rather than the analytical knowledge produced by its "instruments." But even so one cannot ignore some superfluities of detail and a few discursive irrelevancies.

A comparison with Laura Riding's "Auspice of Jewels" may enforce the point. The subject of Riding's poem is in some ways the converse of Moore's: she speaks as a bedecked woman who plaintively protests against the men who

> have endowed the whole of us
> With such a solemn gleaming
> As in the dark of flesh-love
> But the face at first did have.

No aggressive ornateness here. The allure of artifice has brought wooer and wooed to a dusky half-love, in which touch and speech meet in a glistening coldness:

> Until now—when to go jewelled
> We must despoil the drowsy masquerade
> Where gloom of silk and gold
> And glossy dazed adornments
> Kept safe from flagrant realness
> The forgeries of ourselves we were—
> When to be alive as love feigned us
> We must steal death and its wan splendours
> From the women of their sighs we were.

Paradoxically, it is the jewelry that has protected the women from the indiscreet disclosure of their self-forgeries. Riding's tone and style are very different from Moore's, but the treatment of the subject has a similar satirical intent. And yet the poem as a whole has more emotional complexity conveyed in simpler language that is nonetheless more effective for its concentrated rhythm; whereas Moore's poem has a profusion of detail in excess of the feeling that it objectifies. Kenner remarked on Moore's skill in "putting 'unconscious elegance' into tension against 'sophistication' and showing how art, a third thing, can endorse the former without false entan-

[13] "Marianne Moore" (1965); repr. *Six American Poets from Emily Dickinson to the Present*, ed. Allen Tate (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1971), p. 97.

glement in the latter."[14] And as a general appraisal, I agree. But as an aesthetic form, I still feel that "Those Various Scalpels" is elaborately lavish in excess of the ornateness it satirizes. Winters judged two of Moore's weaknesses to be "a tendency to a rhetoric more complex than her matter" and "a tendency to be led astray by opportunities for description."[15] And I believe these weaknesses are discernible in the deficiencies of proportion that I have tried to illustrate.

There are various ways of formulating an ideal proportionality. The simplest, because the most general, is as a relation between the abstract and the concrete. Imagism is, or intends to be, a poetry of the pure concrete; abstract poetry is probably an oxymoron; and between those poles is the field of poetic meaning. As Frye put it, in contrasting symbolism and allegory:

> The contrast is between a "concrete" approach to symbols which begins with images of actual things and works outward to ideas and propositions, and an "abstract" approach which begins with the idea and then tries to find a concrete image to represent it.[16]

Day Lewis identified the same contrast in terms of the romantic-classic antithesis:

> The Romantic image is a mode of exploring reality, by which the poet is in effect asking imagery to reveal to him the meaning of his own experience. With the Romantic poet, the image-seeking faculty is unleashed and wanders at large, whereas with the Classical it is tethered to a thought, a meaning, a poetic purpose already clarified, and its radius of action is thus far limited.[17]

These are not absolutes, of course; they are only tendencies. And as tendencies I think they adequately characterize one polarity of poetic technique, though of course the range of techniques in even a single poet may be wide: the classicist has his romantic moods, and vice versa.

A more complex formulation of the same relation is Tate's theory of tension, which he derived by "lopping the prefixes off the logical terms *ex*tension and *in*tension." What he means by extension is the embodiment of an abstract meaning in concrete imagery; intension is the meaning itself; and the tension between them lies in the degree to which the abstract meaning and the imagery have in some way—as in the nature of things they often do—fallen short of perfect unity. The way in which the poet tries to unify meaning and imagery Tate calls his "strategy":

> The metaphysical poet as a rationalist begins at or near the extensive or denoting end of the line; the romantic or Symbolist poet at the other, intensive end; and each by a straining feat of the imagination tries to push his meanings as far as he can towards the opposite end, so as to occupy the entire scale.[18]

And there are several ways of doing this, many of which Ransom considered in his essay on the Concrete Universal.[19] The poet may begin with a natural image and then humanize it into a

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[14] "Meditation and Enactment," *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 164.
[15] "The Experimental School in American Thought," *In Defense of Reason*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 71.
[16] *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 89.
[17] *The Poetic Image* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), pp. 58–9.
[18] "Tension in Poetry," *Essays of Four Decades*, p. 67.

