CRITICAL THEORY SINCE PLATO

Revised Edition

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The influence of Freud on modern literature, critical practice, and literary theory has been so immense and varied that no small selection from his work can begin to represent that influence. *Creative Writers and Daydreaming* does, however, suggest something of the range of his interest in the relationship between the author and his work. Freud draws an analogy between the artist’s creations and dreams or fantasy. He is interested in literary works as expressions of the author; he sees a piece of creative writing as a continuation of or substitute for the play of childhood. To Freud the hero of romance is merely another manifestation of the familiar ego. Freud is known to have remarked that it was not he but the poets who discovered the unconscious.

In this essay Freud also displays briefly some aspects of his approach to the psychology of the reader. He suggests that the superficial pleasure of the work (“forepleasure”) actually releases still greater and deeper psychic pleasure and thereby liberates tensions.

Freud’s discussion of literature is limited by his analogy between literary work and dream. As Charles Lamb remarked, the poet is awake when he dreams; and that is an important difference. The poet consciously employs a medium. From the Freudian point of view the medium could be considered a sort of censor, the true meaning of a work hidden behind the manifest “dream.” This meaning presumably could be recovered by analysis. Fundamentally, this approach leads to an allegorical reading (in Freudian terms) of all literary works. The theory of symbolism developed by the Romantics opposed this sort of allegorization. The Romantic view led to denials that a work’s meaning can be discovered by analysis, that the medium can be separated from the content, even (as Croce later maintained) that there is any meaning prior to the expression.

A version of what has been called “psychical distance” and Kant and Coleridge call the “beautiful” is apparent in Freud’s assertion that because the writer’s imaginative world is “unreal,” it is possible for many things in it to be pleasurable that would otherwise be unpleasant. Freud does not discuss adequately how it is that some contexts succeed in making this pleasure possible while others do not. Indeed, he is not really interested in the matter of pleasure. His concern is for psychological implications. His discussion suggests, by his own admission, that somewhat inferior works may be more interesting for psychoanalytical investigation than avowed masterpieces. The reason for this, he says, is that lesser works do not take over ready-made materials and themes. This seems naïve in that the more simple, sentimental, and popular the work the more *obviously* conventional it usually is in theme and plot.

As Lionel Trilling pointed out in his essay *Freud and Literature*, Freud’s discussion of these and other matters is hampered by an inadequate grasp of epistemological issues. He talks a great deal about what is “real,” but he never locates “reality” for
us. Nevertheless, his speculations have had an immense influence, and virtually no modern critic has not been touched by them.


Creative Writers and Daydreaming

We laymen have always been intensely curious to know—like the cardinal who put a similar question to Ariosto1—from what sources that strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable. Our interest is only heightened the more by the fact that, if we ask him, the writer himself gives us no explanation, or none that is satisfactory; and it is not at all weakened by our knowledge that not even the clearest insight into the determinants of his choice of material and into the nature of the art of creating imaginative form will ever help to make creative writers of us.

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1Ariosto dedicated the Orlando Furioso to Cardinal Ippolito d’Este, who said in response, “Where did you find so many stories?”
tion—while separating it sharply from reality. Language has preserved this relationship between children’s play and poetic creation. It gives the name of Spiel ["game"] to these forms of imaginative writing which require to be linked to tangible objects and which are capable of representation. It speaks of a Lustspiel or Trauerspiel ["comedy" or "tragedy"] and describes those who carry out the representation as Schauspieler ["players"]. The unreality of the writer’s imaginative world, however, has very important consequences for the technique of his art; for many things which, if they were real, could give no enjoyment, can do so in the play of fantasy, and many excitments which, in themselves, are actually distressing, can become a source of pleasure for the hearers and spectators at the performance of a writer’s work.

There is another consideration for the sake of which we will dwell a moment longer on this contrast between reality and play. When the child has grown up and has ceased to play, and after he has been laboring for decades to envisage the realities of life with proper seriousness, he may one day find himself in a mental situation which once more undoes the contrast between play and reality. As an adult he can look back on the intense seriousness with which he once carried on his games in childhood, and, by equating his ostensibly serious occupations of today with his childhood games, he can throw off the too heavy burden imposed on him by life and win the high yield of pleasure afforded by humor.

As people grow up, then, they cease to play, and they seem to give up the yield of pleasure which they gained from playing. But whoever understands the human mind knows that hardly anything is harder for a man than to give up a pleasure which he has once experienced. Actually, we can never give anything up; we only exchange one thing for another. What appears to be a renunciation is really the formation of a substitute or surrogate. In the same way, the growing child, when he stops playing, gives up nothing but the link with real objects; instead of playing, he now fantasizes. He builds castles in the air and creates what are called daydreams. I believe that most people construct fantasies at times in their lives. This is a fact which has long been overlooked and whose importance has therefore not been sufficiently appreciated.

People’s fantasies are less easy to observe than the play of children. The child, it is true, plays by himself or forms a closed psychical system with other children for the purposes of a game; but even though he may not play his game in front of the grown-ups; he does not, on the other hand, conceal it from them. The adult, on the contrary, is ashamed of his fantasies and hides them from other people. He cherishes his fantasies as his most intimate possessions, and as a rule he would rather confess his misdeeds than tell anyone his fantasies. It may come about that for that reason he believes he is the only person who invents such fantasies and has no idea that creations of this kind are widespread among other people. This difference in the behavior of a person who plays and a person who fantasizes is accounted for by the motives of these two activities, which are nevertheless adjuncts to each other.

A child’s play is determined by wishes: in point of fact by a single wish—one that helps in his upbringing—the wish to be big and grown up. He is always playing at being “grown up,” and in his games he imitates what he knows about the lives of his elders. He has no reason to conceal this wish. With the adult, the case is different. On the one hand, he knows that he is expected not to go on playing or fantasizing any longer, but to act in the real world; on the other hand, some of the wishes which give rise to his fantasies are of a kind which it is essential to conceal. Thus he is ashamed of his fantasies as being childish and as being un permissible.

But, you will ask, if people make such a mystery of their fantasizing, how is it that we know so much about it? Well, there is a class of human beings upon whom, not a god, indeed, but a stern goddess—Necessity—has allotted the task of telling what they suffer and what things give them happiness. These are the victims of nervous illness, who are obliged to tell their fantasies, among other things, to the doctor by whom they expect to be cured by mental treatment. This is our best source of knowledge, and we have found good reason to suppose that our patients tell us nothing that we might not also hear from healthy people.

Let us make ourselves acquainted with a few of the characteristics of fantasizing. We may lay it down that a happy person never fantasizes, only an unsatisfied one. The motive forces of fantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single fantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality. These motivating wishes vary according to the sex, character, and circumstances of the person who is having the fantasy; but they fall naturally into two main groups. They are either ambitious wishes, which serve to elevate the subject’s personality; or they are erotic ones. In young women the erotic wishes predominate almost exclusively, for their ambition is as a rule absorbed by erotic trends. In young men egoistic and ambitious wishes come to the fore clearly enough alongside of erotic ones. But we will
not lay stress on the opposition between the two trends; we
would rather emphasize the fact that they are often united.
Just as, in many altarpieces, the portrait of the donor is to be
seen in a corner of the picture, so, in the majority of ambi-
tious fantasies, we can discover in some corner or other the
lady for whom the creator of the fantasy performs all his
heroic deeds and at whose feet all his triumphs are laid. Here,
as you see, there are strong enough motives for concealment;
the well-brought-up young woman is only allowed a mini-
imum of erotic desire, and the young man has to learn to sup-
press the excess of self-regard which he brings with him
from the spoilt days of his childhood, so that he may find his
place in a society which is full of other individuals making
equally strong demands.

We must not suppose that the products of this imagina-
tive activity—the various fantasies, castles in the air and
daydreams—are stereotyped or unalterable. On the contrary,
they fit themselves into the subject’s shifting impressions of
life, change with every change in his situation, and receive
from every fresh active impression what might be called a
“date-mark.” The relation of a fantasy to time is in general
very important. We may say that it hovers, as it were, be-
tween three times—the three moments of time which our
ideation involves. Mental work is linked to some current
impression, some provoking occasion in the present which has
been able to arouse one of the subject’s major wishes. From
there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience
(usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled; and it
now creates a situation relating to the future which repres-
ents a fulfillment of the wish. What it thus creates is a
daydream or fantasy, which carries about it traces of its
origin from the occasion which provoked it and from the
memory. Thus past, present, and future are strung togeth-
er; as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through
them.

A very ordinary example may serve to make what I
have said clear. Let us take the case of a poor orphan boy to
whom you have given the address of some employer where
he may perhaps find a job. On his way there he may indulge
in a daydream appropriate to the situation from which it
arises. The content of his fantasy will perhaps be something
like this. He is given a job, finds favor with his new em-
ployer, makes himself indispensable in the business, is taken
into his employer’s family, marries the charming young
daughter of the house, and then himself becomes a director
of the business, first as his employer’s partner and then as
his successor. In this fantasy, the dreamer has regained what
he possessed in his happy childhood—the protecting house,
the loving parents, and the first objects of his affectionate
feelings. You will see from this example the way in which
the wish makes use of an occasion in the present to construct,
on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future.

There is a great deal more that could be said about fan-
tasies; but I will only allude as briefly as possible to certain
points. If fantasies become overluxuriant and overpowerful,
the conditions are laid for an onset of neurosis or psychosis.
Fantasies, moreover, are the immediate mental precur-
sors of the distressing symptoms complained of by our patients.
Here a broad bypath branches off into pathology.

I cannot pass over the relation of fantasies to dreams.
Our dreams at night are nothing else than fantasies like these,
as we can demonstrate from the interpretation of dreams.
Language, in its unrivaled wisdom, long ago decided the
question of the essential nature of dreams by giving the name
of daydreams to the airy creations of fantasy. If the meaning
of our dreams usually remains obscure to us in spite of this
pointer, it is because of the circumstance that at night there
also arise in us wishes of which we are ashamed; these we
must conceal from ourselves, and they have consequently
been repressed, pushed into the unconscious. Repressed
wishes of this sort and their derivatives are only allowed to
come to expression in a very distorted form. When scientific
work had succeeded in elucidating this factor of dream dis-
tortion, it was no longer difficult to recognize that night-
dreams are wish-fulfillments in just the same way as day-
dreams—the fantasies which we all know so well.

So much for fantasies. And now for the creative writer.
May we really attempt to compare the imaginative writer
with the “dreamer in broad daylight,” and his creations with
daydreams? Here we must begin by making an initial dis-
tinction. We must separate writers who, like the ancient
authors of epics and tragedies, take over their material
ready-made, from writers who seem to originate their own
material. We will keep to the latter kind, and, for the pur-
poses of our comparison, we will choose not the writers most
highly esteemed by the critics, but the less pretentious au-
thors of novels, romances and short stories, who nonethe-
less have the widest and most eager circle of readers of both
sexes. One feature above all cannot fail to strike us about the
creations of these story-writers: each of them has a hero who
is the center of interest, for whom the writer tries to win
sympathy by every possible means and whom he seems to
place under the protection of a special providence. If, at the
end of one chapter of my story, I leave the hero unconscious
and bleeding from severe wounds, I am sure to find him at
the beginning of the next being carefully nursed and on the
way to recovery; and if the first volume closes with the ship
he is in going down in a storm at sea, I am certain, at the
opening of the second volume, to read of his miraculous res-
cue—a rescue without which the story could not proceed.
The feeling of security with which I follow the hero through his perilous adventures is the same as the feeling with which a hero in real life throws himself into the water to save a drowning man or exposes himself to the enemy's fire in order to storm a battery. It is the true heroic feeling, which one of our best writers has expressed in an inimitable phrase: "Nothing can happen to me!" It seems to me, however, that through this revealing characteristic of invulnerability we can immediately recognize His Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every daydream and of every story.

Other typical features of these egocentric stories point to the same kinship. The fact that all the women in the novel invariably fall in love with the hero can hardly be looked on as a portrayal of reality, but it is easily understood as a necessary constituent of a daydream. The same is true of the fact that the other characters in the story are sharply divided into good and bad, in defiance of the variety of human characters that are to be observed in real life. The "good" ones are the helpers, while the "bad" ones are the enemies and rivals, of the ego which has become the hero of the story.

We are perfectly aware that very many imaginative writings are far removed from the model of the naive daydream; and yet I cannot suppress the suspicion that even the most extreme deviations from that model could be linked with it through an uninterrupted series of transitional cases. It has struck me that in many of what are known as "psychological" novels only one person—once again the hero—is described from within. The author sits inside his mind, as it were, and looks at the other characters from outside. The psychological novel in general no doubt owes its special nature to the inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes. Certain novels, which might be described as "eccentric," seem to stand in quite special contrast to the types of the daydream. In these, the person who is introduced as the hero plays only a very small active part; he sees the actions and sufferings of other people pass before him like a spectator. Many of Zola's later works belong to this category. But I must point out that the psychological analysis of individuals who are not creative writers, and who differ in some respects from the so-called norm, has shown us analogous variations of the daydream, in which the ego contents itself with the role of spectator.

If our comparison of the imaginative writer with the daydreamer, and of poetical creation with the daydream, is to be of any value, it must, above all, show itself in some way or other fruitful. Let us, for instance, try to apply to these authors' works the thesis we laid down earlier concerning the relation between fantasy and the three periods of time and the wish which runs through them; and, with its help, let us try to study the connections that exist between the life of the writer and his works. No one has known, as a rule, what expectations to frame in approaching this problem; and often the connection has been thought of in much too simple terms. In the light of the insight we have gained from fantasies, we ought to expect the following state of affairs. A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfillment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of the old memory.

Do not be alarmed at the complexity of this formula. I suspect that in fact it will prove to be too ingenious a pattern. Nevertheless, it may contain a first approach to the true state of affairs; and, from some experiments I have made, I am inclined to think that this way of looking at creative writings may turn out not unfruitful. You will not forget that the stress it lays on childhood memories in the writer's life—a stress which may perhaps seem puzzling—is ultimately derived from the assumption that a piece of creative writing, like a daydream, is a continuation of, and a substitute for, what was once the play of childhood.

We must not neglect, however, to go back to the kind of imaginative works which we have to recognize, not as original creations, but as the refashioning of ready-made and familiar material. Even here, the writer keeps a certain amount of independence, which can express itself in the choice of material and in changes in it which are often quite extensive. Insofar as the material is already at hand, however, it is derived from the popular treasure-house of myths, legends, and fairy tales. The study of constructions of folk psychology such as these is far from being complete, but it is extremely probable that myths, for instance, are distorted vestiges of the wishful fantasies of whole nations, the secular dreams of youthful humanity.

You will say that, although I have put the creative writer first in the title of my paper, I have told you far less about him than about fantasies. I am aware of that, and I must try to excuse it by pointing to the present state of our knowledge. All I have been able to do is to throw out some encouragements and suggestions which, starting from the study of fantasies, lead on to the problem of the writer's choice of his literary material. As for the other problem—by what means the creative writer achieves the emotional effects in us that are aroused by his creations—we have as yet not touched on it at all. But I should like at least to point out to you the path that leads from our discussion of fantasies to the problems of poetical effects.
You will remember how I have said that the daydreamer carefully conceals his fantasies from other people because he feels he has reasons for being ashamed of them. I should now add that even if he were to communicate them to us he could give us no pleasure by his disclosures. Such fantasies, when we learn them, repel us or at least leave us cold. But when a creative writer presents his plays to us or tells us what we are inclined to take to be his personal daydreams; we experience a great pleasure, and one which probably arises from the confluence of many sources. How the writer accomplishes this is his innermost secret; the essential ars poetica lies in the technique of overcoming the feeling of repulsion in us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that rise between each single ego and the others.\(^3\) We can guess two of the methods used by this technique. The writer softens the character of his egoistic daydreams by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal—that is, aesthetic—yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his fantasies. We give the name of an incentive bonus, or a forepleasure, to a yield of pleasure such as this, which is offered to us so as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources. In my opinion, all the aesthetic pleasure which a creative writer affords us has the character of a forepleasure of this kind, and our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds from a liberation of tensions in our minds. It may even be that not a little of this effect is due to the writer's enabling us thenceforward to enjoy our own daydreams without self-reproach or shame. This brings us to the threshold of new, interesting, and complicated inquiries; but also, at least for the moment, to the end of our discussion.

\(^3\)Compare Keats's letter to Benjamin Bailey, p. 493.
The influence of T. S. Eliot's criticism during the first half of the twentieth century, and particularly the influence of ideas proposed in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, was immense. Like Hulme's *Romanticism and Classicism*, the essay is an attack on certain critical emphases in Romanticism, particularly the cult of originality and the idea that a poem is primarily an expression of the personality of the poet. Eliot argues that a great poem always asserts its relation to the works of dead poets and artists and that the poet must develop a sense of the presentness of the past. The poet is not expressing his personality but instead a medium. He is continually surrendering himself to "something which is more valuable." Poetry is not "a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion." Some commentators have accused Eliot, on the basis of such remarks, of antipoetic coldness. Eliot's point, however, is more like the one Keats makes with his term *negative capability*. Eliot is suggesting that a sort of *psychical distance*, to use Edward Bullough's term, is a condition of successful composition. Eliot provides what many Romantic critics tended to neglect, a concern for the medium in which the poet must work, and he protests the so-called Romantic virtues of originality and self-expression.

Eliot's *Hamlet and His Problems* is printed below because it contains the well-known remark about the "objective correlative," which carries Eliot's concern for problems of the medium into a discussion of artistic practice. The term is perhaps finally more mystifying than useful, since Eliot's definition of it provides no clear way of determining when an "objective correlative" is present or in what it really consists.

Eliot's view of critical practice emphasizes the ability of the critic to read the literary text before him carefully and sensitively. This attention to the text and concern with language had been missing in much of the criticism of Eliot's immediate predecessors.

Tradition and the Individual Talent

In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploiring its absence. We cannot refer to "the tradition" or to "a tradition"; at most, we employ the adjective in saying that the poetry of so-and-so is "traditional" or even "too traditional." Seldom, perhaps, does the word appear except in a phrase of censure. If otherwise, it is vaguely apprehensive, with the implication, as to the work approved, of some pleasing archaeological reconstruction. You can hardly make the word agreeable to English ears without this comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archaeology.

Certainly the word is not likely to appear in our appreciations of living or dead writers. Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius. We know, or think we know, from the enormous mass of critical writing that has appeared in the French language, the critical method or habit of the French; we only conclude (we are such unconscious people) that the French are "more critical" than we, and sometimes even plume ourselves a little with the fact, as if the French were the less spontaneous. Perhaps they are; but we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism. One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavor to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity.

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind and timid adherence to its successes, "tradition" should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple curlets soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the
supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly; altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.

In a peculiar sense he will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past. I say judged, not amputated, by them; not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of dead critics. It is a judgment, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other. To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art. And we do not quite say that the new is more valuable because it fits in; but its fitting in is a test of its value—a test, it is true, which can only be slowly and cautiously applied, for we are none of us infallible judges of conformity. We say; it appears to conform, and is perhaps individual, or it appears individual, and may conform; but we are hardly likely to find that it is one and not the other.

To proceed to a more intelligible exposition of the relation of the poet to the past: he can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus, nor can he form himself wholly on one or two private admissions, nor can he form himself wholly upon one preferred period. The first course is inadmissible, the second is an important experience of youth, and the third is a pleasant and highly desirable supplement. The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe—the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind—is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen. That this development, refinement perhaps, complication certainly, is not, from the point of view of the artist, any improvement. Perhaps not even an improvement from the point of view of the psychologist or not to the extent which we imagine; perhaps only in the end based upon a complication in economics and machinery. But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.

> Someone said: "The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know.

I am alive to a usual objection to what is clearly part of my program for the métier of poetry. The objection is that the doctrine requires a ridiculous amount of erudition (pedantry), a claim which can be rejected by appeal to the lives of poets in any pantheon. It will even be affirmed that much learning deadens or perverts poetic sensibility. While, however, we persist in believing that a poet ought to know as much as will not encroach upon his necessary receptivity and necessary laziness, it is not desirable to confine knowledge to whatever can be put into a useful shape for examinations, drawing rooms, or the still more pretentious modes of publicity. Some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy must sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum. What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.

What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.

There remains to define this process of depersonalization and its relation to the sense of tradition. It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of 'science.' I, therefore, invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filleted platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulfur dioxide.

II

Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. If we attend to the confused cries of the newspaper critics and the susurrus of popular repetition that follows, we shall hear the names of poets in great numbers; if we seek not blue-book knowledge but the enjoyment of poetry, and ask for a poem, we shall seldom find it. I have tried to point out the importance of the relation of the poem to other poems by other authors, and suggested the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. The other aspect of this impersonal theory of poetry is the relation of the poem to its author. And I hinted, by an analogy, that the mind of the mature

"Muttering."
poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of "personality," not being necessarily more interesting, or having "more to say," but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.

The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulfuric acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

The experience, you will notice, the elements which enter the presence of the transforming catalyst, are of two kinds: emotions and feelings. The effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience not of art. It may be formed out of one emotion, or may be a combination of several; and various feelings, inhereing for the writer in particular words or phrases or images, may be added to compose the final result. Or great poetry may be made without the direct and inspired combination of any emotion whatsoever: composed out of feelings solely. Canto XV of the Inferno (Brunetto Latini) is a working up of the emotion evident in the situation; but the effect, though single as that of any work of art, is obtained by considerable complexity of detail. The last quatrains give an image, a feeling attaching to an image, which "came," which did not develop simply out of what preceded, but which was probably in suspension in the poet’s mind until the proper combination arrived for it to add oneself to. The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.

If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semithetical criterion of "sublimity" misses the mark. For it is not the "greatness," the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts. The episode of Paolo and Francesca employs a definite emotion, but the intensity of the poetry is something quite different from whatever intensity in the supposed experience: it may give the impression of. It is no more intense, furthermore, than Canto XXVI, the voyage of Ulysses, which has not the direct dependence upon an emotion. Great variety is possible in the process of transmutation of emotion: the murder of Agamemnon, or the agony of Othello, gives an artistic effect apparently closer to a possible original than the scenes from Dante. In the Agamemnon, the artistic emotion approximates to the emotion of an actual spectator; in Othello to the emotion of the protagonist himself. But the difference between art and the event is always absolute; the combination which is the murder of Agamemnon is probably as complex as that which is the voyage of Ulysses. In either case there has been a fusion of elements, The ode of Keats contains a number of feelings which have nothing particular to do with the nightingale, but which the nightingale, partly, perhaps, because of its attractive name, and partly because of its reputation, served to bring together.