Universal—a frequent technique of Richard Wilbur's. Or he may state the Universal and then illustrate it with concrete detail, as Yeats sometimes does. Or the Universal may be so fused with the Concrete that the idea is suggested without ever being stated, as in many of Thomas's poems. This last, unparaphrasable fusion is of course the Romantic-Symbolist ideal: the dancer indistinguishable from the dance, the "tree of many one." And it is also the formal principle of much of Tomlinson's best poetry, except that Tomlinson developed or adapted or altered the form so as to weave discursive language into it.

Tomlinson's early technical studies began with Pound and then moved on to Moore and Stevens. He was later attracted to Crane's poetry but became dissatisfied with Crane's desire to "merge" with the world in a way that Tomlinson considered ultimately a desire for oblivion. And this kind of desire is just what Tomlinson's resistance to Romanticism is a reaction against—the *surrender* of self to nature rather than the "forgetfulness of self,"[20] which arises from respect for an object's otherness and the effort to energize and enrich one's language in order to acknowledge that. As he says himself:

> as human beings, we live in a universe which goes beyond the merely human, is animate or inanimate, is vegetable, mineral—stone, clay, light, dark, what have you. We have so violently annexed that universe to our needs and our fantasies, literary, economic, political, we need to look again and find language for it and, in doing so, become more human, although *in* the finding of that language we are, say, putting to one side the ego, the personality, the what is *thought* to be "human."[21]

Tomlinson is opposed to symbolism and myth for the same reason: they impose, he feels, a fictitious veil between self and world, between language and perception. And thus perception is more important to Tomlinson than imagination, in the Romantic sense, although, as we shall see, his imagination often resolves its tension with perception in a typically Romantic way. This is not his only technique, of course; there are lots of pure little imagist pieces in the *oeuvre*, some poems built on the Williams triad (his slightest poems, in my view), and some political and historical poems which tend to adopt a more prosaic method. But I believe his richest poems do assume an originally Romantic form.

The relation between perception and imagination is an important aspect of Tomlinson's early poetry; indeed many of Tomlinson's early poems are meditations on this relation itself, which he approached in various ways as he evolved his poetic. His usual method is to infuse a series of juxtaposed images with a metaphysical theme, as he does in "Observation of Facts":

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[19] *Poems and Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1955), pp. 159–85.
[20] Jed Rasula & Mike Erwin, "An Interview with Charles Tomlinson," *Contemporary Literature* 16:4 (1975), p. 406.
[21] Bruce Meyer, "A Human Balance: An Interview with Charles Tomlinson," *The Hudson Review* 43:3 (1990), p. 440.

Facts have no eyes. One must
Surprise them, as one surprises a tree
By regarding its (shall I say?)
Facets of copiousness.

The tree stands.

The house encloses.

The room flowers.

These are fact stripped of imagination:
Their relation is mutual.

A dryad is a sort of chintz curtain
Between myself and a tree.
The tree stands: or does not stand:
As I draw, or remove the curtain.

The house encloses: or fails to signify
As being bodied over against one,
As something one has to do with. . . .

Each embellishment of fact moves closer to a true understanding of the relation between observation and imagination, which is implicitly compared to a relation between the inner and the outer. Imagination is not mythology, which is a film of legends and stories that obscures aesthetic perception. Nor is it an ascription of significance, an enclosure of meaning within the self, since the reality of spatial perception is larger than that and more immediate. What imagination is, in Tomlinson's early poetry, is the power that augments fact (an idea he obviously adopted from Stevens):

The room flowers once one has introduced
Mental fibre beneath its elegance,
A rough pot or two, outweighing
The persistence of frippery
In lampshades or wallpaper.

Style speaks what was seen,
Or it conceals the observation
Behind the observer: a voice
Wearing a ruff.

Those facets of copiousness which I proposed
Exist, do so when we have silenced ourselves.

Yet there is a danger in the excesses of imagination, in the image that transgresses the perception; for style in the good sense privileges the perception over the perceiver, but style in the bad sense is posing or affectation, which is a kind of pride. The suggestion is that true perception can

only occur when the self observes a humility before the object, when it "silences itself" so that perception may speak.

Perception may therefore be defined as a negotiation between the somewhat opposed demands of the fact and the image. And for Tomlinson this negotiation is one way of conceiving the nature of the poetic act, an act which he elsewhere presents as a tension between an irreducible objectivity and the meaning one makes of it. This is the theme of "Appearance":

> Snow brings into view the far hills:
> The winter sun feels for their surfaces:
> Of the little we know of them, full half
> Is in the rushing out to greet them, the restraint
> (Unfelt till then) melted at the look
> That gathers them in, to a meeting of expectations
> With appearances. And what appears
> Where the slant-sided lit arena opens
> Plane above plane, comes as neither
> Question nor reply, but a glance
> Of fire, sizing our ignorance up,
> As the image seizes on us, and we grasp
> For the ground that it delineates in a flight
> Of distances, suddenly stilled: the cold
> Hills drawing us to a reciprocation,
> Ask words of us, answering images
> To their range, their heights, held
> By the sun and the snow, between pause and change.