The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.

I will quote a passage which is unfamiliar enough to be regarded with fresh attention in the light—or darkness—of these observations:

And now methinks I could e’en chide myself
For doting on her beauty, though her death
Shall be revenged after no common action.
Does the silkworm expend her yellow labors
For thee? Forthoe does she undo herself?
Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships
For the, poor benefit of a bewildering minute?
Why does you fellow falsify highways,
And put his life between the judge’s lips,
To refine such a thing—keeps horse and men
To beat their valors for her? . . .2

In this passage (as is evident if it is taken in its context) there is a combination of positive and negative emotions: an intensely strong attraction toward beauty and an equally intense fascination by the ugliness which is contrasted with it and which destroys it. This balance of contrasted emotion is in the dramatic situation to which the speech is pertinent, but that situation alone is inadequate to it. This is, so to speak,

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the structural emotion, provided by the drama. But the whole
effect, the dominant tone, is due to the fact that a number of
floating feelings, having an affinity to this emotion by no
means superficially evident, have combined with it to give
us a new art emotion.

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions pro-
voked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any
way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may
be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be
a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the
emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emo-
tions in life. One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to
seek for new human emotions to express; and in this search
for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse.
The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use
the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to
express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And
emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn
as well as those familiar to him. Consequently, we must be-
lieve that "emotion recollected in tranquillity" is an inexact
formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor,
without distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentra-
tion, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a
very great number of experiences which to the practical and
active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a
concentration which does not happen consciously or of de-
liberation. These experiences are not "recollected," and they
finally unite in an atmosphere which is "tranquil" only in
that it is a passive attending upon the event. Of course this is
not quite the whole story. There is a great deal, in the writing
of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact,
the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be
conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious.
Both errors tend to make him "personal." Poetry is not a
turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is
not the expression of personality, but an escape from person-
ality. But, of course, only those who have personality and
emotions know what it means to want to escape from these
things.

III

ο δὲ νοῦς οὐς θεύτερον τι καὶ ἀπαθὴς ἐστὶν.

This essay proposes to halt at the frontier of metaphys-
ics or mysticism, and confine itself to such practical conclu-
sions as can be applied by the responsible person interested
in poetry. To divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a
laudable aim: for it would conduce to a juster estimation of
actual poetry, good and bad. There are many people who ap-
preciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there
is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical
excellence. But very few know when there is an expression
of significant emotion, emotion which has its life in the
poem and not in the history of the poet. The emotion of art
is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach his impersonality
without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done.
And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he
lives in what is not merely the present, but the present mo-
ment of the past, unless he is conscious; not of what is dead,
but of what is already living.

Hamlet and His Problems

Few critics have even admitted that Hamlet the play is the
primary problem, and Hamlet the character only secondary.
And Hamlet the character has had an especial temptation for
that most dangerous type of critic; the critic with a mind
which is naturally of the creative order, but which through
some weakness in creative power exercises itself in criticism
instead. These minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious exis-
tence for their own artistic realization. Such a mind had Go-
ethe, who made of Hamlet a Werther; and such had Coleridge,
who made of Hamlet a Coleridge; and probably neither of
these men in writing about Hamlet remembered that his first
business was to study a work of art. The kind of criticism
that Goethe and Coleridge produced, in writing of Hamlet,
is the most misleading kind possible. For they both pos-
sessed unquestionable critical insight, and both make their
critical aberrations the more plausible by the substitution—
of their own Hamlet for Shakespeare's—which their creative
gift effects. We should be thankful that Walter Pater did not
fix his attention on this play.

Two writers of our own time, Mr. J. M. Robertson and
Professor Stoll of the University of Minnesota, have issued
small books which can be praised for moving in the other
direction. Mr. Stoll performs a service in recalling to our

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3See Wordsworth, Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, p. 443.
4"The mind may be too divine and therefore unmoved."
attention the labors of the critics of the seventeenth and
eighteenth centuries; observing that

they knew less about psychology than more recent
Hamlet critics, but they were nearer in spirit to
Shakespeare's art; and as they insisted on the im-
portance of the effect of the whole rather than on
the importance of the leading character, they were
nearer, in their old-fashioned way, to the secret of
dramatic art in general.

Qua work of art, the work of art cannot be interpreted;
there is nothing to interpret; we can only criticize it accord-
ing to standards, in comparison to other works of art; and for
"interpretation" the chief task is the presentation of relevant
historical facts which the reader is not assumed to know. Mr.
Robertson points out, very pertinently, how critics have
failed in their "interpretation" of Hamlet by ignoring what
ought to be very obvious; that Hamlet is a stratification, that
it represents the efforts of a series of men, each making what
he could out of the work of his predecessors. The Hamlet of
Shakespeare will appear to us very differently if, instead of
treating the whole action of the play as due to Shakespeare's
design, we perceive his Hamlet to be superposed upon much
cruider material which persists even in the final form.

We know that there was an older play by Thomas Kyd,
that extraordinary dramatic (if not poetic) genius who was in
all probability the author of two plays so dissimilar as The
Spanish Tragedy and Arden of Faversham; and what this
play was like we can guess from three clues: from The Span-
ish Tragedy itself, from the tale of Belleforest upon which
Kyd's Hamlet must have been based, and from a version
acted in Germany in Shakespeare's lifetime which bears
strong evidence of having been adapted from the earlier, not
from the later, play. From these three sources it is clear that
in the earlier play the motive was a revenge motive simply;
that the action or delay is caused, as in The Spanish Tragedy;
solely by the difficulty of assassinating a monarch sur-
rounded by guards; and that the "madness" of Hamlet was
feigned in order to escape suspicion, and successfully. In the
final play of Shakespeare, on the other hand, there is a mo-
tive which is more important than that of revenge, and which
explicitly "blunts" the latter; the delay in revenge is unex-
plained on grounds of necessity or expediency; and the effect
of the "madness" is not to lull but to arouse the king's sus-
picion. The alteration is not complete enough, however, to
be convincing. Furthermore, there are verbal parallels so
close to The Spanish Tragedy as to leave no doubt that in

places Shakespeare was merely revising the text of Kyd. And
finally there are unexplained scenes—the Polonius-Laertes
and the Polonius-Reynaldo scenes—for which there is little
excuse; these scenes are not in the verse style of Kyd, and
not beyond doubt in the style of Shakespeare. These Mr.
Robertson believes to be scenes in the original play of Kyd
reworked by a third hand, perhaps Chapman, before Shake-
speare touched the play. And he concludes, with very strong
show of reason, that the original play of Kyd was, like cer-
tain other revenge plays, in two parts of five acts each. The
upshot of Mr. Robertson's examination is, we believe, irre-
fragable: that Shakespeare's Hamlet, so far as it is Shake-
spere's, is a play dealing with the effect of a mother's guilt
upon her son, and that Shakespeare was unable to impose
this motive successfully upon the "intractable" material of the
old play.

Of the intractability there can be no doubt. So far from
being Shakespeare's masterpiece, the play is most certainly
an artistic failure. In several ways the play is puzzling, and
disquieting as is none of the others. Of all the plays it is the
longest and is possibly the one on which Shakespeare spent
most pains; and yet he has left in it superfluous and inconsist-
ent scenes which even hasty revision should have noticed.
The versification is variable. Lines like "Look, the morn, in
russet mantle clad, / Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern
hill." are of the Shakespeare of Romeo and Juliet. The lines
in Act V, scene ii,

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep . . .
Up from my cabin,
My sea-gown scar'd about me, in the dark
Groped I to find out them: had my desire;
Fingered their packet;

are of his quite mature period. Both workmanship and
thought are in an unstable position. We are surely justified in
attributing the play, with that other profoundly interesting
play of "intractable" material and astonishing versification,
Measure for Measure, to a period of crisis, after which fol-
low the tragic successes which culminate in Coriolanus.
Coriolanus may be not as "interesting" as Hamlet, but it is,
with Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare's most assured ar-
stistic success. And probably more people have thought Ham-
let a work of art because they found it interesting, than have
found it interesting because it is a work of art. It is the Mona
Lisa of literature.

The grounds of Hamlet's failure are not immediately
obvious. Mr. Robertson is undoubtedly correct in concluding
that the essential emotion of the play is the feeling of a son
towards a guilty mother: "[Hamlet's] tone is that of one who

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Eliot I have never, by the way, seen a cogent refutation of Thomas Rymer's objections to Othello.
has suffered tortures on the score of his mother’s degradation. . . The guilt of a mother is an almost intoluble motive for drama, but it had to be maintained and emphasized to supply a psychological solution, or rather a hint of one."

This however, is by no means the whole story. It is not merely the “guilt of a mother” that cannot be handled as Shakespeare handled the suspicion of Othello, the infatuation of Antony, or the pride of Coriolanus. The subject might conceivably have expanded into a tragedy like these, intelligible, self-complete, in the sunlight. Hamlet, like the sonnets, is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art. And when we search for this feeling, we find it, as in the sonnets, very difficult to localize. You cannot point to it in the speeches; indeed, if you examine the two famous soliloquies you see the versification of Shakespeare, but a content which might be claimed by another, perhaps by the author of the Revenge of Bussy d’Ambois, Act V, scene i. We find Shakespeare’s Hamlet not in the action, not in any quotations that we might select, so much as in an unmistakable tone which is unmistakably not in the earlier play.

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an objective correlative; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. If you examine any of Shakespeare’s more successful tragedies, you will find this exact equivalence; you will find that the state of mind of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep has been communicated to you by a skillful accumulation of imagined sensory impressions; the words of Macbeth on hearing of his wife’s death strike us as if, given the sequence of events, these words were automatically released by the last events in the series. The artistic “inevitability” lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in Hamlet. Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear. And the supposed identity of Hamlet with his author is genuine to this point: that Hamlet’s bafflement at the absence of objective equivalent to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem. Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it; and nothing that Shakespeare can do with the plot can express Hamlet for him. And it must be noticed that the very nature of the données of the problem precludes objective equivalence. To have heightened the criminality of Gertrude would have been to provide the formula for a totally different emotion in Hamlet; it is just because her character is so negative and insignificant that she arouses in Hamlet the feeling which she is incapable of representing.

The “madness” of Hamlet lay to Shakespeare’s hand; in the earlier play a simple ruse, and to the end, we may presume, understood as a ruse by the audience. For Shakespeare it is less than madness and more than feigned. The levity of Hamlet, his repetition of phrase, his puns, are not part of a deliberate plan of dissimulation, but a form of emotional relief. In the character Hamlet it is the buffoonery of an emotion which can find no outlet in action; in the dramatist it is the buffoony of an emotion which he cannot express in art. The intense feeling, ecstatic or terrible, without an object or exceeding its object, is something which every person of sensibility has known; it is doubtless a subject for pathologists. It often occurs in adolescence: the ordinary person puts these feelings to sleep, or trims down his feelings to fit the business world; the artist keeps them alive by his ability to intensify the world to his emotions. The Hamlet of Lafortgue is an adolescent; the Hamlet of Shakespeare is not, he has: not that explanation and excuse. We must simply admit that here Shakespeare tackled a problem which proved too much for him. Why he attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle; under compulsion of what experience he attempted to express the inexpressibly horrible, we cannot ever know. We need a great many facts in his biography; and we should like to know whether, and when, and after or at the same time as what personal experience, he read Montaigne, II., xii., Apologie de Raimond Sebond. We should have, finally, to know something which is by hypothesis unknowable, for we assume it to be an experience which, in the manner indicated, exceeded the facts. We should have to understand things which Shakespeare did not understand himself.
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W. K. Wimsatt
1907–1975

Monroe C. Beardsley
1915–1985

Literary theory is replete with accusations of heresy and fallacy. Poe found heresy in didacticism, Brooks in paraphrase. In modern criticism the two best-known accusations of fallacy are those made by Wimsatt and Beardsley in *The Intentional Fallacy* and *The Affective Fallacy*. These essays are written out of the assumption that a literary work has an ontological status of its own—that it is an object with a certain autonomy. They reflect objectivist principles that were current in New Criticism in the work of Ransom, Tate, Warren, and Brooks.

By *intentional fallacy* Wimsatt and Beardsley mean a confusion between the poem and its origins. This fallacy appears frequently in Romantic critical practice. Romantic critics often saw the poem as an expression of the author’s self and therefore tended to thrust ultimate interest back on the author, using the poem as evidence for conclusions about him. Before the Romantic movement, biographical criticism tended to be of little importance; afterward, biography came to dominate literary scholarship and sometimes became an end in itself. Objectivist critics turned away from consideration of the poem as personal expression to the concept of the poem as having an independent public existence. Wimsatt and Beardsley proceed to argue against the usefulness to criticism of considering the author’s intention (if indeed it could be discovered), for what the author did accomplish is before us as the poem.

Wimsatt and Beardsley use the term *affective fallacy* for confusion between the poem and its results. There is a tradition of criticism that defines the poem in terms of, even locates the poem in, the reader’s response. One well-known modern critic who attempts this is Richards, whose position Wimsatt and Beardsley criticize in their essay. Ultimately, theories of catharsis, therapy, didacticism, and delight all partake of this fallacy, for they judge the poem in terms of its effect on the reader.

A third sort of fallacy or heresy is discussed in Cassirer’s essay *Art*, where Cassirer deals with and disposes of imitation. Thus modern “objectivist” criticism attacked all the traditional orientations, seeking to leave nothing but the poem itself and its own structure, its own “being,” as the proper subject of critical study.

Works by Wimsatt include *The Prose Style of Dr. Johnson* (1941); *Philosophical Words* (1948); *The Verbal Icon* (1954); *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (with Cleanth Brooks, 1957); *Hateful Contraries* (1965); *The Portraits of Alexander Pope* (1965); and *Day of the Leopards* (1976). Beardsley’s work includes *Aesthetics: Prob-
The Intentional Fallacy

I

The claim of the author’s “intention” upon the critic’s judgment has been challenged in a number of recent discussions, notably in the debate entitled The Personal Heresy, between Professors Lewis and Tillyard. But it seems doubtful if this claim and most of its Romantic corollaries are as yet subject to any widespread questioning. The present writers, in a short article entitled Intention for a dictionary of literary criticism, raised the issue but were unable to pursue its implications at any length. We argued that the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art, and it seems to us that this is a principle which goes deep into some differences in the history of critical attitudes. It is a principle which accepted or rejected points to the polar opposites of classical “imitation” and Romantic expression. It entails many specific truths about inspiration, authenticity, biography, literary history and scholarship, and about some trends of contemporary poetry, especially its allusiveness. There is hardly a problem of literary criticism in which the critic’s approach will not be qualified by his view of “intention.”

Intention, as we shall use the term, corresponds to what he intended in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance. “In order to judge the poet’s performance, we must know what he intended.” Intention is design or plan in the author’s mind. Intention has obvious affinities for the author’s attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write.

We begin our discussion with a series of propositions summarized and abstracted to a degree where they seem to be axiomatic.

1. A poem does not come into existence by accident. The words of a poem, as Professor Stoll has remarked, come out of a head, not out of a hat. Yet to insist on the designing intellect as a cause of a poem is not to grant the design or intention as a standard by which the critic is to judge the worth of the poet’s performance.

2. One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem. “Only one caveat must be borne in mind,” says an eminent intentionalist in a moment when his theory repudiates itself, “the poet’s aim must be judged at the moment of the creative act, that is to say, by the art of the poem itself.”

3. Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it work. It is only because an artifact works that we infer the intention of an artificer. “A poem should not mean but be.” A poem can be only through its meaning—since its medium is words—yet it is, simply is, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once. Poetry succeeds because all or most of what is said or implied is relevant; what is irrelevant has been excluded, like lumps from pudding and “bugs” from machinery. In this respect poetry differs from practical messages, which are successful if and only if we correctly infer the intention. They are more abstract than poetry.

4. The meaning of a poem may certainly be a personal one, in the sense that a poem expresses a personality or state of soul rather than a physical object like an apple. But even a short lyric poem is dramatic, the response of a speaker (no matter how abstractly conceived) to a situation (no matter how universalized). We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic speaker.
and if to the author at all, only by an act of biographical inference.

5. There is a sense in which an author, by revision, may better achieve his original intention. But it is a very abstract sense. He intended to write a better work, or a better work of a certain kind, and now has done it. But it follows that his former concrete intention was not his intention. "He's the man we were in search of, that's true," says Hardy's rustic constable, "and yet he's not the man we were in search of. For the man we were in search of was not the man we wanted."

"Is not a critic," asks Professor Stoll, "a judge, who does not explore his own consciousness, but determines the author's meaning of intention, as if the poem were a will, a contract, or the constitution? The poem is not the critic's own." He has accurately diagnosed two forms of irresponsibility, one of which he prefers. Our view is yet different. The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge. What is said about the poem is subject to the same scrutiny as any statement in linguistics or in the general science of psychology.

A critic of our dictionary article, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, has argued that there are two kinds of inquiry about a work of art: (1) whether the artist achieved his intentions; (2) whether the work of art "ought ever to have been undertaken at all" and so "whether it is worth preserving." Number 2, Coomaraswamy maintains, is not "criticism of any work of art qua work of art," but is rather moral criticism; number 1 is artistic criticism. But we maintain that 2 need not be moral criticism: that there is another way of deciding whether works of art are worth preserving and whether, in a sense, they "ought" to have been undertaken, and this is the way of objective criticism of works of art as such, the way which enables us to distinguish between a skillful murder and a skillful poem. A skillful murder is an example which Coomaraswamy uses, and in his system the difference between the murder and the poem is simply a "moral" one, not an "artistic" one, since each if carried out according to plan is "artistically" successful. We maintain that 2 is an inquiry of more worth than 1, and since 2 and not 1 is capable of distinguishing poetry from murder, the name "artistic criticism" is properly given to 2.

II

It is not so much a historical statement as a definition to say that the intentional fallacy is a Romantic one. When a rhetorician of the first century A.D. writes: "Sublimity is the echo of a great soul," or when he tells us that "Homer enters into the sublime actions of his heroes" and "shares the full inspiration of the combat," we shall not be surprised to find this rhetorician considered as a distant harbinger of Romanticism and greeted in the warmest terms by Santius. One may wish to argue whether Longinus should be called Romantic, but there can hardly be a doubt that in one important way he is.

Goethe's three questions for "constructive criticism" are "What did the author set out to do? Was his plan reasonable and sensible, and how far did he succeed in carrying it out?" If one leaves out the middle question, one has in effect the system of Croce—the culmination and crowning philosophical expression of Romanticism. The beautiful is the successful intuition-expression, and the ugly is the unsuccessful; the intuition or private part of art is the aesthetic fact, and the medium or public part is not the subject of aesthetic at all. The Madonna of Cimabue is still in the Church of Santa Maria Novella; but does she speak to the visitor today as to the Florentines of the thirteenth century? "Historical interpretation labors . . . to reintegrate in us the psychological conditions which have changed in the course of history. It . . . enables us to see a work of art (a physical object) as its author saw it in the moment of production." The first italics are Croce's, the second ours. The upshot of Croce's system is an ambiguous emphasis on history. With such passages as a point of departure a critic may write a nice analysis of the meaning or "spirit" of a play by Shakespeare or Corneille—a process that involves close historical study but remains aesthetic criticism—or he may, with equal plausibility, produce an essay in sociology, biography, or other kinds of nonaesthetic history.

III

I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts. . . . I took them some of the most elaborate . . .

1Longinus, On the Sublime, IX. 2 and 10–11, pp. 79 and 80.
2See Aesthetic, pp. 692–99.
3[Wimsatt and Beardsley] It is true that Croce himself in his Aristotel Shakespeare and Corneille (London, 1920), Chapter 7, "The Practical Personality and the Poetical Personality," and in his Defense of Poetry (Oxford, 1933), 24, and elsewhere, early and late, has delivered telling attacks on emotive geneticism, but the main drive of the Aesthetic is surely toward a kind of cognitive intentionalism.

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When I read a back-echoers into full in to find somany. One led to a reiteration of the poets which we hear from Societies may have part of it, rigorously ascetic view in which we hardly wish to participate, yet Plato’s Socrates saw a truth about the poetic mind which the world no longer commonly sees — so much criticism, and that most important and most affectionately remembered, has proceeded from that which he might and inspiration.

That reiterated mistrust of the poetry which we hear from Societies may have part of it, rigorously ascetic view in which we hardly wish to participate, yet Plato’s Socrates saw a truth about the poetic mind which the world no longer commonly sees — so much criticism, and that most important and most affectionately remembered, has proceeded from that which he might and inspiration.

Certainly the poets have had something to say that the critic and professor could not say; their message has been more exciting: that poetry should come as naturally as leaves fall from a tree, that poetry is the lava of the imagination, or that it is emotion recollected in tranquility. But it is necessary that we realize the character and authority of such testimony. There is only a fine shade of difference between such expressions and a kind of earnest advice that authors often give. Thus Edward Young, Carlyle, Walter Pater: “I know two golden rules from ethics, which are no less golden in composition, than in life. 1. Know thyself; 2dly, Reverence thyself.” This is the grand secret for finding readers and retaining them: let him who would move and convince others, best move and convince himself. Horace’s rule, Si vis me amare, is applicable in a wider sense than the literal one. To every poet, to every writer, we might say: Be true, if you would be believed. “Truth! There can be no merit, no craft fall, without that. And further, all beauty is in the long run thy fineness of truth, or what we call expression, the finer accommodation of speech to that vision within.”

And Housman’s little handbook to the poetic mind holds this illustration:

Having drunk a pint of beer at luncheon — beer is a sedative to the brain, and my afternoons are the least intellectual portion of my life — I would go out for a walk of two or three hours. As I went along, thinking of nothing in particular, only looking at things around me and following the progress of the seasons, there would flow into my mind, with sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two of verse, sometimes a whole stanza at once.

This is the logical terminus of the series already quoted. Here is a confession of how poems were written which would do as a definition of poetry just as well as “emotion recollected in tranquility” — and which the young poet might equally well take to heart as a practical rule. Drink a pint of beer, relax, go walking, think on nothing in particular, look at things, surrender yourself to yourself, search for the truth in your own soul, listen to the sound of your own inside voice, discover and express the vraie vérité.

It is probably true that all this is excellent advice for poets. The young imagination fired by Wordsworth and Carlyle is probably closer to the verge of producing a poem than the mind of the student who has been sobered by Aristotle or Richards. The art of inspiring poets, or at least of exciting something like poetry in young persons, has probably gone further in our day than ever before. Books of creative writing such as those issued from the Lincoln School are interesting evidence of what a child can do. All this, however, would appear to belong to an art separate from criticism — to a psychological discipline, a system of self-development, a yoga, which the young poet perhaps does well to notice, but which is something different from the public art of evaluating poems.