The poem is organized around the analogy, as *snow* to *sun* so *appearance* to *mind*. The relation between the initial image and the developed metaphor is implicit until we reach the word "melted," which links the image with the central idea. The rest of the poem expands this metaphor discursively, so that both the concrete reality of the image may be seen—"where the slant-sided lit arena opens plane above plane"; "the ground that it delineates in a flight of distances"—and so that the complexity of the reciprocation between appearance and reality, between expectation and perception, may be adequately described. The technical accomplishment, the subtle blending of contemplation with its phenomenal source, would be impossible without such flexibility of syntax.

There are other variations on the same theme. In "The Hill," for instance, the woman ascending the hill is "bearing our question in her climb." Her smallness deprives her of personality and a name, and yet she, "in making her thought's theme that thrust and rise, is bestowing a name," as though one could truly forget oneself only in an impersonal harmony with nature—by meeting its resistance with "(almost) a willessness." Then the last two stanzas:

Nature is hard. Neither the mind
nor the touch can penetrate
to a defenceless part;
but, held on the giant palm, one may negotiate
and she, rising athwart it, is showing the art.

So, do not call to her there:
let her go on,
whom the early sun
is climbing up with to the hill's crown—
she, who did not make it, yet can make
the sun go down by coming down.

There is a collaboration between the mind and nature in the meaning they make of each other, but neither can perform the act alone (a central Romantic idea, we note in passing). One critic, Calvin Bedient, whose metaphorical manner appears to be much in the spirit of Tomlinson's poetry, but whose suave rhetoric betrays deep inconsistencies and contradictions, singles out this poem for indulging in a "solipsistic illusion."[22] He rightly perceives how Tomlinson's imagination invests a natural scene with meaning, but then goes on to claim that Tomlinson is "adverse" to imagination, and imputes a contradiction to Tomlinson's "doctrine" of passivity, silence, and conservatism as expressed in poems that are active, vocal, and "creative." But here again the quarrel with the poet's philosophy clouds perception of the poetic actualities. The poetry does not "contradict" itself; what it does is explore an imaginative tension, of which Tomlinson is quite conscious, between subject and object, between the human and the inanimate.

"Winter Encounters" is an early masterpiece on the theme of this relation:

House and hollow; village and valley-side:
    The ceaseless pairings, the interchange
In which the properties are constant
    Resumes its winter starkness. The hedges' barbs
Are bared. Lengthened shadows
    Intersecting, the fields seem parcelled smaller
As if by hedgerow within hedgerow. Meshed
    Into neighbourhood by such shifting ties,
The house reposes, squarely upon its acre
    Yet with softened angles, the responsive stone
Changeful beneath the changing light . . .

Tomlinson links each image or statement into the next by transmitting its meaning both forwards and backwards. Thus the image of "the hedges' barbs" as bared gives body to the "winter starkness" and at the same time leads seamlessly into the image of the hedgerows "parcelling"

[22] "Charles Tomlinson," *Eight Contemporary Poets* (London: Oxford U.P., 1974), pp. 1–22.

the fields. The next participle clause also works both ways: the grammar indicates that it is properly the *house* that is "meshed into neighbourhood by such shifting ties," and yet it may also apply to the image of the "lengthened shadows intersecting." And then, in a similar way, these geometrical images of intersection and meshing are balanced against the contrary quality of light, so that the angles are "softened." The articulate rhythm links all these images together in a very organic movement. The poem then turns to the point of encounter itself:

> There is a riding-forth, a voyage impending
> In this ruffled air, where all moves
> Towards encounter. Inanimate or human,
> The distinction fails in these brisk exchanges—
> Say, merely, that the roof greets the cloud,
> Or by the wall, sheltering its knot of talkers,
> Encounter enacts itself in the conversation
> On customary subjects, where the mind
> May lean at ease, weighing the prospect
> Of another's presence. . . .

The complex fusion of image and idea now segues, though with the same seamless linking of sentences, into a more discursive progression. (One regrets interposing commentary, since the rhythm of Tomlinson's poems is always a movement of the whole.) And this is where we see the flexibility of Tomlinson's technique—how it can move between these different kinds of language without the slightest jarring. And thus he may conclude his theme by returning to a fusion of discourse and image, which contains a meaning that is now not only spatial but generalized into a temporal, and indeed metaphysical, idea:

> . . . Rain
> And the probability of rain, tares
> And their progress through a field of wheat—
> These, though of moment in themselves,
> Serve rather to articulate the sense
> That having met, one meets with more
> Than the words can witness. One feels behind
> Into the intensity that bodies through them
> Calmness within the wind, the warmth in cold.

In the temporal dimension the "probability of rain" is, so to speak, the hollow that encloses the actuality of rain; and likewise the progress of tares through a field of wheat is the spatial image of a temporal event. Encounters, then, may be defined as the intersection of space and time, a physical point of contact where something metaphysical is felt, something "more than the words can witness." What this "something" may be is suggested in the poem, "In Defence of Meta-

physics." All I hope to have shown here is how various images representing spatial relations are developed into a metaphor for encounters at a discursive level, and then resolved thematically by analogy with temporal relations. There are no symbols in the poem, but the poem as a whole is symbolic in the sense that the articulation of images and discourse is organized into a form that contains everything its parts have implied. And in that sense the poem as a whole has symbolic form: there is no element in it which is not integral to the whole. The same technique may be found in many other poems, such as "Reflections," "At Holwell Farm," and the magnificent "Swimming Chenango Lake."

5

Conclusion

The Range of the Form

The import of my overarching thesis, then, is that the Romantic-Symbolist ideas of form and their Neo-Critical formulations have some truth and use outside the tradition that generated them. I do not wish to leap to any rash claims about the "universality" of Romantic poetics, though claims of that sort have sometimes been made, most enthusiastically by Friedrich Schlegel in his famous "Athenaeumsfragment 116":

> Other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analyzed. The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself. . . .[1]

In English criticism this idea takes the less enthusiastic form of a prejudice against Augustan poetry, epitomized in Arnold's famous dictum that "Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose."[2] The prejudice reappears in several modern critics, most explicitly in Herbert Read, who saw the tradition of organic form as beginning with the arch-Romantic Shakespeare, trickling through the eighteenth century, flourishing with the Romantics, and then resurging again with the romantic Modernists. And however sympathetic one may be to that view, intuitions of the True Form of poetry are in the end a private matter; criticism has to dwell in the rational and historical order of knowledge. My intention has merely been to show how the ideas and theories of this tradition may be usefully applied if understood with fidelity and some historical perspective. As Tate pointed out, we tend to think that a new insight—and in this context we may modify that to a new technique—replaces the tradition from which it emerges; when in fact "it may merely alter it."[3]

How one technical development has altered the formal ideal of the Romantic-Symbolist tradition has just been illustrated, but there are various other ways of achieving a symbolic form, two of which I wish to touch on here because they illustrate two general ways of embodying meaning in imagery; and I believe it is the more expansive way that encourages critics like Schlegel to regard Romantic poetry as having infinite possibilities. The reason is that symbolic form has an

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[1] *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. P. Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1971), p. 175.
[2] "The Study of Poetry," *Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose*, ed. P. J. Keating (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 359.
[3] "Longinus and the New Criticism," *Essays of Four Decades*, p. 485.

essentially metaphorical structure, and, as Wilbur and Frye suggest, to the symbolic imagination the resemblances and relations between things are potentially infinite. We say potentially because there does seem to be an intrinsic limit to the reach of a metaphor before its similitudes become strained; which would suggest that metaphor is governed by something like a natural "law," even if it is more readily perceptible to poets than theoretically formulable. And there also seems to be an extrinsic limit within a given analogical structure to the imaginative shifts feasible in the individual metaphor. Naturally if the poet is bound by no such world, then the individual metaphor is a peculiar act of verve or imagination governed mainly by "the intuitive perception of the similarities in dissimilars." But if the poet does inhabit such a world, or strives to create one, then it is likely that any metaphor which is to be expanded into an analogical structure will contain a poetic world *in utero*. We can see this process at work in Blake's "Auguries of Innocence":

A Robin Red breast in a Cage
Puts all Heaven in a Rage
A dove house filld with doves & Pigeons
Shudders Hell thro all its regions
A dog starved at his Masters Gate
Predicts the ruin of the State . . .