Coleridge and Arnold were better critics than most poets have been, and if the critical tendency dried up the poetry in Arnold and perhaps in Coleridge, it is not inconsistent with our argument, which is that judgment of poems is different from the art of producing them. Coleridge has given us the classic “anodyne” story, and tells what he can about the genesis of a poem which he calls a “psychological curiosity,” but his definitions of poetry and of the poetic quality “imagination” are to be found elsewhere and in quite other terms.

It would be convenient if the passwords of the intentional school, sincerity, fidelity, spontaneity, authenticity, genuineness, originality, could be equated with terms such as integrity, relevance, unity, function, maturity, subtlety, adequacy, and other more precise terms of evaluation —
short, if expression always meant aesthetic achievement. But this is not so.

"Aesthetic" art, says Professor Curt Ducasse, an ingenious theorist of expression, is the conscious objectification of feelings, in which an intrinsic part is the critical moment. The artist corrects the objectification when it is not adequate. But this may mean that the earlier attempt was not successful in objectifying the self, or "it may also mean that it was a successful objectification of a self which, when it confronted us clearly, we disowned and repudiated in favor of another." What is the standard by which we disown or accept the self? Professor Ducasse does not say. Whatever it may be, however, this standard is an element in the definition of art which will not reduce to terms of objectification. The evaluation of the work of art remains public; the work is measured against something outside the author.

IV

There is criticism of poetry and there is author psychology, which when applied to the present or future takes the form of inspirational promotion; but author psychology can be historical too, and then we have literary biography, a legitimate and attractive study in itself, one approach, as Professor Tillyard would argue, to personality, the poem being only a parallel approach. Certainly it need not be with a derogatory purpose that one points out personal studies, as distinct from poetic studies, in the realm of literary scholarship. Yet there is danger of confusing personal and poetic studies; and there is the fault of writing the personal as if it were poetic.

There is a difference between internal and external evidence for the meaning of a poem. And the paradox is only verbal and superficial that what is (1) internal is also public: it is discovered through the semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionaries, and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general through all that makes a language and culture; while what is (2) external is private or idiiosyncratic; not a part of the work as a linguistic fact: it consists of revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or why the poet wrote the poem—to what lady, while sitting on what lawn, or at the death of what friend or brother. There is (3) an intermediate kind of evidence about the character of the author or about private or semiprivileged meanings attached to words or topics by an author or by a coterie of which he is a member. The meaning of words is the history of words, and the biography of an author, his use of a word, and the associations which the word had for him, are part of the word’s history and meaning. But the three types of evidence, especially 2 and 3, shade into one another so subtly that it is not always easy to draw a line between examples, and hence arises the difficulty for criticism. The use of biographical evidence need not involve intentionalism, because while it may be evidence of what the author intended, it may also be evidence of the meaning of his words and the dramatic character of his utterance. On the other hand, it may not be all this. And a critic who is concerned with evidence of type 1 and moderately with that of type 3 will in the long run produce a different sort of comment from that of the critic who is concerned with 2 and with 3 where it shades into 2.

The whole glittering parade of Professor Lowes’ Road to Xanadu, for instance, runs along the border between types 2 and 3 or boldly traverses the Romantic region of 2. "Kubla Khan," says Professor Lowes, "is the fabric of a vision, but every image that rose up in its weaving had passed that way before. And it would seem that there is nothing haphazard or fortuitous in their return." This is not quite clear—not even when Professor Lowes explains that there were clusters of associations, like hooked atoms, which were drawn into complex relation with other clusters in the deep well of Coleridge’s memory, and which then coalesced and issued forth as poems. If there was nothing "haphazard or fortuitous" in the way the images returned to the surface, that may mean (1) that Coleridge could not produce what he did not have, that he was limited in his creation by what he had read or otherwise experienced, or (2) that having received certain clusters of associations, he was bound to return them in just the way he did, and that the value of the poem may be described in terms of the experiences on which he had to draw. The latter pair of propositions (a sort of Hartleyan associationism which Coleridge himself repudiated in the Biographia) may not be assented to. There were certainly other combinations, other poems, worse or better, that might have been written by men who had read Bartram and Purchas and Bruce and Milton. And this will be true no matter how many times we are able to add to the brilliant complex of Coleridge’s reading. In certain flourishes (such as the sentence we have quoted) and in chapter headings like "The Shaping Spirit," "The Magical Synthesis," "Imagination Creative," it may be that Professor Lowes pretends to say more about the actual poems than he does. There is a certain deceptive variation in these fancy chapter titles; one expects to pass on...


[1] Wimsatt and Beardsley] The history of words after a poem is written may contribute meanings which if relevant to the original pattern should not be ruled out by a scruple about intention.
a new stage in the argument, and one finds—more and
more sources, more and more about "the streamy nature of
association."15

"Wohein der Weg?" quotes Professor Lowes for the
metto of his book, "Kein Weg! Ins Unbetretene."16 Precisely
because the way is unbetretan, we should say, it leads away
from the poem. Bartram's Travels17 contains a good deal of
the history of certain words and of certain Romantic Flori-
dian conceptions that appear in Kubla Khan. And a good
deal of that history has passed and was then passing into the
very stuff of our language. Perhaps a person who has read
Bartram appreciates the poem more than one who has not.
Or, by looking up the vocabulary of Kubla Khan in the O-
xford English Dictionary, or by reading some of the other
books there quoted, a person may know the poem better. But
it would seem to pertain little to the poem to know that Cole-
ridge had read Bartram. There is a gross body of life, of sen-
sory and mental experience, which lies behind and in some
goke causes every poem, but can never be and need not be
known in the verbal and hence intellectual composition
which is the poem. For all the objects of our manifold ex-
perience, for every unity, there is an action of the mind which
cuts off roots, melts away context—or indeed we should
never have objects or ideas or anything to talk about.

It is probable that there is nothing in Professor Lowes' 
18 vast book which could detract from anyone's appreciation of
their The Ancient Mariner or Kubla Khan. We next present
a case where preoccupation with evidence of type 3 has gone
so far as to distort a critic's view of a poem (yet a case not
so obvious as those that abound in our critical journals).

In a well-known poem by John Donne appears this
quarain:

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,
Men reckon what it did and meant,
But trepidation of the spheres,
Though greater far, is innocent.18

A recent critic in an elaborate treatment of Donne's learning
has written of this quarain as follows:

He touches the emotional pulse of the situation by
a skillful allusion to the new and the old astron-
omy. . . . Of the new astronomy, the "moving of
the earth" is the most radical principle, of the old,
the "trepidation of the spheres" is the motion of
the greatest complexity . . . . The poet must exhort
his love to quietness and calm upon his departure;
and for this purpose the figure based upon the lat-
ter motion (trepidation), long absorbed into the
traditional astronomy, fittingly suggests the ten-
sion of the moment without arousing the "harm
and fears" implicit in the figure of the moving
earth.19

The argument is plausible and rests on a well-substantiated
thesis that Donne was deeply interested in the new astron-
omy and its repercussions in the theological realm. In vari-
ous works Donne shows his familiarity with Kepler's De
Stella Nova, with Galileo's Sidereus Nuncius, with William
Gilbert's De Magnete, and with Clavius' commentary on the
De Sphaera of Sacrobosco. He refers to the new science in
his sermon at Paul's Cross and in a letter to Sir Henry Good-
wy. In The First Anniversary he says the "new philosophy
calls all in doubt." In the Elegy on Prince Henry he says that
the "least moving of the center" makes "the world to
shake."

It is difficult to answer argument like this, and impos-
sible to answer it with evidence of like nature. There is no
reason why Donne might not have written a stanza in which
the two kinds of celestial motion stood for two sorts of emo-
tion at parting. And if we become full of astronomical ideas
and see Donne only against the background of the new sci-
ence, we may believe that he did. But the text itself remains
to be dealt with, the analyzable vehicle of a complicated met-
aphor. And one may observe: (1) that the movement of
the earth according to the Copernican theory is a celestial
motion, smooth and regular, and while it might cause religious
or philosophic fears, it could not be associated with the cru-
dity and earthiness of the kind of commotion which the
speaker in the poem wishes to discourage; (2) that there is
another moving of the earth, an earthquake, which has just
these qualities and is to be associated with the tear-floods
and sigh-tempests of the second stanza of the poem; (3) that
"trepidation" is an appropriate opposite of earthquake, be-
because each is a shaking or vibratory motion; and "trepidation
of the spheres" is "greater far" than an earthquake, but not
much greater (if two such motions can be compared as to
greatness) than the annual motion of the earth; (4) that reck-
oning what it "did and meant" shows that the event has

15Wimsatt and Beardsley, Chapters 8, "The Pattern," and 16, "The Known
and Familiar Landscape," will be found of most help to the student of the
poem.

16"Where does the path lead?" "There is no path! Into the untravel'd."

17A book published in 1791 by William Bartram, naturalist and nature artist,
which greatly influenced English Romanticism.

18A Medicinal Forbidding Mourning, 9–12.

19Wimsatt and Beardsley, Charles M. Coffin, John Donne and the New Phi-
losophy (New York, 1927), 97–98.
passed, like an earthquake, not like the incessant celestial movement of the earth. Perhaps a knowledge of Donne's interest in the new science may add another shade of meaning, an overtone to the stanza in question, though to say even this runs against the words. To make the geocentric and heliocentric antithesis the core of the metaphor is to disregard the English language, to prefer private evidence to public, external to internal.

V

If the distinction between kinds of evidence has implications for the historical critic, it has them no less for the contemporary poet and his critic. Or, since every rule for a poet is but another side of a judgment by a critic, and since the past is the realm of the scholar and critic, and the future and present that of the poet and the critical leaders of taste, we may say that the problems arising in literary scholarship from the intentional fallacy are matched by others which arise in the world of progressive experiment.

The question of "allusiveness," for example, as acutely posed by the poetry of Eliot, is certainly one where a false judgment is likely to involve the intentional fallacy. The frequency and depth of literary allusion in the poetry of Eliot and others has driven so many in pursuit of full meanings to the Golden Bough and the Elizabethan drama that it has become a kind of commonplace to suppose that we do not know what a poet means unless we have traced him in his reading—a supposition redolent with intentional implications. The stand taken by F. O. Matthiessen is a sound one and partially forestalls the difficulty.

If one reads these lines with an attentive ear and is sensitive to their sudden shifts in movement, the contrast between the actual Thames and the idealized vision of it during an age before it flowed through a megalopolis is sharply conveyed by that movement itself, whether or not one recognizes the refrain to be from Spenser.20

Eliot's allusions work when we know them—and to a great extent even when we do not know them, through their suggestive power.

But sometimes we find allusions supported by notes, and it is a nice question whether the notes function more as guides to send us where we may be educated, or more as indications in themselves about the character of the allusions. "Nearly everything of importance... that is apposite to an appreciation of The Waste Land," writes Matthiessen of Miss Weston's book, "has been incorporated into the structure of the poem itself, or into Eliot's notes." And with such an admission it may begin to appear that it would not much matter if Eliot invented his sources (as Sir Walter Scott invented chapter epigraphs from "old plays" and "anonymous" authors, or as Coleridge wrote marginal glosses for The Ancient Mariner). Allusions to Dante, Webster, Marvell, or Baudelaire doubtless gain something because these writers existed, but it is doubtful whether the same can be said for an allusion to an obscure Elizabethan: "'The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring / Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring,' [p. 197] "Cf. Day, Parliament of Bees," says Eliot, when of a sudden, listening, you shall hear, / A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring / Actaeon to Diana in the spring, / Where all shall see her naked skin.

The irony is completed by the quotation itself; had Eliot, as is quite conceivable, composed these lines to furnish his own background, there would be no loss of validity. The conviction may grow as one reads Eliot's next note: "'I do not know the origin of the ballad from which these lines are taken: it was reported to me from Sydney, Australia.'" The important word in this note—on Mrs. Porter and her daughter who washed their feet in sods water—is ballad. And if one should feel from the lines themselves their "ballad" quality, there would be little need for the note. Ultimately, the inquiry must focus on the integrity of such notes as parts of the poem, for where they constitute special information about the meaning of phrases in the poem, they ought to be subject to the same scrutiny as any of the other words in which it is written. Matthiessen believes the notes were the price Eliot "had to pay in order to avoid what he would have considered muffling the energy of his poem by extended connecting links in the text itself." But it may be questioned whether the notes and the need for them are not equally muffling. F. W. Bateson has plausibly argued that Tennyson's The Sailor Boy would be better if half the stanzas were omitted, and the best versions of ballads like Sir Patrick Spens owe their power to the very audacity with which the minstrel has taken for granted the story upon which he comments. What then if a poet finds he cannot take so much for granted in a more recondite context and rather than write informatively, sup

20 The Achievement of T. S. Eliot.

The Intentional Fallacy

...notes? It can be said in favor of this plan that at least the notes do not pretend to be dramatic, as they would if written in verse. On the other hand, the notes may look like massimilated material lying loose beside the poem, necessary for the meaning of the verbal symbol, but not integrated, so that the symbol stands incomplete.

We mean to suggest by the above analysis that whereas notes tend to seem to justify themselves as external indexes to the author's intention, yet they ought to be judged like any other parts of a composition (verbal arrangement special to a particular context), and when so judged their reality as parts of the poem, or their imaginative integration with the rest of the poem, may come into question. Matthiessen, for instance, sees that Eliot's titles for poems and his epigraphs are informative apparatus, like the notes. But while he is worried by some of the notes and thinks that Eliot "appears to be mocking himself for writing the note at the same time that he wants to convey something by it," Matthiessen believes that the "device" of epigraphs "is not at all open to the objection of not being sufficiently structural." "The intention," he says, "is to enable the poet to secure a condensed expression in the poem itself." "In each case the epigraph is designed to form an integral part of the effect of the poem." And Eliot himself, in his notes, has justified his poetic practice in terms of intention.

The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V... The man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself.

And perhaps he is to be taken more seriously here, when off hand in a note, than when in his Norton lectures he comments on the difficulty of saying what a poem means and adds playfully that he thinks of prefixing to a second edition of Ash Wednesday some lines from Don Juan:

I don't pretend that I quite understand
My own meaning when I would be very fine;
But the fact is that I have nothing planned
Unless it were to be a moment merry.

Eliot and other contemporary poets have any characteristic fault, it may be in planning too much.

Allusiveness in poetry is one of several critical issues by which we have illustrated the more abstract issue of intentionality, but it may be for today the most important illustration. As a poetic practice allusiveness would appear to be in some recent poems an extreme corollary of the Romantic intentionalist assumption, and as a critical issue it challenges and brings to light in a special way the basic premise of intentionality. The following instance from the poetry of Eliot may serve to epitomize the practical implications of what we have been saying. In Eliot's Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, toward the end, occurs the line: "I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each," and this bears a certain resemblance to a line in a song by John Donne, "Teach me to hear mermaids singing," so that for the reader acquainted to a certain degree with Donne's poetry, the critical question arises: Is Eliot's line an allusion to Donne's? Is Prufrock thinking about Donne? Is Eliot thinking about Donne? We suggest that there are two radically different ways of looking for an answer to this question. There is (1) the way of poetic analysis and exegesis, which inquires whether it makes any sense if Eliot-Prufrock is thinking about Donne. In an earlier part of the poem, when Prufrock asks, "Would it have been worthwhile,... to have squeezed the universe into a ball," his words take half their sadness and irony from certain energetic and passionate lines of Marvel To His Coy Mistress. But the exegetical inquirer may wonder whether mermaids considered as "strange sights" (to hear them is in Donne's poem analogous to getting with child a mandrake root) have much to do with Prufrock's mermaids, which seem to be symbols of romance and dynamism, and which incidentally have literary authentication, if they need it, in a line of a sonnet by Gérald de Nerval. This method of inquiry may lead to the conclusion that the given resemblance between Eliot and Donne is without significance and is better not thought of, or the method may have the disadvantage of providing no certain conclusion. Nevertheless, we submit that this is the true and objective way of criticism, as contrasted to what the very uncertainty of exegesis might tempt a second kind of critic to undertake: (2) the way of biographical or genetic inquiry, in which, taking advantage of the fact that Eliot is still alive, and in the spirit of a man who would settle a bet, the critic writes to Eliot and asks what he means, or if he had Donne in mind. We shall not here weigh the probabilities—whether Eliot would answer that he meant nothing at all, had nothing at all in mind—a sufficiently good answer to such a question—or in an unguarded moment might furnish a clear and, within its limit, irrefutable answer. Our point is that such an answer to such an inquiry would have nothing to do with the poem Prufrock; it would not be a critical inquiry. Critical inquiries, unlike bets, are not settled in this way. Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle.
The Affective Fallacy

I

As the title of this essay invites comparison with that of our first, it may be relevant to assert at this point that we believe ourselves to be exploring two roads which have seemed to offer convenient detours around the acknowledged and usually feared obstacles to objective criticism, both of which, however, have actually led away from criticism and from poetry. The intentional fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its origins, a special case of what is known to philosophers as the genetic fallacy. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological causes of the poem and ends in biography and relativism. The affective fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does), a special case of epistemological skepticism, though usually advanced as if it had far stronger claims than the overall forms of skepticism. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome of either fallacy, the intentional or the affective, is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear.

In the present essay, we would discuss briefly the history and fruits of affective criticism, some of its correlatives in cognitive criticism, and hence certain cognitive characteristics of poetry which have made affective criticism plausible. We would observe also the premises of affective criticism, as they appear today, in certain philosophic and pseudophilosophic disciplines of wide influence. And first and mainly that of "semantics."

II

The separation of emotive from referential meaning was urged persuasively about twenty years ago in the earlier works of L. A. Richards. The types of meaning which were defined in his Practical Criticism and in the Meaning of Meaning of Ogden and Richards created, partly by suggestion, partly with the aid of direct statement, a clean "antithesis" between "symbolic and emotive use of language." In his Practical Criticism Richards spoke of "aesthetic" or "projectile" words—adjectives by which we project feelings at objects themselves altogether innocent of any qualities corresponding to these feelings. And in his succinct Science and Poetry, science is statement, poetry is pseudostatement which plays the important role of making us feel better about things than statements would. After Richards—and under the influence too of Count Korzybski's non-Aristotelian Science and Sanity—came the semantic school of Chase, Hayakawa, Walpole, and Lee. Most recently C. L. Stevenson in his Ethics and Language has given an account which, as it is more careful and explicit than the others, may be taken as most clearly pleading their cause—and best revealing its weakness.

One of the most emphatic points in Stevenson's system is the distinction between what a word means and what it suggests. To make the distinction in a given case, one applies what the semiotician calls a "linguistic rule" ("definition" in traditional terminology), the role of which is to stabilize responses to a word. The word athlete may be said to mean one interested in sports, among other things, but merely to suggest a tall young man. The linguistic rule is that "athletes" are necessarily interested in sports, but may or may not be tall. All this is on the side of what may be called the descriptive (or cognitive) function of words. For a second and separate main function of words—that is, the emotive—there is no linguistic rule to stabilize responses and, therefore, in Stevenson's system, no parallel distinction between meaning and suggestion. Although the term quasi-dependent emotive meaning is recommended by Stevenson for a kind of emotive "meaning" which is "conditional to the cognitive suggestion of a sign," the main drift of his argument is that emotive "meaning" is something noncorrelative to and independent of descriptive (or cognitive) meaning. Thus, emotive "meaning" is said to survive sharp changes in descriptive meaning. And words with the same descriptive meaning are said to have quite different emotive "meanings." License and liberty, for example, Stevenson believes to have in some contexts the same descriptive meaning, but opposite emotive "meanings." Finally, there are words which he believes to have no descriptive meaning, yet a decided emotive "meaning": these are expletives of various sorts.

But a certain further distinction, and an important one which does not appear in Stevenson's system—nor in that

The Affective Fallacy. Wimsatt and Beardsley's The Affective Fallacy was first published in 1949. The text is from The Verbal Icon by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley (1954). Reprinted by permission of The University of Kentucky Press.

See pp. 527–37.

of his forerunners—is invited by his persistent use of the word meaning for both cognitive and emotive language functions and by the absence from the emotive of his careful distinction between meaning and suggestion. It is a fact worth insisting upon that the term emotive meaning, as used by Stevenson, and the more cautious term feeling, as used by Richards to refer to one of his four types of “meaning,” do not refer to any such cognitive meaning as that conveyed by the name of an emotion—anger or love. Rather, these key terms refer to the expression of emotive states which Stevenson and Richards believe to be effected by certain words—for instance license, liberty, pleasant, beautiful, ugly—and hence also to the emotive response which these words may evoke in a hearer. As the term meaning has been traditionally and usefully assigned to the cognitive, or descriptive, functions of language, it would have been well if these writers had employed, in such contexts, some less preempted term. Import might have been a happy choice. Such differentiation in vocabulary would have had the merit of reflecting a profound difference in linguistic function—all the difference between grounds of emotion and emotions themselves, between what is immediately meant by words and what is evoked by the meaning of words, or what more briefly might be said to be the “import” of the words themselves.

Without pausing to examine Stevenson’s belief that expletives have no descriptive meaning, we are content to observe in passing that these words at any rate have only the vaguest emotive import, something raw, unarticulated, imprecise. Oh! (surprise and related feelings), Ah! (regret), Ugh! (distaste). It takes a more descriptive reference to specify the feeling. “In quiet she reposes. Ah! would that I did too.” But a more central reemphasis for Stevenson’s position—and for that of his forerunners, including Richards—seems required by a fact scarcely mentioned in semantic writings: namely, that a large and obvious area of emotive import depends directly upon descriptive meaning (either with or without words of explicit valuation)—as when a person says and is believed: “General X ordered the execution of 50,000 civilian hostages,” or “General X is guilty of the murder of 50,000 civilian hostages.” And secondly, by the fact that a great deal of emotive import which does not depend thus directly on descriptive meaning does depend on descriptive suggestion. Here we have the “quasi-dependent emotive meaning” of Stevenson’s system—a “meaning,” to which surely he assigns too slight a role. This is the kind of emotive import, we should say, which appears when words change in descriptive meaning yet preserve a similar emotive “meaning”—when the Communists take over the term “democracy” and apply it to something else, preserving, however, the old descriptive suggestion, a government of, by, and for the people. It appears in pairs of words like liberty and license, which even if they have the same descriptive meaning (as one may doubt), certainly carry different descriptive suggestions. Or one might cite the word series in Bentham’s classic Catalogue of Motives: “humanity, good will, partiality,” “frugality, pecuniary interest, avarice.” Or the other standard examples of emotive insinuation: “Animals sweat, men perspire, women glow.” “I am firm, thou art obstinate, he is pigheaded.” Or the sentence, “There should be a revolution every twenty years,” to which the experimenter in emotive responses attaches now the name Karl Marx (and arouses suspicion), now that of Thomas Jefferson (and provokes applause).

The principle applies conspicuously to the numerous examples offered by the school of Hayakawa, Walpole, and Lee. In the interest of brevity, though in what may seem a quixotic defiance of the warnings of this school against unindexed generalization—according to which semanticist 1 is not semanticist 2 and semanticist 3, and so forth—we call attention to Irving Lee’s Language Habits in Human Affairs, particularly Chapters 7 and 8. According to Lee, every mistake that anyone ever makes in acting, since in some direct or remote sense it involves language or thought (which is related to language), may be ascribed to “bad language habits,” a kind of magic misuse of words. No distinctions are permitted. Basil Rathbone, handed a scenario entitled The Monster, returns it unread, but accepts it later under a different title. The Ephraimite says “Sibboleth” instead of “Shibboleth” and is slain. A man says he is offended by four-letter words describing events in a novel, but not by the events. Another man receives an erroneously worded telegram which says that his son is dead. The shock is fatal. One would have thought that with this example Lee’s simplifying prejudice might have broken down—that a man who is misinformed that his son is dead may have leave himself to drop dead without being thought a victim of emotive incantation. Or that the title of a scenario is some ground for the inference that it is a Grade-B horror movie; that the use of phonetic principles in choosing a password is reason rather than magic—as lollapalooza and lullabye were used against infiltration tactics on Guadalcanal; that four-letter words may suggest in events certain qualities which a reader finds it distasteful to contemplate. None of these examples (except the utterly anomalous Sibboleth) offers any evidence, in short, that what a word does to a person is to be ascribed to anything except what it means, or if this connection is not apparent, as the most, by what it suggests.

A question about the relation of language to objects of emotion is a shadow and index of another question, about the status of emotions themselves. It is a consistent cultural
phenomenon that within the same period as the floruit of semantics one kind of anthropology has delivered a parallel attack upon the relation of objects themselves to emotions, or more specifically, upon the constancy of their relations through the times and places of human societies. In the classic treatise of Westermarck on Ethical Relativity we learn, for example, that the custom of eliminating the aged and unproductive has been practiced among certain primitive tribes and nomadic races. Other customs, that of exposing babies, that of suicide, that of showing hospitality to strangers—or the contrary custom of eating them, the reception of the Cyclops rather than that of Alcinous—seem to have enjoyed in some cultures a degree of approval unknown or at least unusual in our own. But even Westermarck has noticed that difference of emotion "largely originates in different measures of knowledge, based on experience of the consequences of conduct, and in different beliefs." That is to say, the different emotions, even though they are responses to the same objects or actions, may yet be responses to different qualities or functions—to the edibility of Odysseus rather than to his comeliness or manliness. A converse of this is the fact that for different objects in different cultures there may be on cognitive grounds emotions of similar quality—for the cunning of Odysseus and for the strategy of Montgomery at El Alamein. Were it otherwise, indeed, there would be no way of understanding and describing alien emotions, no basis on which the science of the cultural relativist might proceed.

We shall not pretend to frame any formal discourse upon affective psychology, the laws of emotion. At this point, nevertheless, we venture to rehearse some generalities about objects, emotions, and words. Emotion, it is true, has a well-known capacity to fortify opinion, to inflame cognition, and to grow upon itself in surprising proportions to grains of reason. We have mob psychology, psychosis, and neurosis. We have "free-floating anxiety" and all the vaguely understood and inchoate states of apprehension, depression, or elation, the prevailing complexes of melancholy or cheer. But it is well to remember that these states are indeed inchoate or vague and by that fact may even verge upon the unconscious.4 We have, again, the popular and self-vindicatory forms of confessing emotion. "He makes me boil." "It burns me up." Or in the novels of Evelyn Waugh a social event or a person is "sick-making." But these locutions involve an extension of the strict operational meaning of make or effect. A food or a poison causes pain or death, but for an emotion we have a reason or an object, not merely an efficient cause. If objects are ever connected by "emotional congruity," as in the association psychology which J. S. Mill inherited from the eighteenth century, this can mean only that similar emotions attach to various objects because of similarity in the objects or in their relations. What makes one angry is something false, insulting, or unjust. What makes one afraid is a cyclone, a mob, a holdup, a war. And in each case the emotion is somewhat different.

The tourist who said a waterfall was pretty provoked the silent disgust of Coleridge, while the other who said it was sublime won his approval. This, as C. S. Lewis so well observes, was not the same as if the tourist had said, "I feel sick," and Coleridge had thought, "No, I feel quite well."

The doctrine of emotive meaning propounded recently by the semanticists has seemed to offer a scientific basis for one kind of affective relativism in poetics—the poet. That is, if a person can correctly say either liberty or license in a given context independently of the cognitive quality of the context, merely at will or from emotion, it follows the reader may likely feel either "hot" or "cold" and report either "bad" or "good" on reading either liberty or license—either an ode by Keats or a limerick. The sequence of censes is endless. Similarly, the doctrines of one school of anthropology have gone far to fortify another kind of affective relativism, the cultural or historical, the measurement of poetic value by the degree of feeling felt by the reader of a given era. A different psychological criticism, that by the author's intention, as we noted in our first essay, is concerned both with piety for the poet and with antiquarian curiosity and has been heavily supported by the historical scholar and biographer. So affective criticism, though in its personal impressionistic form it meets with strong dislike from scholars, yet in its theoretical or scientific form finds strong support from the same quarter. The historical scholar, if much interested in his own personal responses or in those of his students, is intensely interested in whatever can be covered about those of any member of Shakespeare's audience.

III

Plato's feeding and watering of the passions5 was an example of affective theory, and Aristotle's countertheory.

4[Wimsatt and Beardsley] Strictly, a theory not of poetry but of morals, take a curious modern instance, Lucie Guéret's La Poéticonthéorie (Paris, 1946) is a theory not of poetry but of Aristotle's catharsis is a true theory of poetry, that is, part of a definition of poetry.
catharsis was another (with modern intentionalistic analogues in theories of "relief" and "sublimation"). There was also the "transport" of the audience in the *Peri Hypousia* (matching the great soul of the poet), and this had echoes of passion or enthusiasm among eighteenth-century Longinians. We have had more recently the infection theory of Tolstoy (with its intentionalistic analogue in the emotive expressionism of Veron), the *Einfühlung* or empathy of Lipp and related pleasure theories, either more or less tending to the "objectification" of Santayana: "Beauty is pleasure regarded as the quality of a thing." An affinity for these theories is seen in certain theories of the comic during the same era, the relaxation theory of Penjont, the laughter theory of Max Eastman. In their *Foundations of Aesthetics* Ogden, Richards, and Wood listed sixteen types of aesthetic theory, of which at least seven may be described as affective. Among these the theory of synaesthesia (beauty which produces an equilibrium of appetencies) was the one they themselves espoused. This was developed at length by Richards in *his Principles of Literary Criticism.*

The theories just mentioned may be considered as belonging to one branch of affective criticism, and that the main one, the emotive—unless the theory of empathy, with its transport of the self into the object, belongs rather with a parallel and equally ancient affective theory, the imaginative. This is represented by the figure of vividness so often mentioned in the rhetorics—*efficacia, enargeia,* or the *phantasia* in Chapter 15 of *Peri Hypousia.* This if we mistake not is the imagination the "pleasures" of which are celebrated by Addison in his series of *Spectators.* It is an imagination implicit in the theories of Leibniz and Baumgarten that beauty lies in clear but confused, or sensuous, ideas; in the statement of Warton in his *Essay on Pope* that the selection of "lively pictures . . . chiefly constitutes true poetry." In our time, as the emotive form of psychologistic or affective theory has found its most impressive champion in F. A. Richards, so the imaginative form has in Max Eastman, whose *Literary Mind and Enjoyment of Poetry* have much to say about vivid realizations or heightened consciousness.

The theory of intention or author psychology has been the intense conviction of poets themselves, Wordsworth, Keats, Housman, and since the Romantic era, of young persons interested in poetry, the introspective amateurs and soul-cultivators. In a parallel way, affective theory has often been less a scientific view of literature than a prerogative—of the soul adventuring among masterpieces, the contagious teacher, the poetic radiator—a magnetic rhapsode Ion, a Saintsbury, a Quiller-Couch, a William Lyon Phelps. Criticism on this theory has approximated the tone of the Buchmanite confession, the revival meeting. "To be quite frank," says Anatole France, "the critic ought to say: 'Gentlemen, I am going to speak about myself apropos of Shakespeare, apropos of Racine.'" The sincerity of the critic becomes an issue, as for the intentionalist the sincerity of the poet.

A "mysterious entity called the Grand Style" is celebrated by Saintsbury—something much like "the Longinian Sublime." Whenever this perfection of expression acquires such force that it transmutes the subject and transports the hearer or reader, then and there the Grand Style exists, for so long, and in such degree, as the transmutation of the one and the transportation of the other lasts." This is the grand style, the emotive style, of nineteenth-century affective criticism. A somewhat less resonant style which has been heard in our columns of Saturday and Sunday reviewing and from our literary explorers is more closely connected with imagism and the kind of vividness sponsored by Eastman. In the *Book-of-the-Month Club News* Dorothy Canfield testifies to the power of a novel: "To read this book is like living through an experience rather than just reading about it." A poem, says Hans Zinsser, means nothing to me unless it can carry me away with the gentle or passionate peace of its emotion, over obstacles of reality into meadows and covers of illusion . . . . The sole criterion for me is whether it can sweep me with it into emotion or illusion of beauty, terror, tranquility, or even disgust.

It is but a short step to what we may call the physiological form of affective criticism. Beauty, said Burke in the eighteenth century, is something which "acts by relaxing the solids of the whole system." More recently, on the side of personal testimony, we have the oft quoted goose-flesh experience in a letter of Emily Dickinson, and the top of her head taken off. We have the bristling of the skin while Housman was shaving, the "shiver down the spine," the sensation in "the pit of the stomach." And if poetry has been discerned by these tests, truth also. "All scientists," said D. H. Law-
ference to Aldous Huxley, "are liars. . . . I don't care about evidence. Evidence doesn't mean anything to me. I don't feel it here." And, reports Huxley, "he pressed his two hands on his solar plexus."

An even more advanced grade of affective theory, that of hallucination, would seem to have played some part in the neoclassic conviction about the unities of time and place, was given a modified continuation of existence in phrases of Coleridge about a "willing suspension of disbelief" and a "temporary half faith," and may be found today in some textbooks. The hypnotic hypothesis of E. D. Snyder might doubtless be invoked in its support. As this form of affective theory is the least theoretical in detail, has the least content, and makes the least claim on critical intelligence, so it is in its most concrete instances a not a theory but a fiction or a fact—of no critical significance. In the eighteenth century Fielding conveys a right view of the hallucinative power of drama in his comic description of Partridge seeing Garrick act the ghost scene in Hamlet. "O ha! sir. . . . If I was frightened, I am not the only person. . . . You may call me coward if you will; but if that little man there upon the stage is not frightened, I never saw any man frightened in my life." Partridge is today found perhaps less often among the sophisticates at the theater than among the myriad audiences of movies and radio. It is said, and no doubt easily discernible, that during World War II Stefan Schnabel played Nazi roles in radio dramas so convincingly that he received numerous letters of complaint, and in particular one from a lady who said that she had reported him to General MacArthur.13

IV

A distinction can be made between those who have testified what poetry does to themselves and those who have coolly investigated what it does to others. The most resolute researches of the latter have led them into the dreary and antiseptic laboratory, to testing with Fechner the effects of triangles and rectangles, to inquiring what kinds of colors are suggested by a line of Keats, or to measuring the motor discharges attendant upon reading it.14 If animals could read poetry, the affective critic might make discoveries analogous to those of W. B. Cannon about Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear and Rage—the increased liberation of sugar from the liver, the secretion of adrenin from the adrenal gland. The affective critic is today actually able, if he wishes, to measure the "psychogalvanic reflex" of persons subjected to a given moving picture. But, as Herbert J. Muller in his Science and Criticism points out: "Students have sincerely reported an 'emotion' at the mention of the word mother, although a galvanometer indicated no bodily change whatever. They have also reported no emotion at the mention of prostitute, although the galvanometer gave a definite kick." Thomas Mann and a friend came out of a movie weeping copiously—but Mann narrates the incident in support of his view that movies are not art. "Art is a cold sphere."15 The gap between various levels of physiological experience and the recognition of value remains wide, in the laboratory or out.

In a similar way, general affective theory at the literary level has, by the very implications of its program, produced little actual criticism. The author of the ancient Peri Hypsous is weakest at the points where he explains that passion and sublimity are the palliatives or excuses (alexiatharmaka) of bold metaphors, and that passions which verge upon transport are the leitmotiv or remedies (panokeia) of such audacities in speech as hyperbole. The literature of catharsis has dealt with the historical and theoretical question whether Aristotle meant a medical or a lustratory metaphor, whether the genitive which follows katharsis is of the thing purged or of the object purified. Even the early critical practice of I. A. Richards had little to do with his theory of synaesthesia. His Practical Criticism16 depended mainly on two important constructive principles of criticism which Richards has realized and insisted upon—(1) that rhythm (the vague, if direct, expression of emotion) and poetic form in general are intimately connected with and interpreted by other and more precise parts of poetic meaning, (2) that poetic meaning is inclusive or multiple and hence sophisticated. The latter quality of poetry may perhaps be the subjective correlate of the affective state synaesthesia, but in applied criticism there would seem to be not much room for synaesthesia or for the touchy little attitudes of which it is composed.

The report of some readers, on the other hand, that a poem or story induces in them vivid images, intense feelings, or heightened consciousness, is neither anything which can be refuted nor anything which is possible for the objective critic to take into account. The purely affective report is either too physiological or it is too vague. Feelings, as Hegel has conveniently put it, "remain purely subjective affections of myself, in which the concrete matter vanishes, as

91Wimsatt and Beardsley, New Yorker, XIX (December 11, 1943), 28.
92Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The final averages showed that the combined finger movements for the Byron experiment were eight meters longer than they were for Keats." R. C. Givler, The Psycho-Physiological Effect of the Elements of Speech in Relation to Poetry (Princeton, 1915), 62.
93Wimsatt and Beardsley, Uber den Film, in Die Forderung des Tages (Berlin, 1930), 387.
94See pp. 827-38.
95The Wells,
though narrowed into a circle of the utmost abstraction.” And the only constant or predictable thing about the vivid images which more eidetic readers experience is precisely their vividness—as may be seen by requiring a class of average pupils to draw illustrations of a short story or by consulting the newest Christmas edition of a childhood classic which one knew with the illustrations of Howard Pyle or N. C. Wyeth. Vividness is not the thing in the work by which the work may be identified, but the result of a cognitive structure, which is the thing. “The story is good,” as the student so often says in his papers, “because it leaves so much to the imagination.” The opaque accumulation of physical detail in some realistic novels has been aptly dubbed by Middleton Murry “the pictorial fallacy.”

Certain theorists, notably Richards, have anticipated some difficulties of affective criticism by saying that it is not intensity of emotion that characterizes poetry (murder, robbery, forgery, horse racing, war—perhaps even chess—take care of that better), but the subtle quality of patterned emotions which play at the subdued level of disposition or attitude. We have psychological theories of aesthetic distance, detachment, or disinterestedness. A criticism on these principles has already taken important steps toward objectivity. If Eastman’s theory of imaginative vividness appears today chiefly in the excited puffs of the newspaper book sections, the campaign of the semanticists and the balanced emotions of Richards, instead of producing their own school of affective criticism, have contributed much to recent schools of cognitive analysis, of paradox, ambiguity, irony, and symbol. It is not always true that the emotive and cognitive forms of criticism will sound far different. If the affective critic (avoiding both the physiological and the abstractly psychological form of report) ventures to state with any precision what a line of poetry does—as “it fills us with a mixture of melancholy and reverence for antiquity”—either the statement will be patently abnormal or false, or it will be a description of what the meaning of the line is: “the spectacle of massive antiquity in ruins.” Tennyson’s Tears, Idle Tears, as it deals with an emotion which the speaker at first seems not to understand, might be thought to be a specially emotive poem. “The last stanza,” says Brooks in his recent analysis, “evokes an intense emotional response from the reader.” But this statement is not really a part of Brooks’ criticism of the poem—rather a witness of his fondness for it. “The second stanza”—Brooks might have said at an earlier point in his analysis—“gives us a momentary vivid realization of past happy experiences, then makes us sad at their loss.” But he says actually: “The conjunction of the qualities of sadness and freshness is reinforced by the fact that the same basic metaphor—the light on the sails of a ship hull down—has been employed to suggest both qualities.” The distinction between these formulations may seem slight, and in the first example which we furnished may be practically unimportant. Yet the difference between translatable emotive formulas and more physiological and psychologically vague ones—cognitively untranslatable—is theoretically of the greatest importance. The distinction even when it is a faint one is at the dividing point between paths which lead to polar opposites in criticism, to classical objectivity and to Romantic reader psychology.

The critic whose formulations lean to the emotive and the critic whose formulations lean to the cognitive will in the long run produce a vastly different sort of criticism.

The more specific the account of the emotion induced by a poem, the more neatly it will be an account of the reasons for emotion, the poem itself, and the more reliable it will be as an account of what the poem is likely to induce in other—sufficiently informed—readers. It will in fact supply the kind of information which will enable readers to respond to the poem. It will talk not of tears, pricks, or other physiological symptoms, of feeling angry, joyful, hot, cold, or intense, or, of vaguer states of emotional disturbance, but of shades of distinction and relation between objects of emotion. It is precisely here that the discerning literary critic has his insuperable advantage over the subject of the laboratory experiment and over the tabulator of the subject’s responses. The critic is not a contributor to statistically countable reports about the poem, but a teacher or explicator of meanings. His readers, if they are alert, will not be content to take what he says as testimony, but will scrutinize it as teaching.

V

Poetry, as Matthew Arnold believed, “attaches the emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact.” The objective critic, however, must admit that it is not easy to explain how this is done, how poetry makes ideas thick and complicated enough to hold on to emotions. In his essay on Hamlet and His Problems T. S. Eliot finds Hamlet’s state of emotion unsatisfactory because it lacks an “objective correlative,” a “chain of events” which are the “formula of that particular emotion.” The emotion is “in excess of the facts as they appear.” It is “inexpressible.” Yet Hamlet’s emotion must be ex-

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10The Well Wrought Urn.
pressible, we submit, and actually expressed too (by something) in the play; otherwise Eliot would not know it is there—in excess of the facts. That Hamlet himself or Shakespeare may be baffled by the emotion is beside the point. The second chapter of Yvor Winters’ *Primitivism and Decadence* has gone much further in clarifying a distinction adumbrated by Eliot. Without embracing the extreme doctrine of Winters, that if a poem cannot be paraphrased it is a poor poem, we may yet with profit reiterate his main thesis: that there is a difference between the motive, as he calls it, or logic of an emotion, and the surface or texture of a poem constructed to describe the emotion, and that both are important to a poem. Winters has shown, we think, how there can be in effect “fine poems” about nothing. There is rational progression and there is “qualitative progression,”’ the latter, with several subtly related modes, a characteristic of decadent poetry. Qualitative progression is the succession, the dream float, of images, not substantiated by a plot. “Moister than an oyster in its clammy cloister, I’m bluer than a wooer who has slipped in a sewer,” says Morris Bishop in a recent comic poem:

Chiller than a killer in a cinema thriller,  
Queerer than a leerer at his leer in a mirror,  
Madder than an adder with a stone in the bladder.  
If you want to know why, I cannot but reply:  
It is really no affair of yours.21

The term *pseudostatement* was for Richards a patronizing term by which he indicated the attractive nullity of poems. For Winters, the kindred term *pseudoreference* is a name for the more disguised kinds of qualitative progression and is a term of reproach. It seems to us highly significant that for another psychological critic, Max Eastman, so important a part of poetry as metaphor is in effect too pseudostatement. The vivid realization of metaphor comes from its being in some way an obstruction to practical knowledge (like a torn coat sleeve to the act of dressing). Metaphor operates by being abnormal or inept, the wrong way of saying something. Without pressing the point, we should say that an uncomfortable resemblance to this doctrine appears in Ransom’s logical structure and local texture of irrelevance.22

What Winters has said seems basic. To venture both a slight elaboration of this and a return to the problem of emotive semantics surveyed in our first section: it is a well-known but nonetheless important truth that there are two kinds of real objects which have emotive quality, the objects which are the reasons for human emotion, and those which by some kind of association suggest either the reasons or the resulting emotion: the thief, the enemy, or the insult that makes us angry, and the hornet that sounds and stings somewhat like ourselves when angry; the murderer or felon, and the crow that kills small birds and animals or feeds on carrion and is black like the night when crimes are committed by men. The arrangement by which these two kinds of emotive meaning are brought together in a juncture characteristic of poetry is, roughly speaking, the simile, the metaphor, and the various less clearly defined forms of association. We offer the following crude example as a kind of skeleton figure to which we believe all the issues can be attached.

1. X feels as angry as a hornet.
2. X whose lunch has been stolen feels as angry as a hornet.

No. 1 is, we take it, the qualitative poem, the vehicle of a metaphor, an objective correlative—for nothing. No. 2 adds the tenor of the metaphor, the motive for feeling angry, and hence makes the feeling itself more specific. The total statement has a more complex and testable structure. The element of aptitude, or ineptitude, is more susceptible of discussion. “Light thickens, and the crow makes wing to the rocky wood”23 might be a line from a poem about nothing, but initially owed much of its power, and we daresay still does, to the fact that it is spoken by a tormented murderer who, as night draws on, has sent his agents out to perform a further “deed of dreadful note.”