There are no verbal metaphors in each couplet (though cases could be made for "shudders" and "predicts"); within the context of Blake's vision these are in fact literal statements. But each little fable open out towards a total vision of the relations between Man, Nature, and Eternity, and what propels the imagination onwards is a metaphoric movement that gradually expands into the analogical structure of Blake's total vision.

This expansive movement is what Philip Wheelwright called *diaphor*, a movement *through* a contrast or combination of elements. The other movement is what he called *epiphor*, which is the classical Aristotelian conception of metaphor as a *carrying* of a concrete, specific, or familiar term onto an abstract, general, or unusual one (or vice versa).[4] There are different kinds and combinations of each movement, but in general the *diaphoric* movement refracts a feeling or an idea through a structure of imagery, whilst the *epiphoric* movement focuses or crystallizes it. And this latter movement is what we find in many of Merrill's early poems, such as "The Black Swan," "The Peacock," and "Hour Glass." Here is "The Broken Bowl":

To say it once held daisies and bluebells
    Ignores, if nothing else,
Much diehard brilliance where, crashed to the floor,
The wide bowl lies that seemed to cup the sun,
Its green leaves wilted, its loyal blaze undone,

[4] See *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1962), Ch. 4.

All spilt, its glass integrity no more.
    From piece to shattered piece
A fledgling rainbow struggles for release.

Did also the heart shatter when it slipped? . . .

The second stanza continues with a dazzling depiction of the effects of sunlight on the shards, which is more decorative than functional, since it doesn't extend the analogy set up by the opening stanza. That has to wait until the third:

No lucid, self-containing artifice
    At last, but fire, ice,
A world in jeopardy. What lets the bowl
Nonetheless triumph by inconsequence
And wrestle harmony from dissonance
And with the fragments build another, whole,
    Inside us, which we feel
Can never break, or grow less bountiful?

Love does that. . . .

There is a conscious ingenuity to the rhetoric which invites the reader to join Merrill in discovering the analogies in the bowl. Indeed, much of the poem's pleasure lies in observing Merrill's skill as he adapts his ever-agile language to the demands of the form. The image itself is symbolic in the sense that Merrill has fused it with the idea of the power of love; but the form of the whole poem is what we might rather call iconic, since it crystallizes the meaning into a single image rather than radiating it outwards as if through a translucent medium. In this respect Merrill's technique in some of his early poems may be called "classical," as we feel (whatever the case may have been) that he already knew what he wanted to say and sought out the image to illustrate it.

This iconic form has some similiarities with the form of imagery in the metaphysical conceit. It is true that the burden of Rosemund Tuve's *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* was to show that the Modernists' and the New Critics' taste for sensuousness and particularity had distorted their understanding of the functional nature of Metaphysical imagery, but the similarity I am pointing to here pertains to form rather than function. And in both, a correspondence or metaphor or analogy is formed into the structure of the poem's imagery. Donne's "A Valediction: of Weeping" is a clear example:

    Let me powre forth
My tears before thy face, whil'st I stay here,
For thy face coines them, and thy stampe they beare,
And by this Mintage they are something worth,
    For thus they bee

Pregnant of thee;
Fruits of much grief they are, emblemes of more,
When a teare falls, that thou falls which it bore,
So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore.

On a round ball
A workeman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, *All*,
So doth each teare,
Which thee doth weare,
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
Till thy teares mixt with mine doe overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so. . . .

The imagery is clearly subordinate to the argument. In fact, one can hardly speak of imagery here, in the modern sense, for none of the objects are invested with more particularity than a name; whereas in Merrill's poem we can virtually see the bowl that he describes. But both poems illustrate their meaning in a similar way, though Merrill's does so, if we like, with more luminance.

But for the full radiance of form and content symbolically fused an essentially different form of imagery is required. Consider Geoffrey Hill's "The White Ship" for contrast:

Where the living with effort go,
Or with expense, the drowned wander
Easily: seaman
And king's son also

Who, by gross error lost,
Drift, now, in salt crushed
Polyp- and mackerel-fleshed
Tides between coast and coast,

Submerge or half-appear.
This does not much matter.
They are put down as dead. Water
Silences all who would interfere;

Retains, still, what it might give
As casually as it took away:
Creatures passed through the wet sieve
Without enrichment or decay.