These distinctions bear a close relation to the difference between historical statement which may be a reason for emotion because it is believed (Macbeth has killed the king) and fictitious or poetic statement, where a large component of suggestion (and hence metaphor) has usually appeared. The first of course seldom occurs pure, at least not for the public eye. The coroner or the intelligence officer may content himself with it. Not the chronicler, the bard, or the newspaperman. To these we owe more or less direct words of value and emotion (the murder, the atrocity, the wholesale butchery) and all the repertoire of suggestive meanings which here and there in history—with somewhat to start upon—a Caesar or a Macbeth—have created out of a mere case of factual reason for intense emotion a specified, figuratively fortified, and permanent object of less intense but far richer emotion. With a decline of heroes and of faith in external order, we have had during the last century a great flowering of poetry

21[Wimsatt and Beardsley] The term, as Winters indicates, is borrowed from Kenneth Burke’s *Counter-Statement*.
24Macbeth, III. ii. 50–51.
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which has tried the utmost to do without any hero or action of fiction of these—the qualitative poetry of Winters’ analysis. It is true that any hero and action when they become fictitious take the first step toward the simply qualitative, and all poetry, so far as separate from history, tends to be formula of emotion. The hero and action are taken as symbolic. A graded series from fact to quality might include: (1) the historic Macbeth, (2) Macbeth as Renaissance tragic protagonist, (3) a Macbeth written by Eliot, (4) a Macbeth written by Pound. As Winters has explained, “the prince is briefly introduced in the footnotes” of The Waste Land; “it is to be doubted that Mr. Pound could manage such an introduction.” Yet in no one of these four stages has anything like a pure emotive poetry been produced. The semantic analysis which we have offered in our first section would say that even in the last stages a poetry of pure emotion is an illusion. What we have is a poetry where kinds are only symbols or even a poetry of horns and crows, how of human deeds. Yet a poetry about things. How these things are joined in patterns and with what names of emotion remains always the critical question. “The Romance of the Rose could not, without loss,” observes C. S. Lewis, “be rewritten as The Romance of the Onion.”

Poetry is characteristically a discourse about both emotions and objects, or about the emotive quality of objects. The emotions correlative to the objects of poetry become a part of the matter dealt with—not communicable to the reader like an infection or disease, not inflicted mechanically like a bullet or knife wound, not administered like a poison, not simply expressed as by expletives or grimaces or rhythms, but presented in their objects and contemplated as a pattern of knowledge. Poetry is a way of fixing emotions or making them more permanently perceptible when objects have undergone a functional change from culture to culture, or when as simple facts of history they have lost emotive value with loss of immediacy. Though the reasons for emotion in poetry may not be so simple as Ruskin’s “noble grounds for the noble emotions,” yet a great deal of constancy for poetic objects of emotion—if we will look for constancy—may be traced through the drift of human history. The murder of Duncan by Macbeth, whether as history of the eleventh century or chronicle of the sixteenth, has not tended to become the subject of a Christmas carol. In Shakespeare’s play it is an act difficult to duplicate in all its immediate adjuncts of treachery, deliberation, and horror of conscience. Set in its galaxy of symbols—the hoarse raven, the thickening light, and the crow making wing, the babe plucked from the breast, the dagger in the air, the ghost, the bloody hands—this ancient murder has become an object of strongly fixed emotive value. The corpse of Polynices, a far more ancient object and partially concealed from us by the difficulties of the Greek, shows a similar pertinacity in remaining among the understandable motives of higher duty. Funeral customs have changed, but not the intelligibility of the web of issues, religious, political, and private, woven about the corpse “unburied, unhonored, all unhallowed.”

Again, certain objects partly obscured in one age wax into appreciation in another, and partly through the efforts of the poet. It is not true that they suddenly arrive out of nothing. The paths of Shylock, for example, is not a creation of our time, though a smugly modern humanitarianism, because it has slogans, may suppose that this was not felt by Shakespeare or Southampton—may not perceive its own debt to Shakespeare. “Poets,” says Shelley, “are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”24 And it may be granted at least that poets have been leading expositors of the laws of feeling.25

To the relativist historian of literature falls the uncomfortable task of establishing as discrete cultural moments the past when the poem was written and first appreciated, and the present into which the poem with its clear and nicely interrelated meanings, its completeness, balance, and tension has survived. A structure of emotive objects so complex and so reliable as to have been taken for great poetry by any past age will never, it seems safe to say, so wane with the waning of human culture as not to be recoverable at least by a willing student. And on the same grounds a confidence seems indicated for the objective discrimination of all future poetic phenomena, though the premises or materials of which such poems will be constructed cannot be prescribed or foreseen. If the exegesis of some poems depends upon the understanding of obsolete or exotic customs, the poems themselves are the most precise emotive report on the customs. In the poet’s finely contrived objects of emotion and in other works of art the historian finds his most reliable evidence about the emotions of antiquity—and the anthropologist, about those of contemporary primitivism. To appreciate courtly love we turn to Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France. Certain attitudes of late fourteenth-century England, toward knighthood, toward monasticism, toward the bourgeoisie, are nowhere more precisely illustrated than in the prologue to The Canterbury Tales. The field worker among the Zunis or the Navahos finds no informant so informative as the poet or the member of the tribe who can quote its myths.26 In short, though cultures have changed and will change, poems remain and explain.

24A Defense of Poetry, p. 529.
With Roman Jakobson, who later founded the Prague school of structuralists, Eichenbaum was a main figure of the Russian Formalist movement, which flourished until its forced demise under political pressure in the 1920s. The attack that destroyed the movement began in 1924 with Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* and was carried on more vehemently by other lesser figures. Members of the movement were charged with lack of interest in the social causes and effects of literature and advocating a form of art for art's sake.

Eichenbaum's essay is an attempt to summarize the movement's achievements and to defend it against Marxist attacks. There is an element of conciliation in the essay that somewhat distorts the picture. The movement was never as communal and orderly in its development and aims as Eichenbaum would have his readers believe. Also there is considerably more emphasis on scientific, positivistic procedures in his essay than was evident in the work of the Formalist critics themselves. The standard history of the movement, Victor Erlich's *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine*, rev. ed. (1964), offers a more detached summary.

Eichenbaum's reader cannot help being struck by the similarities of the movement to the New Criticism. Almost all the general principles he enunciates are shared by the American movement: the attack on the irresponsible mixing of various disciplines and their problems, the distinction between "practical language" and language with "independent value," the insistence that form is not simply an "envelope" for content, the assertion that explanation of the genesis of a phenomenon does not clarify the phenomenon as a literary fact, the idea of a literary work as a "self-determined use of material," and the sense of the expansive meaning of a literary work.

The Formalists began, according to Eichenbaum, by rejecting old assumptions about beauty as an external ideal, worked through the idea of the literary object as a unified technical accomplishment, and came to the idea of a truly literary history. In this last phase they spoke much as did Eliot in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. In their view, a work of art is defined by its relation to other works. Literary history points out these relationships and thus is not using literature as document but actually giving to aesthetic theory and to literary meaning a historical dimension.

When the Formalist movement died, many of its principles were carried, mainly by Jakobson, into structuralist linguistics; combined with the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* (1915), they contributed to structuralism in a variety of fields, including anthropology and, again, literary theory.

The Theory of the "Formal Method"

The worst, in my opinion, are those who describe science as if it were settled.¹

A. DE CANDOLLE

The so-called formal method grew out of a struggle for a science of literature that would be both independent and factual; it is not the outgrowth of a particular methodology. The notion of a method has been so exaggerated that it now suggests too much. In principle the question for the Formalist² is not how to study literature, but what the subject matter of literary study actually is. We neither discuss methodology nor quarrel about it. We speak and may speak only about theoretical principles suggested to us not by this or that ready-made methodology, but by the examination of specific material in its specific context. The Formalists' works in literary theory and literary history show this clearly enough, but during the past ten years so many new questions and old misunderstandings have accumulated that I feel it advisable to try to summarize some of our work—not as a dogmatic system but as a historical summation. I wish to show how the work of the Formalists began, how it evolved, and what it evolved into.

The evolutionary character of the development of the formal method is important to an understanding of its history; our opponents and many of our followers overlook it.

₁Le pire, à mon avis, est celui qui représente la science comme faite.
²By Formalist I mean in this essay only that group of theorists who made up the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (the Opozyt) and who began to publish their studies in 1916. (Lemon and Reis) Actually, Eichenbaum also includes as Formalists members of the Moscow Linguistic Circle.
³An essay by Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933), Soviet Commissar of Education, which attacked Formalism on the grounds of its decadence.
tem characterizes us; we are characterized only by the attempt to create an independent science of literature which studies specifically literary material. We ask only for recognition of the theoretical facts of literary art as such.

Representatives of the formal method were frequently reproached by various groups for their lack of clarity or for the inadequacy of their principles—for indifference to general questions of aesthetics, sociology, psychology, and so on. These reproaches, despite their varying merit, are alike in that they correctly grasp that the chief characteristic of the Formalists is indeed their deliberate isolation both from "aesthetics from above" and from all ready-made or self-styled general theories. This isolation (particularly from aesthetics) is more or less typical of all contemporary studies of art. Dismissing a whole group of general problems (problems of beauty, the aims of art, etc.), the contemporary study of art concentrates on the concrete problems of aesthetics [Kunstwissenschaft]. Without reference to socio-aesthetic premises, it raises questions about the idea of artistic form and its evolution. It thereby raises a series of more specific theoretical and historical questions. Such familiar slogans as Wölflin's "history of art without names" [Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen] characterized experiments in the empirical analysis of style and technique (like Voll's "experiment in the comparative study of paintings"). In Germany especially the study of the theory and history of the visual arts, which had had there an extremely rich history of tradition and experiment, occupied a central position in art studies and began to influence the general theory of art and its separate disciplines—in particular, the study of literature. In Russia, apparently for local historical reasons, literary studies occupied a place analogous to that of the visual arts in Germany.

The formal method has attracted general attention and become controversial not, of course, because of its distinctive methodology, but rather because of its characteristic attitude towards the understanding and the study of technique. The Formalists advocated principles which violated solidly entrenched traditional notions, notions which had appeared to be axiomatic not only in the study of literature, but in the study of art generally. Because they adhered to their principles so strictly, they narrowed the distance between particular problems of literary theory and general problems of aesthetics. The ideas and principles of the Formalists, for all their concreteness, were pointedly directed towards a general theory of aesthetics. Our creation of a radically unconventional poetics, therefore, implied more than a simple reassertment of particular problems; it had an impact on the study of art generally. It had its impact because of a series of historical developments, the most important of which were the crisis in philosophical aesthetics and the startling innovations in art (in Russia most abrupt and most clearly defined in poetry). Aesthetics seemed barren and art deliberately denuded—in an entirely primitive condition. Hence, Formalism and Futurism seemed bound together by history.

But the general historical significance of the appearance of Formalism comprises a special theme; I must speak of something else here because I intend to show how the principles and problems of the formal method evolved and how the Formalists came to their present position.

Before the appearance of the Formalists, academic research, quite ignorant of theoretical problems, made use of antiquated aesthetic, psychological, and historical axioms and had so lost sight of its proper subject that its very existence as a science had become illusory. There was almost no struggle between the Formalists and the Academicians, not because the Formalists had broken in the door (there were no doors), but because we found an open passageway instead of a fortress. The theoretical heritage which Potebnya and Velichkovsky left to their disciples seemed to lie like dead capital—a treasure which they were afraid to touch, the brilliance of which they had allowed to fade. In fact, authority and influence had gradually passed from academic scholarship to the "scholarship" of the journals, to the work of the Symbolist critics and theoreticians. Actually, between 1907 and 1912 the books and essays of Vyacheslav Ivanov, Bryusov, Merezhkovsky, Chukovsky, and others, were much more influential than the scholarly studies and dissertations of the university professors. This journalistical scholarship, with all its subjectivity and tendentiousness, was supported by the theoretical principles and slogans of the new artistic movements and their propagandists. Such books as Bely's Simvolizm (1910) naturally meant much more to the younger generation than the monographs on the history of literature which sprang up from no set of principles and which showed that the authors completely lacked both a scientific temperament and a scientific point of view.

The historical battle between the two generations (the Symbolists and the Formalists)—a battle which was fought over principles and was extraordinarily intense—was therefore resolved in the journals, and the battle line was drawn over Symbolist theory and Impressionist criticism rather than over any work being done by the Academicians. We entered the fight against the Symbolists in order to wrest poetics from their hands—to free it from its ties with their subjective philosophical and aesthetic theories and to direct it toward the scientific investigation of facts. We were raised on their works, and we saw their errors with the greatest clarity. At this time, the struggle became even more urgent. 

*Lemon and Reis* See Heinrich Wölflin's Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe (Munich, 1915). Wölflin was one of the originators of the stylistic analysis of art.
cause the Futurists—(Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, and Mayakovskiy), who were on the rise, opposed the Symbolist poetics and supported the Formalists.

The original group of Formalists was united by the idea of liberating poetic diction from the fetters of the intellectualism and moralism which more and more obsessed the Symbolists. The dissension among the Symbolist theoreticians (1910–11) prepared the way for our decisive rebellion. We knew that all compromises would have to be avoided, that history demanded of us a really revolutionary attitude—a categorical thesis, merciless irony, and bold rejections of whatever could not be reconciled with our position. We had to oppose the subjective aesthetic principles espoused by the Symbolists with an objective consideration of the facts. Hence our Formalist movement was characterized by a new passion for scientific positivism—a rejection of philosophical assumptions, of psychological and aesthetic interpretations, etc. Art, considered apart from philosophical aesthetics and ideological theories, dictated its own position on things. We had to turn to facts and, abandoning general systems and problems, to begin “in the middle,” with the facts which art forced upon us: Art demanded that we approach it closely; science, that we deal with the specific.

The establishment of a specific and factual literary science was basic to the organization of the formal method. All of our efforts were directed toward disposing of the earlier position which, according to Alexander Veselovsky, made of literature an abandoned thing [a res nullius]. This is why the position of the Formalists could not be reconciled with other approaches and was so unacceptable to the eclectics. In rejecting these other approaches, the Formalists actually rejected and still reject not the methods, but rather the irresponsible mixing of various disciplines and their problems.

The basis of our position was and is that the object of literary science, as such, must be the study of those specifics which distinguish it from any other material. (The secondary, incidental features of such material, however, may reasonably and rightly be used in a subordinate way by other scientific disciplines.) Roman Jakobson formulated this view with perfect clarity:

The object of the science of literature is not literature, but literariness—that is, that which makes a given work a work of literature. Until now literary historians have preferred to act like the policeman who, intending to arrest a certain person, would, at any opportunity, seize any and all persons who chanced into the apartment, as well as those who passed along the street. The literary historians used everything—anthropology, psychology, politics, philosophy. Instead of a science of literature, they created a conglomeration of homespun disciplines. They seemed to have forgotten that their essays strayed into related disciplines—the history of philosophy, the history of culture, of psychology, etc.—and that these could rightly use literary masterpieces only as defective, secondary documents.*

To apply and strengthen this principle of specificity and to avoid speculative aesthetics, we had to compare literary facts with other kinds of facts, extracting from a limitless number of important orders of fact that order which would pertain to literature and would distinguish it from the others by its function. This was the method Leo Jakubinsky followed in his essays in the first Opyaz collection, in which he worked out the contrast between poetic and practical language that served as the basic principle of the Formalists’ work on key problems of poetics. As a result, the Formalists did not look at literary studies usually had, towards history, culture, sociology, psychology, or aesthetics, etc., but toward linguistics, a science bordering on poetics and sharing material with it, but approaching it from a different perspective and with different problems. Linguistics, for its part, was also interested in the formal method in that what was discovered by comparing poetic and practical language could be studied as a purely linguistic problem, as part of the general phenomena of language. The relationship between linguistics and the formal method was somewhat analogous to that relation of mutual use and delimitation that exists, for example, between physics and chemistry. Against this background, the problems posed earlier by Potebnya and taken for granted by his followers were reviewed and reinterpreted.

Leo Jakubinsky’s first essay, On the Sounds of Poetic Language, compared practical and poetic language and formulated the difference between them:

The phenomena of language must be classified from the point of view of the speaker’s particular

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* [Eichenbaum] Roman Jakobson, Noveyshaya russkaya poesiya [Modern Russian Poetry] (Prague, 1921), p. 11. [Lemon and Reiss] Jakobson, it should be stressed, is not arguing that literature is unrelated to history, psychology, etc. He is, rather, insisting that the study of literature, if it is to be a distinct discipline, must have its own particular subject.
purpose as he forms his own linguistic pattern. If the pattern is formed for the purely practical purpose of communication, then we are dealing with a system of practical language (the language of thought) in which the linguistic pattern (sounds, morphological features, etc.) have no independent value and are merely a means of communication. But other linguistic systems, systems in which the practical purpose is in the background (although perhaps not entirely hidden) are conceivable; they exist, and their linguistic patterns acquire independent value.

The establishment of this distinction was important both for the construction of a poetics and for understanding the Futurist’s preference for nonsense language as revealing the furthest extension of the sheer independent value of words, the kind of value partially observed in the language of children, in the glossolalia of religious sects, and so on. The Futurist experiments in nonsense language were of prime significance as a demonstration against Symbolism which, in its theories, went no further than to use the idea of instrumentation to indicate the accompaniment of meaning by sound and so to de-emphasize the role of sound in poetic language. The problem of sound in verse was especially crucial because it was on this point that the Formalists and Futurists united to confront the theorists of Symbolism. Naturally, the Formalists gave battle at first on just that issue; the question of sound had to be disposed of first if we were to oppose the aesthetic and philosophical tendencies of the Symbolists with a system of precise observations and to reach the underlying scientific conclusions. This accounts for the content of the first volume of Opozvez, a content devoted entirely to the problem of sound and nonsense language.

Victor Shklovsky, along with Jakubinsky, in On Poetry and Nonsense Language, cited a variety of examples which showed that “even words without meaning are necessary.” He showed such meaninglessness to be both a widespread linguistic fact and a phenomenon characteristic of poetry. “The poet does not decide to use the meaningless word; usually ‘nonsense’ is disguised as some kind of frequently delusive, deceptive content. Poets are forced to acknowledge that they themselves do not understand the content of their own verses.” Shklovsky’s essay, moreover, transfers the question from the area of pure sound, from the acoustical level (which provided the basis for impressionist interpretations of the relation between sound and the description of objects or the emotion represented) to the level of pronunciation and articulation. “In the enjoyment of a meaningless ‘nonsense word,’ the articulatory aspect of speech is undoubtedly important. Perhaps generally a great part of the delight of poetry consists in pronunciation, in the independent dance of the organs of speech.” The question of meaningless language thus became a serious scientific concern, the solution of which would help to clarify many problems of poetic language in general. Shklovsky also formulated the general question:

If we add to our demand of the word as such that it serve to clarify understanding, that it be generally meaningful, then of course “meaningless” language, as a relatively superficial language, falls by the wayside. But it does not fall alone; a consideration of the facts forces one to wonder whether words always have a meaning, not only in meaningless speech, but also in simple poetic speech—or whether this notion is only a fiction resulting from our inattention.

The natural conclusion of these observations and principles was that poetic language is not only a language of images, that sounds in verse are not at all merely elements of a superficial euphony, and that they do not play a mere “accompaniment” to meaning, but rather that they have an independent significance. The purpose of this work was to force a revision of Potebnya’s general theory, which had been built on the conviction that poetry is “thought in images.” Potebnya’s analysis of poetry, the analysis which the Symbolists had adopted, treated the sound of verse as expressive of something behind it. Sound was merely onomatopoetic, merely “aural description.” The works of Andrey Bely (who discovered the complete sound picture that champagne makes when poured from a bottle into a glass in two lines from Pushkin, and who also discovered the “noisiness of a hangover” in Blok’s repetition of the consonantal cluster rdl) were quite typical. Such attempts to explain alliteration, bordering on parody, required a rebuff and an attempt to produce concrete evidence showing that sounds in verse exist apart from any connection with imagery, that they have an independent oral function.

Leo Jakubinsky, in his essays, provided linguistic support for [our arguments in favor of] the independent value of sound in verse. Osip Brik’s essay on Sound Repetitions illustrated the point with quotations from Pushkin and Le

montov arranged to present a variety of models. Brik doubted the correctness of the common opinion that poetic language is a language of images:

No matter how one looks at the interrelationship of image and sound, there is undoubtedly only one conclusion possible—the sounds, the harmonies, are not only euphonious accessories to meaning; they are also the result of an independent poetic purpose. The superficial devices of euphony do not completely account for the instrumentation of poetic speech. Such instrumentation represents on the whole an intricate product of the interaction of the general laws of harmony. Rhyme, alliteration, etc., are only obvious manifestations, particular cases, of the basic laws of euphony.

In opposing the work of Bely, Brik, in the same essay, made no comment at all on the meaning of this or that use of alliteration, but merely affirmed that repetition in verse is analogous to tautology in folklore—that is, that repetition itself plays something of an aesthetic role: "Obviously we have here diverse forms of one general principle, the principle of simple combination, by which either the sounds of the words or their meanings, or now one and now the other, serve as the material of the combination." Such an extension of one device to cover the various forms of poetic material is quite characteristic of the work of the Formalists during their initial period. After the presentation of Brik's essay the question of sound in verse lost something of its urgency, and the Formalists turned to questions of poetics in general.

The Formalists began their work with the question of the sounds of verse—at that time the most controversial and most basic question. Behind this particular question of poetics stood more general theses which had to be formulated. The distinction between systems of poetic and practical language, which defined the work of the Formalists from the very beginning, was bound to result in the formulation of a whole group of basic questions. The idea of poetry as "thought by means of images" and the resulting formula, poetry = imagery, clearly did not coincide with our observations and contradicted our tentative general principles. Rhythm, sound, syntax—all of these seemed secondary from such a point of view; they seemed uncharacteristic of poetry and necessarily extraneous to it. The Symbolists accepted Potebnya's general theory because it justified the supremacy of the image-symbol; yet they could not rid themselves of the notorious theory of the "harmony of form and content" even though it clearly contradicted their bent for formal experimentation and discredited it by making it seem mere aestheticism. The Formalists, when they abandoned Potebnya's point of view, also freed themselves from the traditional correlation of form and content and from the traditional idea of form as an envelope, a vessel into which one pours a liquid (the content). The facts of art demonstrate that art's uniqueness consists not in the parts which enter into it but in their original use. Thus the notion of form was changed; the new notion of form required no companion idea, no correlative.

Even before the formation of the Opozda in 1914, at the time of the public performances of the Futurists, Shklovsky had published a monograph, The Resurrection of the Word, in which he took exception partly to the concepts set forth by Potebnya and partly to those of Veselovsky (the question of imagery was not then of major significance) to advance the principle of perceptible form as the specific sign of artistic awareness:

We do not experience the commonplace, we do not see it; rather, we recognize it. We do not see the walls of our room; and it is very difficult for us to see errors in proofreading, especially if the material is written in a language we know well, because we cannot force ourselves to see, to read, and not to "recognize" the familiar word. If we have to define specifically "poetic" perception and artistic perception in general, then we suggest this definition: "Artistic" perception is that perception in which we experience form—perhaps not form alone, but certainly form.

Perception here is clearly not to be understood as a simple psychological concept (the perception peculiar to this or that person), but, since art does not exist outside of perception, as an element in art itself. The notion of form here acquires new meaning; it is no longer an envelope, but a complete thing, something concrete, dynamic, self-contained, and without a correlative of any kind. Here we made a decisive break with the Symbolist principle that some sort of content is to shine through the form. And we broke with aestheticism—the preference for certain elements of form consciously isolated from "content."

But these general acknowledgments that there are differences between poetic and practical language and that the specific quality of art is shown in its particular use of the

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material were not adequate when we tried to deal with specific works. We had to find more specific formulations of the principle of perceptible form so that they could make possible the analysis of form itself—the analysis of form understood as content. We had to show that the perception of form results from special artistic techniques which force the reader to experience the form. Shklovsky's *Art as Technique*, presenting its own manifesto of the Formalist method, offered a perspective for the concrete analysis of form. Here was a really clear departure from Potenina and Potebynaism and, at the same time, from the theoretical principles of Symbolism. The essay began with objections to Potenina's basic view of imagery and its relation to content. Shklovsky indicates, among other things, that images are almost always static:

The more you understand an age, the more convinced you become that the images a given poet used and which you thought his own were taken almost unchanged from another poet. The works of poets are classified or grouped according to the new techniques they discover and share, and according to their arrangement and development of the resources of language; poets are much more concerned with arranging images than creating them. Images are given to poets, the ability to remember them is far more important than the ability to create them. Imagistic thought does not, in any case, include all aspects of art or even all aspects of verbal art. A change in imagery is not essential to the development of poetry.

He further pointed out the difference between poetic and nonpoetic images. The poetic image is defined as one of the devices of poetic language—as a device which, depending upon the problem, is as important as such other devices of poetic language as simple and negative parallelism, comparison, repetition, symmetry, hyperbole, etc., but no more important. Thus imagery becomes a part of a system of poetic devices and loses its theoretical dominance.

Shklovsky likewise repudiated the principle of artistic economy, a principle which had been strongly asserted in aesthetic theory, and opposed it with the device of defamiliarization and the notion of roughened form. That is, he saw art as increasing the difficulty and span of perception "because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged"; he saw art as a means of destroying the automatism of perception; the purpose of the image is not to present the approximate meaning of its object to our understanding, but to create a special perception of the object—the creation of its vision, and not the recognition of its meaning. Hence the image is usually connected with the process of defamiliarization.

The break with Potenina was formulated definitely in Shklovsky's essay *Potenina*. He repeats once more that imagery—symbolization—does not constitute the specific difference between poetic and prosaic (practical) language:

Poetic language is distinguished from practical language by the perception of its structure. The acoustical, articulatory, or semantic aspects of poetic language may be felt. Sometimes one feels the verbal structure, the arrangement of the words, rather than their texture. The poetic image is one of the ways, but only one of the ways, of creating a perceptible structure designed to be experienced within its own fabric. . . . The creation of a scientific poetics must begin inductively with a hypothesis built on an accumulation of evidence. That hypothesis is that poetic and prosaic languages exist, that the laws which distinguish them exist, and finally, that these differences are to be analyzed.

These essays are to be read as the summation of the first phase of the Formalists' work. The main achievement of this period consisted in our establishment of a series of theoretical principles which provided working hypotheses for a further investigation of the data for the defeat of the current theories based on Poteninaism. The chief strength of the Formalists, as these essays show, was neither the direction of their study of so-called forms nor the construction of a special method; their strength was founded securely on the fact that the specific features of the verbal arts had to be studied and that to do so it was first necessary to sort out the differing uses of poetic and practical language. Concerning form, the Formalists thought it important to change the meaning of this muddled term. It was important to destroy these traditional correlatives and so to enrich the idea of form with new significance. *The notion of technique*, because it has to do directly with the distinguishing features of poetic and practical speech, *is much more significant in the long range evolution of Formalism than is the notion of form*.

The preliminary stage of our theoretical work had passed. We had proposed general principles bearing directly upon factual material. We now had to move closer to the material and to make the problems themselves specific. At the center stood those questions of theoretical poetics that had previously been outlined only in general form. We had to move from questions about the sound of verse to a general
theory of verse. The questions about the sound of verse, when originally posed, were meant only as illustrations of the difference between poetic and practical language. We had to move from questions about technique-in-general to the study of the specific devices of composition, to inquiry about plot, and so on. Our interest in opposing Veselovsky’s general view and, specifically, in opposing his theory of plot, developed side by side with our interest in opposing Polebnov’s.

At this time, the Formalists quite naturally used literary works only as material for supporting and testing their theoretical hypotheses; we had put aside questions of convention, literary evolution, etc. Now we felt it important to widen the scope of our study, to make a preliminary survey of the data, and to allow it to establish its own kind of laws. In this way we freed ourselves from the necessity of resorting to abstract premises and at the same time mastered the materials without losing ourselves in details.

Shklovsky, with his theory of plot and fiction, was especially important during this period. He demonstrated the presence of special devices of “plot construction” and their relation to general stylistic devices in such diverse materials as the skaz, Oriental tales, Cervantes’ Don Quixote, Tolstoy’s works, Sterne’s Tristram Shandy, and so on. I do not wish to go into details—those should be treated in specialized works and not in a general essay such as this on the Formalist method—but I do wish to cover those ideas in Shklovsky’s treatment of plot which have a theoretical significance beyond any relationship they might have to particular problems of plots as such. Traces of those ideas can be found in the most advanced pieces of Formalist criticism.

The first of Shklovsky’s works on plot, The Relation of Devices of Plot Construction to General Devices of Style, raised a whole series of such ideas. In the first place, the proof that special devices of plot arrangement exist, a proof supported by the citation of great number of devices, changed the traditional notion of plot as a combination of a group of motifs and made plot a compositional rather than a thematic concept. Thus the very concept of plot was changed; plot was no longer synonymous with story. Plot construction became the natural subject of Formalist study, since plot constitutes the specific peculiarity of narrative art. The idea of form had been enriched, and as it lost its former abstractness, it also lost its controversial meaning. Our idea of form had begun to coincide with our idea of literature as such, with the idea of the literary fact.

Furthermore, the analogies which we established between the devices of plot construction and the devices of style had theoretical significance, for the step-by-step structure usually found in the epic was found to be analogous to sound repetition, tautology, tautological parallelism, and so on. All illustrated a general principle of verbal art based on parceling out and impeding the action.

For instance, Roland’s three blows on the stone in the Song of Roland and the similar triple repetition common in tales may be compared, as a single type of phenomenon, with Gogol’s use of synonyms and with such linguistic structures as hoity-toity, a diller, a dollar, etc. “These variations of step-by-step construction usually do not all occur together, and attempts have been made to give each case a special explanation.” Shklovsky shows how we attempt to demonstrate that the same device may reappear in diverse materials. Here we clashed with Veselovsky, who in such cases usually avoided theory and resorted to historical-genetic hypotheses. For instance, he explained epic repetition as a mechanism for the original performance (as embryonic song). But an explanation of the genetics of such a phenomenon, even if true, does not clarify the phenomenon as a fact of literature. Veselovsky and other members of the ethnographic school used to explain the peculiar motifs and plots of the skaz by relating literature and custom; Shklovsky did not object to making the relationship but challenged it only as an explanation of the peculiarities of the skaz—he challenged it as an explanation of a specifically literary fact. The study of literary genetics can clarify only the origin of a device, nothing more; poetry must explain its literary function.

The genetic point of view fails to consider the device as a self-determined use of material; it does not consider how conventional materials are selected by an author, how conventional devices are transformed, or how they are made to play a structural role. The genetic point of view does not explain how a convention may disappear and its literary function remain. The literary function remains not as a simple [customary or social] experience but as a literary device retaining a significance over and beyond its connection with the convention. Characteristically, Veselovsky had contradicted himself by considering the adventures of the Greek romance as purely stylistic devices.

The Formalists naturally opposed Veselovsky’s ethnography because it ignored the special characteristic of the literary device and because it replaced the theoretical and evolutionary point of view with a genetic point of view.

Veselovsky saw syncretism as a phenomenon of primitive poetry, a result of custom, and he later was censured for this in B. Kazansky’s The Concept of Historical Poetics. Ka-

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1 [Lemon and Rei] Eichenbaum gives two nonsense phrases here, kudy-mudy and ploschashchypushki. The point is, of course, that repetition of sound alone may keep alive certain otherwise meaningless expressions.
zanksy repudiated the ethnographic point of view by affirming the presence of syncretic tendencies in the very nature of each art, a presence especially obvious in some periods. The Formalists naturally could not agree with Veselovsky when he touched upon general questions of literary evolution: If the clash with the Potebnyists clarified basic principles of poetics; the clash with Veselovsky's general view and with that of his followers clarified the Formalist's views on literary evolution and, thereby, on the structure of literary history.

Shklovsky began to deal with the subject of literary evolution in the essay I cited previously, The Relation of Devices of Plot Construction to General Devices of Style. He had encountered Veselovsky's formula, a formula broadly based on the ethnographic principle that "the purpose of new form is to express new content," and he decided to advance a completely different point of view:

The work of art arises from a background of other works and through association with them. The form of a work of art is defined by its relation to other works of art, to forms existing prior to it. . . . Not only parody, but also any kind of art is created parallel to and opposed to some kind of form. The purpose of the new form is not to express new content, but to change an old form which has lost its aesthetic quality.

Shklovsky supported this thesis with B[roder] Christiansen's demonstration of "differentiated perceptions" or "perceptions of difference." He sees that the dynamism characteristic of art is based on this and is manifested in repeated violations of established rules. At the close of his essay, he quotes F[erdinand] Brunetière's statements that "of all the influences active in the history of literature, the chief is the influence of work on work," and that "one should not, without good cause, increase the number of influences upon literature, under the assumption that literature is the expression of society, nor should one confuse the history of literature with the history of morals and manners. These are entirely different things."

Shklovsky's essay marked the changeover from our study of theoretical poetics to our study of the history of literature. Our original assumptions about form had been complicated by our observation of new features of evolutionary dynamics and their continuous variability. Our moving into the area of the history of literature was no simple expansion of our study; it resulted from the evolution of our concept of form. We found that we could not see the literary work in isolation, that we had to see its form against a background of other works rather than by itself. Thus the Formalists definitively went beyond "Formalism," if by Formalism one means (as some poorly informed critics usually did) some fabricated system which permitted us to be classified, some system which zealously adapted itself to logic-chopping, or some system which joyously welcomed any dogma. Such scholastic Formalism was neither historical nor essentially connected with the work of the Opozyz. We were not responsible for it; on the contrary, we were unreconcilably its enemies on principle.

Later I shall return to the historical-literary work of the Formalists, but now I wish to conclude the survey of those theoretical principles and problems contained in the early work of the Opozyz. The Shklovsky essay I referred to above contains still another idea which figured prominently in the subsequent study of the novel—the idea of motivation.¹ The discovery of various techniques of plot construction (step-by-step structure, parallelism, framing, the weaving of motifs, etc.) clarified the difference between the elements used in the construction of a work and the elements comprising its material (its story, the choice of motifs, the characters, the themes, etc.). Shklovsky stressed this difference at that time because the basic problem was to show the identity of individual structural devices in the most diverse materials imaginable. The old scholarship worked exclusively with the material, taking it as the content and treating the remainder as an external form either totally without interest or of interest only to the dilettante. Hence the naïve and pathetic aesthetics of our older literary critics and historians, who found "neglect of form" in Tютчев's poetry and simply "bad form" in Nekrasov and Dostoevsky. The literary reputations of these authors were saved because their intensity of thought and mood excused their formlessness. Naturally, during the years of struggle and polemics against such a position, the Formalists directed all their forces to showing the significance of such compositional devices as motivation and ignored all other considerations. In speaking of the formal method and its evolution, we must constantly remember that many of the principles advanced by the Formalists in the years of tense struggle were significant not only as scientific principles, but also as slogans, as paradoxes sharpened for propaganda and controversy. To ignore this fact and to treat the work of the Opozyz (between 1916 and 1921) in the same way as one would treat the academic scholarship is to ignore history.

The concept of motivation permitted the Formalists to approach literary works (in particular, novels and short stories) more closely and to observe the details of their structure, which Shklovsky did in two later works, Plot Develop

¹Not necessarily characters' motivation but the author's.
ment and Sterne's Tristram Shandy and the Theory of the Novel. In these works, he studied the relationship between technique and motivation in Cervantes' Don Quixote and Sterne's Tristram Shandy as material for the study of the structure of the short story and the novel apart from literary history, and he studies Don Quixote as an instance of the transition from collections of tales (like the Decameron) to the novel with a single hero whose travels justify or motivate its episodic structure. Don Quixote was chosen because the devices it contains and their motivation are not fully integrated into the entire context of the novel. Material is often simply inserted, not welded in; devices of plot construction and methods of using material to further the plot structure stand out sharply, whereas later structures tend "more and more to integrate the material tightly into the very body of the novel." While analyzing "how Don Quixote was made," Shklovsky also showed the instability of the hero and concluded that his type appeared "as the result of the business of constructing the novel." Thus the dominance of structure, of plot over material, was emphasized.

Neither a work fully motivated nor an art which deliberately does away with motivation and exposes the structure provides the most suitable material for the illumination of such theoretical problems. But the very existence of a work such as Don Quixote, with a deliberately exposed structure, confirms the relevance of these problems, confirms the fact that the problems need to be stated as problems, and confirms the fact that they are significant literary problems. Moreover, we were able to explain works of literature entirely in the light of these theoretical problems and principles, as Shklovsky did with Tristram Shandy. Shklovsky not only used the book to illustrate our theoretical position, he gave it new significance and once more attracted attention to it. Studied against the background of an interest in the structure of the novel, Sterne became a contemporary; people spoke about him, people who previously had found in his novel only boring chatter or eccentricities, or who had prejudged it from the point of view of its notorious sentimentalism, a characteristic for which Sterne is as little to blame as Gogol for realism.

Shklovsky pointed out Sterne's deliberate laying bare of his methods of constructing Tristram Shandy and asserted that Sterne had exaggerated the structure of the novel. He had shown his awareness of form by his manner of violating it and by his manner of assembling the novel's contents. In his conclusion to the essay, Shklovsky formulated the difference between plot and story:

The idea of plot is too often confused with the description of events—with what I propose provisionally to call the story. The story is, in fact, only material for plot formulation. The plot of Eugene Onegin is, therefore, not the romance of the hero with Tatyana, but the fashioning of the subject of this story as produced by the introduction of interrupting digressions.

The forms of art are explainable by the laws of art; they are not justified by their realism. Slowing the action of a novel is not accomplished by introducing rivals, for example, but by simply transposing parts. In so doing the artist makes us aware of the aesthetic laws which underlie both the transposition and the slowing down of the action.

My essay How Gogol's Greatcoat Was Made also considers the structure of the novel, comparing the problem of plot with the problem of the skaz—the problem of structure based upon the narrator's manner of telling what had happened. I tried to show that Gogol's text "was made up of living speech patterns and vocalized emotions," that words and sentences are selected and joined by Gogol as they are in the oral skaz, in which articulation, mimicry, sound gestures, and so on, play a special role. From this point of view I showed how the structure of The Greatcoat imparts a grotesque tone to the tale by replacing the usual humor of the skaz (with its anecdotes, puns, etc.) with sentimental-melodramatic declamation, I discussed, in this connection, the end of The Greatcoat as the apotheosis of the grotesque—not unlike the mute scene in The Inspector General. The traditional line of argument about Gogol's romanticism and realism proved unnecessary and unilluminating.

Thus we began to make some progress with the problem of the study of prose. The line between the idea of plot as structure and the idea of the story as material was drawn; this explanation of the typical techniques of plot construction opened the door for work on the history and theory of the novel; and furthermore, the skaz was treated as the structural basis of the plotless short story. These works have influenced a whole series of recent studies by persons not directly connected with the Opyaz.

As our theoretical work broadened and deepened it naturally became specialized—the more so because persons who were only beginning their work or who had been working independently joined the Opyaz group. Some of them specialized in the problems of poetry, others in the problems of prose. The Formalists insisted upon keeping clear the demarcation between poetry and prose in order to counterbalance the Symbolists, who were then attempting to erase the

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11[Lemon and Reis] The final scene, in which not a word is spoken for a minute and a half as the curtain slowly falls.
boundary line both in theory and in practice by painstakingly attempting to discover meter in prose.12

The earlier sections of this essay show the intensity of our work on prose. We were pioneers in the area. Several Western works resembled ours (in particular, such observations on story material as Wilhelm Diebelius' *Englische Romankunst*, 1910), but they had little relevance to our theoretical problems and principles. In our work on prose we felt almost free from tradition, but in dealing with verse the situation was different. The great number of works by Western and Russian literary theorists, the numerous practical and theoretical experiments of the Symbolists, and the special literature of the controversies over the concepts of rhythm and meter (produced between 1910 and 1917) complicated our study of poetry. The Futurists, in that same period, were creating new verse forms, and this complicated things still more. Given such conditions, it was difficult for us to pose the right problems. Many persons, instead of returning to basic questions, were concerned with special problems of metrics or with trying to put the accumulation of systems and opinions in good order. Meanwhile, we had no general theory of poetry: no theoretical elucidations of verse rhythm, of the connection of rhythm and syntax, of the sounds of verse (the Formalists had indicated only a few linguistic premises), of poetic diction and semantics, and so on. In other words, the nature of verse as such remained essentially obscure. We had to draw away from particular problems of metrics and to approach verse from some more disciplined perspective. We had, first of all, to pose the problem of rhythm so that it did not rest on metrics and would include a more substantial part of poetic speech.

Here, as in the previous section, I shall dwell upon the problem of verse only insofar as its exploration led to a new theoretical view of verbal art or a new view of the nature of poetic speech. Our position was stated first in Osip Brik's *On Rhythmic-Syntactic Figures*, an unpublished lecture delivered before the Opyoz group and, apparently, not even written out.13 Brik demonstrated that verse contained stable syntactical figures indissolubly connected with rhythm. Thus rhythm was no longer thought of as an abstraction; it was made relevant to the very linguistic fabric of verse—the phrase. Metrics became a kind of background, significant, like the alphabet, for the reading and writing of verse. Brik's step was as important for the study of verse as the discovery of the relation of plot to structure was for the study of prose. The discovery that rhythmic patterns are related to the grammatical patterns of sentences destroyed the notion that rhythm is a superficial appendage, something floating on the surface of speech. Our theory of verse was founded on the analysis of rhythm as the structural basis of verse, a basis which of itself determined all of its parts—both acoustical and unacoustical. A superior theory of verse, which would make metrics but a kindergarten preparation, was in sight. The Symbolists and the group led by Bely, despite their attempts, could not travel our road because they still saw the central problem as metrics isolation.

But Brik's work merely hinted at the possibility of a new way; like his first essay, *Sound Repetitions*, it was limited to showing examples and arranging them into groups. From Brik's lecture one could move either into new problems or into the simple classification and cataloging, or systematizing, of the material. The lecture was not necessarily an expression of the formal method. Victor Zhirmunsky continued the work of classification in *The Composition of Lyric Verse*. Zhirmunsky, who did not share the theoretical principles of the Opyoz, was interested in the formal method as only one of the possible scientific approaches to the division of materials into various groups and headings. Given his understanding of the formal method, he could do nothing else; he accepted any superficial feature as a basis for the grouping of materials. Hence the unvarying cataloging and the pedantic tone of all of Zhirmunsky's theoretical work. Such works were not a major influence in the general evolution of the formal method; in themselves they merely emphasized the tendency (evidently historically inevitable) to give the formal method an academic quality. It is not surprising, therefore, that Zhirmunsky later completely withdrew from the Opyoz over a difference of opinion about the principles he stated repeatedly in his last works (especially in his introduction to the translation of Os̆kar Walzel's *The Problem of Form in Prose* [1923]).

My book, *Verse Melody*, which was prepared as a study of the phonetics of verse and so was related to a whole group of Western works (by Sievers, Saran, etc.), was relevant to Brik's work on rhythmic-syntactic figures. I maintained that stylistic differences were usually chiefly lexical:

> With that we drop the idea of versification as such, and take up poetic language in general. . . . We have to find something related to the poetic phrase that does not also lead us away from poetry itself, something bordering on both phonetics and semantics. This "something" is syntax.

I did not examine the rhythmic-syntactic phenomena in isolation, but as part of an examination of the structural significance of metrical and vocal intonation. I felt it especially

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12[Lemon and Reis] See especially Andrey Bely's *Sverstvov* (Moscow, 1910).
13[Lemon and Reis] 1920. Brik's lecture was published in 1927 in *New Left.*
important both to assert the idea of a dominant, upon which a given poetic style is organized, and to isolate the idea of melody as a system of intonations from the idea of the general musicality of verse. On this basis, I proposed to distinguish three fundamental styles of lyric poetry: declamatory (oratorical), melodic, and conversational. My entire book is devoted to the peculiarities of the melodic style—to peculiarities in the material of the lyrics of Zhukovsky, Tyutchev, Lermontov, and Fet. Avoiding ready-made schematizations, I ended the book with the conviction that “in scientific work, I consider the ability to see facts far more important than the construction of a system. Theories are necessary to clarify facts; in reality, theories are made of facts. Theories perish and change, but the facts they help discover and support remain.”

The tradition of specialized metrical studies still continued among the Symbolist theoreticians (Bely, Bryusov, Bobrov, Chukovsky, and others), but it gradually turned into precise statistical enumeration and lost what had been its dominant characteristic. Here the metrical studies of Boris Tomashevsky, concluded in his text Russian Versification, played the most significant role. Thus, as the study of metrics became secondary, a subsidiary discipline with a very limited range of problems, the general theory of verse entered its first stage.