The poem does not immediately announce the meaning of its images—the drowned as the damned or victims of the damned, the sea as both creative and destructive power; it suggests

them gradually until, in the last penetrating quatrain, a total vision of the worth of those lives, lost to either the just or the tragic indifference of God, suddenly resonates through the farthest reaches of moral conception. The metaphoric movement of the thought completes itself, but its meaning goes rippling on towards a reality that can only be called divine. The form incarnates a spiritual vision through a metaphoric movement that gestures towards eternity.

Whether we label poetry with such aspirations Romantic, or metaphysical, or simply religious is largely insignificant next to the significance of the aspiration itself; it is merely the futile attempt to capture the metaphoric movement in a symbol, the spirit in the letter. Indeed, in his *Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience* (1949)—another neglected book, in part no doubt because of its difficult abstract thought—Martin Foss considered this tension to be the perennial problem of philosophy and ultimately the perennial problem of creativity. The mind, he argues, is always reducing the variety and richness of experience to a symbolic system or representation, mainly for the sake of expediency and convenience, so that the ego may practically engage with an environment that is subordinated to its needs and desires—the low dream, as Eliot called it. But the more the system or representation comes to replace the world, the more it becomes an abstraction distancing the mind from the world, reality, existence (as you like)—the world in the process of becoming. And the metaphoric impulse must always transcend the fixities of a symbolic system in order to express or represent that process. So by metaphor Foss means the power of creative energy that continuously strives to express the intuition of the world as process. Now, as applied to poetry, the identification of the creative process with metaphor is itself a symbolic reduction, for there are of course various other motives that go into a poem's making: a sense of rhythm, a new complex of images, a fresh insight, and so forth. So that, at the verbal level, poetic creativity more broadly considered consists in an organic concentration of a poet's whole vocabulary, his stock of images, his flexibility of phrasing—his total power of expression, in the end. But this is nothing more than a minor qualification of the many truths in Foss's work, one of which is that the creative impulse must always to some extent destroy a symbolic form in order for new creative work to be possible (a process partly exemplified in this symbolic reduction of the argument of a dense, complex, and far-ranging book). So there is a continual tension in art and life—between the necessity of forming experience into a symbolic form and the necessity of destroying a symbolic form in order to create anew.

Schiller understood the same tension in his *Letters on Aesthetic Education* as a conflict between the sensuous drive and the formal drive. The Person persists through Time and is conditioned by it, since Time is the condition of all contingency. But the Person also conditions Time to the extent that he strives towards Absolute Being, which Schiller identifies with Freedom or Human

Nature and ultimately with an aspiration towards the divine. The Person strives to become this Absolute, his or her ideal Self, by organizing the changing matter of experience into a formal unity. Personality is thus one possible expression of Human Nature, but it is merely an expression of it as a Form without sensation. Hence Sensuous Nature without Personality is merely Matter; and emotion and will without Reason is merely World, "the formless content of time." In order for experience to take on a form, the Person must transform the "manifold variety of World" into the "eternal unity" of the Self. This is the metaphysic (briefly) behind Schiller's theory of the artistic process. The artist faces the same tension and seeks a similar ideal, though naturally he does so through the formal unity of each artwork. And each artwork requires matter and form. So the sensous drive seeks out matter through passive sensation and feeling, while the formal drive attempts to free it from time and endow it with universality and necessity. To seek one without the other results in obvious disproportions: to be driven by sense alone is to surrender to changing affections and volitions; to be driven by form alone is to preclude the reception of new experience through a sealed-off autonomy and rationality. What keeps the two drives in harmony in the Person is culture; and what reconciles them in art, according to Schiller, is play. The play-drive liberates the psyche by establishing a harmony between the laws of reason and the contingency of the World: and thus, "To the extent that it deprives feelings and passions of their dynamic power, it will bring them into harmony with the ideas of reason; and to the extent that it deprives the laws of reason of their moral compulsion, it will reconcile them with the interests of the senses."[5] It is a constant tension, only to be resolved in the unity of a living form.

I give this brief advertisement of these works in the hope that my symbolic reductions will urge the reader on to a higher process. We may set up various dichotomies to be reconciled in the ideal poem or the creative act. To apply one such dichotomy to the idea of symbolic form, we may see metaphor as the poet's Freedom and analogy as his Law—or at least one of the laws of the symbolic imagination. For if it is true that the play of metaphor works with a potentially infinite fund of images, then it may also be true that the forms that structure those images are finite. But ultimately such theoretical limits have to be tested by the poet in the realities of the creative act. And the genius of that act at its most inspired is in more than one sense beyond criticism.

[5] *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and trans. E. M. Wilkinson & L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 99.

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