Tomashevsky’s Pushkin’s Tambic Pentameter outlined the entire previous course of developments within the formal method, including its attempt to broaden and enrich the notion of poetic rhythm and to relate it to the structure of poetic language. The essay also attempted to go beyond the idea of meter in language: Hence the basic charge against Bely and his school: “The problem of rhythm is not conformity to imaginary meters; it is rather the distribution of expiratory energy within a single wave—the line itself.” In The Problems of Poetic Rhythm Tomashevsky expressed this with perfect clarity of principle. Here the earlier conflict between meter and rhythm is resolved by applying the idea of rhythm in verse to all of the elements of speech that play a part in the structure of verse. The rhythms of phrasal intonation and euphony (alliterations, etc.) are placed side by side with the rhythm of word accent. Thus we came to see the line as a special form of speech which functions as a single unit in the creation of poetry. We no longer saw the line as something which could create a rhythmic variation by resisting or adjusting to the metrical form (a view which Zhirmunsky continued to defend in his new work, Introduction to Metrics). Tomashevsky wrote that:

Poetic speech is organized in terms of its sounds. Taken singly, any phonetic element is subject to rules and regulations, but sound is a complex phenomenon. Thus classical metrics singles out accent and normalizes it by its rules . . . But it takes little effort to shake the authority of traditional forms, because the notion persisted that the nature of verse is not fully explained by a single distinguishing feature, that poetry exists in “secondary” features, that a recognizable rhythm exists alongside meter, that poetry can be created by imposing a pattern on only these secondary features, and that speech without meter may sound like poetry.

The important idea of a rhythmic impulse (which had figured earlier in Brik’s work) with a general rhythmic function is maintained here:

Rhythmic devices may participate in various degrees in the creation of an artistic-rhythmic effect; this or that device may dominate various works—this or that means may be the dominant. The use of a given rhythmic device determines the character of the particular rhythm of the work. On this basis poetry may be classified as accented-metrical poetry (e.g., the description of the Battle of Poltava), intoned-melodic poetry (the verses of Zhukovsky), or harmonic poetry (common during the recent years of Russian Symbolism).

Poetic form, so understood, is not contrasted with anything outside itself—with a content which has been laboriously set inside this form—but is understood as the genuine content of poetic speech. Thus the very idea of form, as it had been understood in earlier works, emerged with a new and more adequate meaning.

In his essay On Czech Versification Roman Jakobson pointed out new problems in the general theory of poetic rhythm. He opposed the [earlier] theory that “verse adapts itself completely to the spirit of the language,” that is, that “form does not resist the material [it shapes]” with the theory that “poetic form is the organized coercion of language.” He applied this refinement of the more orthodox view—a refinement in keeping with the Formalist method—to the question of the difference between the phonetic qualities of practical language and those of poetic language. Although Jakubinsky had [for example] noted that the dissimilation of liquid consonants [l and r] is relatively infrequent in poetry, Jakobson showed that it existed in both poetical

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4In Pushkin’s Poltava.
and practical language but that in practical language it is “accidental”; in poetic language it is, “so to speak, contrived; these are two distinct phenomena.”

In the same essay Jakobson also clarified the principal distinction between emotional and poetic language (a distinction he had previously considered in his first book, Modern Russian Poetry):

Although poetry may use the methods of emotive language, it uses them only for its own purposes. The similarities between the two kinds of language and the use of poetic language in the way that emotive language is used frequently leads to the assumption that the two are identical. The assumption is mistaken because it fails to consider the radical difference of function between the two kinds of language.

In this connection Jakobson refuted the attempts of [Maurice] Grammont and other prosodists to explain the phonetic structure of poetry in terms either of onomatopoeia or of the emotional connection between sounds and images. “Phonetic structure,” he wrote, “is not always a structure of audible images, nor is it a structure of audible images always a method of emotional language.” Jakobson’s book was typical because it constantly went beyond the limits of its particular, special theme (the prosody of Czech verse) and shed light on general questions about the theory of poetic language and verse. Thus his book ends with a whole essay on Mayakovsky, an essay complemented by his earlier piece on Khebulaiko.

In my own work on Anna Akhmatova I also attempted to raise basic theoretical questions about the theory of verse—questions of the relation of rhythm to syntax and intonation, the relation of the sound of verse to its articulation, and, lastly, the relation of poetic diction to semantics. Referring to a book which Yuri Tynyanov was then preparing, I pointed out that “as words get into verse they are, as it were, taken out of ordinary speech. They are surrounded by a new aura of meaning and perceived not against the background of speech in general but against the background of poetic speech.” I also indicated that the formation of collateral meanings, which disrupts ordinary verbal associations, is the chief peculiarity of the semantics of poetry.

Until then, the original connection between the formal method and linguistics had been growing considerably weaker. The difference that had developed between our problems was so great that we no longer needed the special support of the linguists, especially the support of those who were psychologically oriented. In fact, some of the work of the linguists was objectionable in principle. Tynyanov’s The Problem of Poetic Language, which had appeared just then, emphasized the difference between the study of psychological linguistics and the study of poetic language and style. This book showed the intimate relation that exists between the meaning of words and the poetic structure itself; it added new meaning to the idea of poetic rhythm and initiated the Formalists’ investigation not only of acoustics and syntax, but also of the shades of meaning peculiar to poetic speech. In the introduction Tynyanov says:

The study of poetry has of late been quite rewarding. Undoubtedly the prospect in the near future is for development in the whole field, although we all remember the systematic beginning of the study. But the study of poetry has been kept isolated from questions of poetic language and style; the study of the latter is kept isolated from the study of the former. The impression is given that neither the poetic language itself nor the poetic style itself has any connection with poetry, that the one does not depend upon the other. The idea of poetic language, which was advanced not so long ago and is now changing, undoubtedly invited a certain looseness by its breadth and by the vagueness of its content, a content based on psychological linguistics.

Among the general questions of poetics revived and illuminated by this book, that of the idea of the material is most fundamental. The generally accepted view saw an opposition between form and content; when the distinction was made purely verbal, it lost its meaning. In fact, as I have already mentioned, our view gave form the significance of a thing complete in itself and strengthened it by considering the work of art in relation to its purpose. Our concept of form required no complement—except that other, artistically insignificant, kind of form. Tynyanov showed that the materials of verbal art were neither all alike nor all equally important, that “one feature may be prominent at the expense of the rest, so that the remainder is deformed and sometimes degraded to the level of a neutral prop.” Hence the conclusion that “the idea of material does not lie beyond the limits of form; the material itself is a formal element. To confuse it with external structural features is a mistake.” After this...

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[Tynyanov, Boris] Jakobtsky had already pointed out the excessive complexity of the idea of practical speech and the impossibility of analyzing it in terms of function (conversational, oratorical, scientific, and so on); see his essay, “O dialogicheskom reche’” (“On Dialogic Speech”), Razislavna reche’ [Russian Speech], 1 (1923).
The Theory of the "Formal Method"

Tynyanov could make the notion of form more complex by showing that form is dynamic: "The unity of the work is not a closed, symmetrical whole, but an unfolding, dynamic whole. Its elements are not static indications of equality and complexity, but always dynamic indications of correlation and integration. The form of literary works must be thought of as dynamic."

Rhythm is here presented as the fundamental specific factor which permeates all the elements of poetry. The objective sign of poetic rhythm is the establishment of a rhythmic group whose unity and richness exist side by side with each other. And again, Tynyanov affirms the principal distinction between prose and poetry:

Poetry, as opposed to prose, tends toward unity and richness ranged around an uncommon object. This very "uncommonness" prevents the main point of the poem from being smoothed over. Indeed, it asserts the object with a new force. Any element of prose brought into the poetic pattern is transformed into verse by that feature of it which asserts its function and which thus has two aspects: the emphasis of the structure—the versification—and the deformation of the uncommon object.

Tynyanov also raises the question of semantics: "In verse are not the ordinary semantic meanings of the words so distorted (a fact which makes complete paraphrase impossible) that the usual principles governing their arrangement no longer apply?" The entire second part of Tynyanov's book answers this question by defining the precise relation between rhythm and semantics. The facts show clearly that oral presentations are unified in part by rhythm. "This is shown in a more forceful and more compact integration of connectives than occurs in ordinary speech; words are made correlative by their positions"; prose lacks this feature.

Thus the Formalists abandoned Potebnia's theory and accepted the conclusions connected with it on a new basis, and a new perspective opened up to the theory of verse. Tynyanov's work permitted us to grasp even the remotest implications of these new problems. It became clear even to those only casually acquainted with the Opyaz that the essence of our work consisted not in some kind of static "formal method," but in a study of the specific peculiarities of verbal art—we were not advocates of a method, but students of an object. Again, Tynyanov stated this:

The object of a study claiming to be a study of art ought to be so specific that it is distinguished from other areas of intellectual activity and uses them for its own materials and tools. Each work of art represents a complex interaction of many factors; consequently, the job of the student is the definition of the specific character of this interaction.

Earlier I noted that the problem of the diffusion and change of form—the problem of literary evolution—is raised naturally along with theoretical problems. The problem of literary evolution arises in connection with a reconsideration of Veselovsky's view of skaz motifs and devices; the answer ("new form is not to express new content, but to replace old form") led to a new understanding of form. If form is understood as the very content, constantly changing according to its dependence upon previous images, then we naturally had to approach it without abstract, ready-made, unalterable, classical schemes; and we had to consider specifically its historical sense and significance. The approach developed its own kind of dual perspective: the perspective of theoretical study (like Shklovsky's Development of Plot and my Verse Melody), which centered on a given theoretical problem and its applicability to the most diverse materials, and the perspective of historical studies—studies of literary evolution as such. The combination of these two perspectives, both organic to the subsequent development of the formal school, raised a series of new and very complex problems, many of which are still unsolved and even undefined.

Actually, the original attempt of the Formalists to take a particular structural device and to establish its identity in diverse materials became an attempt to differentiate, to understand, the function of a device in each given case. This notion of functional significance was gradually pushed toward the foreground and the original idea of the device pushed into the background. This kind of sorting out of its own general ideas and principles has been characteristic of our work throughout the evolution of the formal method. We have no dogmatic position to bind us and shut us off from facts. We do not answer for our schematizations; they may require change, refinement, or correction when we try to apply them to previously unknown facts. Work on specific materials compelled us to speak of functions and thus to revise our idea of the device. The theory itself demanded that we turn to history.

Here again we were confronted with the traditional academic sciences and the preferences of critics. In our student days the academic history of literature was limited chiefly to biographical and psychological studies of various writers—only the "greats," of course. Critics no longer made attempts to construct a history of Russian literature as a whole, attempts which evidenced the intention of bringing the great historical materials into a system; nevertheless, the traditions established by earlier histories (like A. N. Pypin's History of
Russian Literature) retained their scholarly authority, the more so because the following generation had decided not to pursue such broad themes. Meanwhile, the chief role was played by such general and somewhat vague notions as realism and romanticism (realism was said to be better than romanticism); evolution was understood as gradual perfection, as progress (from Romanticism to realism); succession [of literary schools] as the peaceful transfer of the inheritance from father to son. But generally, there was no notion of literature as such; material taken from the history of social movements, from biography, etc. had replaced it entirely.

This primitive historicism, which led away from literature, naturally provoked the Symbolist theoreticians and critics into a denial of any kind of historicism. Their own discussions of literature, consequently, developed into impressionistic "études" and "silhouettes," and they indulged in a widespread "modernization" of old writers, transforming them into "eternal companions." The history of literature was silently (and sometimes aloud) declared unnecessary.

We had to demolish the academic tradition and to eliminate the bias of the journalists [the Symbolist theoreticians]. We had to advance against the first a new understanding of literary evolution and of literature itself—without the idea of progress and peaceful succession, without the ideas of realism and romanticism, without materials foreign to literature—as a specific order of phenomena, a specific order of material. We had to act against the second by pointing out concrete historical facts, fluctuating and changing forms, by pointing to the necessity of taking into account the specific functions of this or that device—in a word, we had to draw the line between the literary work as a definite historical fact and a free interpretation of it from the standpoint of contemporary literary needs, tastes, or interests. Thus the basic passion for our historical-literary work had to be a passion for destruction and negation, and such was the original tone of our theoretical attacks; our work later assumed a calmer note when we went on to solutions of particular problems.

That is why the first of our historical-literary pronouncements came in the form of theses expressed almost against our will in connection with some specific material. A particular question would unexpectedly lead to the formulation of a general problem, a problem that inextricably mixed theoretical and historical considerations. In this sense Tyutyanov's Dostoevsky and Gogol and Shklovsky's Rozanov were typical.

Tyutyanov's basic problem was to show that Dostoevsky's The Village of Stepanchikovo is a parody, that behind its first level is hidden a second—it is a parody of Gogol's Correspondence with Friends. But his treatment of this particular question was overshadowed by a whole theory of parody [which he developed to solve the particular problem], a theory of parody as a stylistic device (stylized parody) and as one of the manifestations (having great historical-literary significance) of the dialectical development of literary groups. With this arose the notion of succession and tradition and, hence, the basic problems of literary evolution were posed [as part of the study of style]:

When one speaks of literary tradition or succession . . . usually one implies a certain kind of direct line uniting the younger and older representatives of a known literary branch. Yet the matter is much more complicated. There is no continuing direct line; there is rather a departure, a pushing away from the known point—a struggle. . . . Any literary succession is first of all a struggle, a destruction of old values and a reconstruction of old elements.

Literary evolution was complicated by the notion of struggle, of periodic uprisings, and so lost its old suggestion of peaceful and gradual development. Against this background, the literary relationship between Dostoevsky and Gogol was shown to be that of a complicated struggle.

In his Rozanov, Shklovsky showed, almost in the absence of basic themes, a whole theory of literary evolution which even then reflected the current discussion of such problems in Opoyaz. Shklovsky showed that literature moves forward in a broken line.

In each literary epoch there is not one literary school, but several. They exist simultaneously, with one of them representing the high point of the current orthodoxy. The others exist uncanonical, mutely; in Pushkin's time, for example, the courtly tradition of [Wilhelm] Kuchelbecker and [Alexander]Greboyedov existed simultaneously with the tradition of Russian vaudeville verse and with such other traditions as that of the pure adventure novel of Bulgarin.

The moment the old art is canonized, new forms are created, on a lower level. A "young line" is created which grows up to replace the old, as the vaudevillian Beloyatkin is transformed into a Nekrasov (see Brik's discussion of the relationship); a direct descendant of the eighteenth century, Tolstoy, creates...
The Theory of the "Formal Method"

Shklovsky is discussing the dynamism of genres, and he interprets Rozanov’s books as embodiments of a new genre, as a new type of novel in which the parts are unconnected by motive. "Thematically, Rozanov’s books are characterized by the elevation of new elements; compositionally, by the revealed device." As part of this general theory, we introduced the notion of the dialectical self-creation of new forms, that is, hidden in the new form we saw both analogies with other kinds of cultural development and proof of the independence of the phenomena of literary evolution. In a simplified form, this theory quickly changed hands and, as always happens, became a simple and fixed scheme—very handy for critics. Actually, we have here only a general outline of evolution surrounded by a whole series of complicated conditions. From this general outline the Formalists moved on to a more consistent solution of historical-literary problems and facts, specifying and refining their original theoretical premises.

Given our understanding of literary evolution as the dialectical change of forms, we did not go back to the study of those materials which had held the central position in the old-fashioned historical-literary work. We studied literary evolution insofar as it bore a distinctive character and only to the extent that it stood alone, quite independent of other aspects of culture. In other words, we stuck exclusively to facts in order not to pass into an endless number of indefinite connections and correspondences which would do nothing at all to explain literary evolution. We did not take up questions of the biography and psychology of the artist because we assumed that these questions, in themselves serious and complex, must take their places in other sciences. We felt it important to find indications of historical regularity in evolution—that is why we ignored all that seemed, from this point of view, circumstantial, not concerned with [literary] history. We were interested in the very process of evolution, in the very dynamics of literary form, insofar as it was possible to observe them in the facts of the past. For us, the central problem of the history of literature is the problem of evolution without personality—the study of literature as a self-formed social phenomenon. As a result, we found extremely significant both the question of the formation and changes of genres and the question of how second rate and popular literature contributed to the formation of genres.

Here we had only to distinguish that popular literature which prepared the way for the formation of new genres from that which arose out of their decay and which offered material for the study of historical inertia.

On the other hand, we were not interested in the past, in isolated historical facts, as such; we did not busy ourselves with the restoration of this or that epoch because we happened to like it. History gave us what the present could not—a stable body of material. But, precisely for this reason, we approached it with a stock of theoretical problems and principles suggested in part by the facts of contemporary literature. The Formalists, then, characterized and had a close interest in contemporary literature and also reconciled criticism and scholarship. The earlier literary historians had, to a great extent, kept themselves aloof from contemporary literature; the Symbolists had subordinated scholarship to criticism. We saw in the history of literature not so much a special theoretical subject as a special approach, a special cross section of literature. The character of our historical-literary work involved our being drawn not only to historical conclusions, but also to theoretical conclusions—to the posing of new theoretical problems and to the testing of old.

From 1922 to 1924 a whole series of Formalist studies of literary history was written, many of which, because of contemporary market conditions, remain unpublished and are known only as reports…. There is, of course, not space enough here to speak of such works in detail. They usually took up secondary writers (those who form the back-

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44[Lemon and Reis] The deleted material contains a listing of some Formalist works, including: Yuri Tyutchev’s Verse Forms of Nekrasov, The Question of Tyutchev, Tyutchev and Pushkin, Tyutchev and Heine, The Ode as a Declamatory Genre; Boris Tomashevsky’s Gavriladi, Pushkin, a Reader of French Poets, Pushkin, Pushkin and Balzac, Pushkin and La Fontaine; Boris Eichenbaum’s Lermontov, Problems of the Poetics of Pushkin, Pushkin’s Path to Prose, Nekrasov; Victor Vinogradov’s Plot and Structure of Gogol’s The Nose, Plot and Architecture of Dostoevsky’s Novel Poor People, Gogol and the Realistic School, Studies on the Style of Gogol; and Victor Zhukovsky’s Byron and Pushkin.
ground of literature) and carefully explained the traditions of their work, noting changes in genres, styles, and so on. As a result, many forgotten names and facts came to light, current estimates were shown to be inaccurate, traditional ideas changed, and, chiefly, the very process of literary evolution became clearer. The working out of this material has only begun. A new series of problems is before us: further differentiation of theoretical and historical literary ideas, introduction of new material, posing new questions, and so on.

I shall conclude with a general summary. The evolution of the formal method, which I have tried to present, has the look of a sequential development of theoretical principles—apart from the individual roles each of us played. Actually, the work of the Opozy group was genuinely collective. It was this way, obviously, because from the very beginning we understood the historical nature of our task; we did not see it as the personal affair of this or that individual. This was our chief connection with the times. Science itself is still evolving, and we are evolving with it. I shall indicate briefly the evolution of the formal method during these ten years:

1. From the original outline of the conflict of poetic language with practical we proceeded to differentiate the idea of practical language by its various functions (Jakubsky) and to delimit the methods of poetic and emotional languages (Jakobson). Along with this we became interested in studying oratorical speech because it was close to practical speech but distinguished from it by function, and we spoke about the necessity of a revival of the poetic of rhetoric.

2. From the general idea of form, in its new sense, we proceeded to the idea of technique, and from here, to the idea of function.

3. From the idea of poetic rhythm as opposed to meter we proceeded to the idea of rhythm as a constructive element in the total poem and thus to an understanding of verse as a special form of speech having special linguistic (syntactical, lexical, and semantic) features.

4. From the idea of plot as structure we proceeded to an understanding of material in terms of its motivation, and from here to an understanding of material as an element participating in the construction but subordinate to the character of the dominant formal idea.

5. From the ascertainment of a single device applicable to various materials we proceeded to differentiate techniques according to function and from here to the question of the evolution of form—that is, to the problem of historical-literary study.

A whole new series of problems faces us, as Tynianov’s latest essay, Literary Fact, shows. Here the question of the relation between life and literature is posed, a question which many persons answer on the basis of a simple-minded diletantism. Examples of how life becomes literature are shown and, conversely, of how literature passes into life: “During the period of its deterioration a given genre is shoved from the center toward the periphery, but in its place, from the trivia of literature, from literature’s backyard, and from life itself, new phenomena flow into the center.”

Although I deliberately called this essay The Theory of the “Formal Method,” I gave, obviously, a sketch of its evolution. We have no theory that can be laid out as a fixed, ready-made system. For us theory and history merge not only in words, but in fact. We are too well trained by history itself to think that it can be avoided. When we feel that we have a theory that explains everything, a ready-made theory explaining all past and future events and therefore needing neither evolution nor anything like it—then we must recognize that the formal method has come to an end, that the spirit of scientific investigation has departed from it. As yet, that has not happened.
Jan Mukařovský

1891–1975

Mukařovský was a member of the Prague school of structural linguists, which built on the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and was influenced by Russian Formalism, principally through the work of Roman Jakobson. In *Standard Language and Poetic Language*, Mukařovský argues that poetic language is not simply a special brand of standard language, for it has at its disposal all the forms of the given language in addition to some of its own. Nevertheless, poetic language is closely related to standard language because the latter is the background against which poetic language is “foregrounded.” It is in this contrast that poetic language can be seen as intentionally violating the norm of the standard.

According to Mukařovský, the function of poetic language is to achieve a maximum of foregrounding, which is a use of language for its own sake, or not in the service of communication. He proposes that where there is a clearly defined norm of standard language, there is a greater opportunity for foregrounding, thus for poetry. Scientific language avoids foregrounding by exact definition of terms. In order to have a foreground, however, there must be a background: the poem cannot totally violate the norm of the standard. Mukařovský sees the poem as a unity in variety, a dynamic unity of harmony and disharmony. “The mutual relationships of the components of the work of poetry, both foregrounded and unforegrounded, constitute its structure.” Remarks like these reveal the similarities between Mukařovský’s attitude and the attitudes of various American New Critics.

Standard Language and Poetic Language

The problem of the relationship between standard language and poetic language can be considered from two standpoints. The theorist of poetic language poses it somewhat as follows: Is the poet bound by the norms of the standard? Or perhaps: How does this norm assert itself in poetry? The theorist of the standard language, on the other hand, wants to know above all to what extent a work of poetry can be used as data for ascertaining the norm of the standard. In other words, the theory of poetic language is primarily interested in the differences between the standard and poetic language, whereas the theory of the standard language is mainly interested in the similarities between them. It is clear that with a good procedure no conflict can arise between the two directions of research; there is only a difference in the point of view and in the illumination of the problem. Our study approaches the problem of the relationship between poetic language and the standard from the vantage point of poetic language. Our procedure will be to subdivide the general problem into a number of special problems.

The first problem, by way of introduction, concerns the following: What is the relationship between the extension of poetic language and that of the standard, between the places of each in the total system of the whole of language? Is poetic language a special brand of the standard, or is it an independent formation?—Poetic language cannot be called a brand of the standard, if for no other reason that poetic language has at its disposal, from the standpoint of lexicon, syntax, etc., all the forms of the given language—often of different developmental phases thereof. There are works in which the lexical material is taken over completely from another form of language than the standard (thus, Villon’s or Rictus’ slang poetry in French literature). Different forms of the language may exist side by side in a work of poetry (for instance, in the dialogues of a novel dialect or slang, in the narrative passages the standard). Poetic language finally has also some of its own lexicon and phraseology as well as some grammatical forms, the so-called poetisms such as zur ["gaze"], of ["steed"], plati ["be aflame"], 3rd p. sg. múž ["can"; cf. English -th] (a rich selection of examples can be found in the ironic description of "moon language" in [Svatopluk] Čech’s [1846–1908, a realist] Výlet pana Broučka do měsíce [Mr. Brouček’s Trip to the Moon]). Only some schools of poetry, of course, have a positive attitude towards poetisms (among them the Lumír Group including Svatopluk Čech); others reject them.

Poetic language is thus not a brand of the standard. This is not to deny the close connection between the two, which consists in the fact that, for poetry, the standard language is the background against which is reflected the esthetically intentional distortion of the linguistic components of the work, in other words, the intentional violation of the norm of the standard. Let us, for instance, visualize a work in which this distortion is carried out by the interpenetration of dialect speech with the standard; it is clear, then, that it is not the standard which is perceived as a distortion of the dialect, but the dialect as a distortion of the standard, even when the dialect is quantitatively preponderant. The violation of the norm of the standard, its systematic violation, is what makes possible the poetic utilization of language; without this possibility there would be no poetry. The more the norm of the standard is stabilized in a given language, the more varied can be its violation, and therefore the more possibilities for poetry in that language. And on the other hand, the weaker the awareness of this norm, the fewer possibilities of violation, and hence the fewer possibilities for poetry. Thus, in the beginnings of modern Czech poetry, when the awareness of the norm of the standard was weak, poetic neologisms with the purpose of violating the norm of the standard were little different from neologisms designed to gain general acceptance and become a part of the norm of the standard, so that they could be confused with them.

Such is the case of M. Z. Polák [1788–1856, an early Romantic], whose neologisms are to this day considered poor neologisms of the standard.

A structural analysis of Polák’s1 poem would show that [Josef] Jungmann [a leading figure of the Czech national renaissance] was right in evaluating Polák’s poetry positively. We are here citing the disagreement in the evaluation of Polák’s neologisms merely as an illustration of the state-

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1It is important to note that Polák himself in lexical notes to his poem clearly distinguishes little-known works (including obvious neologisms and new loans) from those which he used “for better poetic expression,” that is, as shown by the evidence, from poetic neologisms.
ment that, when the norm of the standard is weak—as was the case in the period of national renaissance, it is difficult to differentiate the devices intended to shape this norm from those intended for its consistent and deliberate violation, and that a language with a weak norm of the standard therefore offers fewer devices to the poet.

This relationship between poetic language and the standard, one which we could call negative, also has its positive side which is, however, more important for the theory of the standard language than for poetic language and its theory. Many of the linguistic components of a work of poetry do not deviate from the norm of the standard because they constitute the background against which the distortion of the other components is reflected. The theoretician of the standard language can therefore include works of poetry in his data with the reservation that he will differentiate the distorted components from those that are not distorted. An assumption that all components have to agree with the norm of the standard would, of course, be erroneous.

The second special question which we shall attempt to answer concerns the different function of the two forms of language. This is the core of the problem. The function of poetic language consists in the maximum of foregrounding of the utterance. Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become. Objectively speaking: automatization schematizes an event; foregrounding means the violation of the scheme. The standard language in its purest form, as the language of science with formulation as its objective, avoids foregrounding [aktualisace]; thus, a new expression, foregrounded because of its newness, is immediately automatized in a scientific treatise by an exact definition of its meaning. Foregrounding is, of course, common in the standard language, for instance, in journalistic style, even more in essays. But here it is always subordinate to communication: its purpose is to attract the reader's (listener's) attention more closely to the subject matter expressed by the foregrounded means of expression. All that has been said here about foregrounding and automatization in the standard language has been treated in detail in Havránk's paper in this cycle; we are here concerned with poetic language. In poetic language foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake; it is not used in the services of communication, but in order to place in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself. The question is then one of how this maximum of foregrounding is achieved in poetic language. The idea might arise that this is a quantitative effect, a matter of the foregrounding of the largest number of components, perhaps of all of them together. This would be a mistake, although only a theoretical one, since in practice such a complete foregrounding of all the components is impossible. The foregrounding of any one of the components is necessarily accompanied by the automatization of one or more of the other components; thus, for instance, the foregrounded intonation in [Jaroslav] Vrchlický [1853–1912, a poet of the Lumír Group, see above] and [Svatopluk] Čech has necessarily pushed to the lowest level of automatization the meaning of the word as a unit, because the foregrounding of its meaning would give the word phonetic independence as well and lead to a disturbance of the uninterrupted flow of the intonational (melodic) line; an example of the degree to which the semiotic independence of the word in context also manifests itself as intonational independence can be found in [Karel] Toman's [1877–1946, a modern poet] verse. The foregrounding of intonation as an uninterrupted melodic line is thus linked to the semantic "emptiness" for which the Lumír Group has been criticized by the younger generation as being "verbalistic."—In addition to the practical impossibility of the foregrounding of all components, it can also be pointed out that the simultaneous foregrounding of all the components of a work of poetry is unthinkable. This is because the foregrounding of a component implies precisely its being placed in the foreground; the unit in the foreground, however, occupies this position by comparison with another unit or units that remain in the background. A simultaneous general foregrounding would thus bring all the components into the same plane and so become a new automatization.

The devices by which poetic language achieves its maximum of foregrounding must therefore be sought elsewhere than in the quantity of foregrounded components. They consist in the consistency and systematic character of foregrounding. The consistency manifests itself in the fact that the reshaping of the foregrounded component within a given work occurs in a stable direction; thus, the deautomatization of meanings in a certain work is consistently carried out by lexical selection (the mutual interlarding of contrasting areas of the lexicon), in another equally consistently by the uncommon semantic relationship of words close together in the context. Both procedures result in a foregrounding of meaning, but differently for each. The systematic foregrounding of components in a work of poetry consists in the gradation of the interrelationships of these components, that is, in their mutual subordination and superordination. The component highest in the hierarchy becomes the dominant. All other components, foregrounded or not, as well as their interrelationships, are evaluated from the standpoint of the
dominant. The dominant is that component of the work which sets in motion, and gives direction to, the relationships of all other components. The material of a work of poetry is intertwined with the interrelationships of the components even if it is in a completely unforegrounded state. Thus, there is always present, in communicative speech as well, the potential relationship between intonation and meaning, syntax, word order, or the relationship of the word as a meaningful unit to the phonetic structure of the text, to the lexical selection found in the text, to other words as units of meaning in the context of the same sentence. It can be said that each linguistic component is linked directly or indirectly, by means of these multiple interrelationships, in some way to every other component. In communicative speech these relationships are for the most part merely potential, because attention is not called to their presence and to their mutual relationship. It is, however, enough to disturb the equilibrium of this system at some point and the entire network of relationships is slanted in a certain direction and follows it in its internal organization: tension arises in one portion of this network (by consistent unidirectional foregrounding), while the remaining portions of the network are relaxed (by automatization perceived as an intentionally arranged background). This internal organization of relationships will be different in terms of the point affected, that is, in terms of the dominant. More concretely: sometimes intonation will be governed by meaning (by various procedures), sometimes, on the other hand, the meaning structure will be determined by intonation; sometimes again, the relationship of a word to the lexicon may be foregrounded, then again its relationship to the phonetic structure of the text. Which of the possible relationships will be foregrounded, which will remain automatized, and what will be the direction of foregrounding—whether from component A to component B or vice versa, all this depends on the dominant.

The dominant thus creates the unity of the work of poetry. It is, of course, a unity of its own kind, the nature of which in aesthetics is usually designated as “unity in variety,” a dynamic unity in which we at the same time perceive harmony and disharmony, convergence and divergence. The convergence is given by the trend towards the dominant, the divergence by the resistance of the unmoving background of unforegrounded components against this trend. Components may appear unforegrounded from the standpoint of the standard language, or from the standpoint of the poetic canon, that is, the set of firm and stable norms into which the structure of a preceding school of poetry has dissolved by automatization, when it is no longer perceived as an indivisible and undissociable whole. In other words, it is possible in some cases for a component which is foregrounded in terms of the norms of the standard, not to be foregrounded in a certain work because it is in accord with the automatized poetic canon. Every work of poetry is perceived against the background of a certain tradition, that is, of some automatized canon with regard to which it constitutes a distortion. The outward manifestation of this automatization is the ease with which creation is possible in terms of this canon, the proliferation of epigones, the liking for obsolescent poetry in circles not close to literature. Proof of the intensity with which a new trend in poetry is perceived as a distortion of the traditional canon is the negative attitude of conservative criticism which considers deliberate deviations from the canon errors against the very essence of poetry.

The background which we perceive behind the work of poetry as consisting of the unforegrounded components resisting foregrounding is thus dual: the norm of the standard language and the traditional aesthetic canon. Both backgrounds are always potentially present, though one of them will predominate in the concrete case. In periods of powerful foregrounding of linguistic elements, the background of the norm of the standard predominates, while in periods of moderate foregrounding, that of the traditional canon. If the latter has strongly distorted the norm of the standard, then its moderate distortion may, in turn, constitute a renewal of the norm of the standard, and this precisely because of its moderation. The mutual relationships of the components of the work of poetry, both foregrounded and unforegrounded, constitute its structure, a dynamic structure including both convergence and divergence and one that constitutes an undissociable artistic whole, since each of its components has its value precisely in terms of its relation to the totality.

It is thus obvious that the possibility of distorting the norm of the standard, if we henceforth limit ourselves to this particular background of foregrounding, is indispensable to poetry. Without it, there would be no poetry. To criticize the deviations from the norm of the standard as faults, especially in a period which, like the present, tends towards a powerful foregrounding of linguistic components, means to reject poetry. It could be countered that in some works of poetry, or rather in some genres, only the “content” (subject matter) is foregrounded, so that the above remarks do not concern them. To this it must be noted that in a work of poetry of any genre there is no fixed border, nor, in a certain sense, any essential difference between the language and the subject matter. The subject matter of a work of poetry cannot be judged by its relationship to the extralinguistic reality entering into the work; it is rather a component of the semantic side of the work (we do not want to assert, of course, that its relationship to reality cannot become a factor of its structure, as for instance in realism). The proof of this statement could
be given rather extensively; let us, however, limit ourselves to the most important point: the question of truthfulness does not apply in regard to the subject matter of a work of poetry, nor does it even make sense. Even if we posed the question and answered it positively or negatively as the case may be, the question has no bearing on the artistic value of the work; it can only serve to determine the extent to which the work has documentary value. If in some work of poetry there is emphasis on the question of truthfulness (as in [Vladislav Vančura’s [1891–1942, a modern author] short story Dobrá míra [The Good Measure]), this emphasis only serves the purpose of giving the subject matter a certain semantic coloration. The status of subject matter is entirely different in case of communicative speech. There, a certain relationship of the subject matter to reality is an important value, a necessary prerequisite. Thus, in the case of a newspaper report the question whether a certain event has occurred or not is obviously of basic significance.

The subject matter of a work of poetry is thus its largest semantic unit. In terms of being meaningful, it has certain properties which are not directly based on the linguistic sign, but are linked to it insofar as the latter is a general semiological unit (especially its independence of any specific signs, or sets of signs, so that the same subject matter may without basic changes be rendered by different linguistic devices, or even transposed into a different set of signs altogether, as in the transposition of subject matter from one art form to another), but this difference in properties does not affect the semantic character of the subject matter. It thus holds, even for works and genres of poetry in which the subject matter is the dominant, that the latter is not the “equivalent” of a reality to be expressed by the work as effectively (for instance, as truthfully) as possible, but that it is a part of the structure, is governed by its laws, and is evaluated in terms of its relationship to it. If this is the case, then it holds for the novel as well as for the lyrical poem that to deny a work of poetry the right to violate the norm of the standard is equivalent to the negation of poetry. It cannot be said of the novel that here the linguistic elements are the aesthetically indifferent expression of content; not even if they appear to be completely devoid of foregrounding: the structure is the total of all the components, and its dynamics arises precisely from the tension between the foregrounded and deforegrounded components. There are, incidentally, many novels and short stories in which the linguistic components are clearly foregrounded. Changes effected in the interest of correct language would thus, even in the case of prose, often interfere with the very essence of the work; this would, for instance, happen if the author or even translator decided, as was asked in Násle Řeč, to eliminate “superfluous” relative clauses.

There still remains the problem of aesthetic values in language outside of the realm of poetry. A recent Czech opinion has it that “aesthetic evaluation must be excluded from language, since there is no place where it can be applied. It is useful and necessary for judging style, but not language” (J. Haller, Problém jazykové správnosti [The Problem of Correct Language], Výroční zpráva č. st. ref. redl. gymnasia v Ústí nad Labem za r. 1930–31, p. 23). I am leaving aside the criticism of the terminologically inaccurate opposition of style and language; but I do want to point out, in opposition to Haller’s thesis, that aesthetic valuation is a very important factor in the formation of the norm of the standard; on the one hand because the conscious refinement of the language cannot do without it, on the other hand because it sometimes, in part, determines the development of the norm of the standard.

Let us start with a general discussion of the field of aesthetic phenomena. It is clear that this field by far exceeds the confines of the arts. Dessoir says about it: “The striving for beauty need not be limited in its manifestation to the specific forms of the arts. The aesthetic needs are, on the contrary, so potent that they affect almost all the acts of man.” If the area of aesthetic phenomena is indeed so broad, it becomes obvious that aesthetic valuation has its place beyond the confines of the arts; we can cite as examples the aesthetic factors in sexual selection, fashion, the social amenities, the culinary arts, etc. There is, of course, a difference between aesthetic valuation in the arts and outside of art. In the arts, aesthetic valuation necessarily stands highest in the hierarchy of the values contained in the work, whereas outside of art its position vacillates and is usually subordinate. Furthermore, in the arts we evaluate each component in terms of the structure of the work in question, and the yardstick is in each individual case determined by the function of the component within the structure. Outside of art, the various components of the phenomenon to be evaluated are not integrated into an aesthetic structure and the yardstick becomes the established norm that applies to the component in question, wherever the latter occurs. If, then, the area of aesthetic valuation is so broad that it includes “almost all of the acts of man,” it is indeed not very probable that language would be exempt from aesthetic valuation; in other words, that its use would not be subject to the laws of taste. There is direct proof that aesthetic valuation is one of the basic criteria of purism, and that even the development of the norm of the standard cannot be imagined without it.

3M. Dessoir, Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft (Stuttgart, 1906), p. 112.
Aesthetic valuation clearly has its indispensible place in the refinement of language, and those purists who deny its validity are unconsciously passing judgment on their own practice. Without an aesthetic point of view, no other form of the cultivation of good language is possible, even one much more efficient than purism. This does not mean that he who intends to cultivate good language has the right to judge language in line with his personal taste, as is done precisely by the purists. Such an intervention into the development of the standard language is efficient and purposeful only in periods when the conscious aesthetic valuation of phenomena has become a social fact—as was the case in France in the seventeenth century. In other periods, including the present, the aesthetic point of view has more of a regulatory function in the cultivation of good language: he who is active in the cultivation of good language must take care not to force upon the standard language, in the name of correct language, modes of expression that violate the aesthetic canon (set of norms) given in the language implicitly, but objectively; intervention without heed to the aesthetic norms hampers, rather than advances, the development of the language. The aesthetic canon, which differs not only from language to language, but also for different developmental periods of the same language (not counting in this context other functional formations of which each has its own aesthetic canon), must therefore be ascertained by scientific investigation and be described as accurately as possible. This is the reason for the considerable significance of the question of the manner in which aesthetic valuation influences the development of the norm of the standard. Let us first consider the manner in which the lexicon of the standard language is increased and renewed. Words originating in slang, dialects, or foreign languages, are, as we know from our own experience, often taken over because of their novelty and uncommonness, that is, for purposes of foregrounding in which aesthetic valuation always plays a significant part. Words of the poetic language, poetic neologisms, can also enter the standard by this route, although in these cases we can also be dealing with acceptance for reasons of communication (need for a new shade of meaning). The influence of poetic language on the standard is, however, not limited to the vocabulary: intonational and syntactic patterns (clichés) can, for instance, also be taken over—the latter only for aesthetic reasons since there is hardly any communicative necessity for a change of the sentence and intonation structure current until then. Very interesting in this respect is the observation by the poet J. Cocteau in his book Le secret professionnel (Paris, 1922, p. 36) that "Stéphane Mallarmé even now influences the style of the daily press without the journalists' being aware of it." By way of explanation it must be pointed out that Mallarmé has very violently distorted French syntax and word order which is incomparably more bound in French than in Czech, being a grammatical factor. In spite of this intensive distortion, or perhaps because of it, Mallarmé influenced the development of the structure of the sentence in the standard language.

The effect of aesthetic valuation on the development of the norm of the standard is undeniable; this is why the problem deserves the attention of the theorists. So far, we have, for instance, hardly even any lexical studies of the acceptance of poetic neologisms in Czech and of the reasons for this acceptance; [Antonín] Frína's article Rukopisné podvry a naše spisovná řeč [The Fake Manuscripts (Václav Hanka's forgeries of purportedly Old Czech poetry, 1813, 1817) and our Standard Language] (Naše, Řeč, Vol. II) has remained an isolated attempt. It is also necessary to investigate the nature and range of aesthetic valuation in the standard language. Aesthetic valuation is based here, as always when it is not based on an artistic structure, on certain generally valid norms. In art, including poetry, each component is evaluated in relation to the structure. The problem in evaluating is to determine how and to what extent a given component fulfills the function proper to it in the total structure; the yardstick is given by the context of a given structure and does not apply to any other context. The proof lies in the fact that a certain component may by itself be perceived as a negative value in terms of the pertinent aesthetic norm, if its distortional character is very prominent, but may be evaluated positively in terms of a particular structure and as its essential component precisely because of this distortional character. There is no aesthetic structure outside of poetry, none in the standard language (nor in language in general). There is, however, a certain set of aesthetic norms, each of which applies independently to a certain component of language. This set, or canon, is constant only for a certain period and for a certain linguistic milieu; thus, the aesthetic canon of the standard is different from that of slang. We therefore need a description and characterization of the aesthetic canon of the standard language of today and of the development of this canon in the past. It is, of course, clear to begin with that this development is not independent of the changing structures in the art of poetry. The discovery and investigation of the aesthetic canon accepted for a certain standard language would not only have theoretical significance as a part of its history, but also, as has already been said, be of practical importance in its cultivation.

Let us now return to the main topic of our study and attempt to draw some conclusions from what was said above of the relationship between the standard and poetic language.

Poetic language is a different form of language with different function from that of the standard. It is therefore equally unjustified to call all poets, without exception, cre
tors of the standard language as it is to make them responsible for its present state. This is not to deny the possibility of utilizing poetry as data for the scientific description of the norm of the standard (cf. p. 1051), nor the fact that the development of the norm of the standard does not occur uninfluenced by poetry. The distortion of the norm of the standard is, however, of the very essence of poetry, and it is therefore improper to ask poetic language to abide by this norm. This was clearly formulated as early as 1913 by Ferdinand Brunot ("L'autorité en matière de langue," Die neueren Sprachen, Vol. XX):

Modern art, individualistic in essence, can not always and everywhere be satisfied with the standard language alone. The laws governing the usual communication of thought must not, lest it be unbearable tyranny, be categorically imposed upon the poet who, beyond the bounds of the accepted forms of language, may find personalized forms of intuitive expression. It is up to him to use them in accord with his creative intuition and without other limits than those imposed by his own inspiration. Public opinion will give the final verdict.

It is interesting to compare Brunot's statement to one of Haller's of 1931 (Problém jazykové správnosti, op. cit. 3):

Our writers and poets in their creative effort attempt to replace the thorough knowledge of the material of the language by some sort of imaginary ability of which they themselves are not too sincerely convinced. They lay claim to a right which can but be an unjust privilege. Such an ability, instinct, inspiration, or what have you, cannot exist in and of itself; just as the famous feel for the language, it can only be the final result of previous cognition, and without consciously leaning on the finished material of the language, it is no more certain than any other arbitrary act.

If we compare Brunot's statement to Haller's, the basic difference is clear without further comment. Let us also mention Jungmann's critique of Polsk's Vzešenost přírody [The Sublimity of Nature] cited elsewhere in this study, p. 1051 [see above]: Jungmann has there quite accurately pointed out as a characteristic feature of poetic language its "uncommonness," that is, its distortedness.—In spite of all that has been said here, the condition of the norm of the standard language is not without its significance to poetry, since the norm of the standard is precisely the background against which the structure of the work of poetry is projected, and in regard to which it is perceived as a distortion; the structure of a work of poetry can change completely from its origin if it is, after a certain time, projected against the background of a norm of the standard which has since changed.

In addition to the relation of the norm of the standard to poetry, there is also the opposite relationship, that of poetry to the norm of the standard. We have already spoken of the influence of poetic language on the development of the standard; some remarks remain to be added. First of all, it is worth mentioning that the poetic foregrounding of linguistic phenomena, since it is its own purpose, cannot have the purpose of creating new means of communication (as Vossler and his school think). If anything passes from poetic language into the standard, it becomes a loan in the same way as anything taken over by the standard from any other linguistic milieu; even the motivation of the borrowing may be the same: a loan from poetic language may likewise be taken over for extraesthetic, that is, communicative reasons, and conversely the motivation for borrowings from other functional dialects, such as slang, may be aesthetic. Borrowings from poetic language are beyond the scope of the poet's intent. Thus, poetic neologisms arise as intentionally aesthetic new formations, and their basic features are unexpectedness, unusualness, and uniqueness. Neologisms created for communicative purposes, on the other hand, tend towards common derivation patterns and easy classifiability in a certain lexical category; these are the properties allowing for their general usability. If, however, poetic neologisms were formed in view of their general usability, their aesthetic function would be endangered thereby; they are, therefore, formed in an unusual manner, with considerable violence to the language, as regards both form and meaning.

The relationship between poetic language and the standard, their mutual approximation or increasing distance, changes from period to period. But even within the same period, and with the same norm of the standard, this relationship need not be the same for all poets. There are, generally speaking, three possibilities: the writer, say a novelist, may either not distort the linguistic components of his work at all (but this nondistortion is, as was shown above, in itself a fact of the total structure of his work), or he may distort it, but subordinate the linguistic distortion to the subject matter by giving substandard color to his lexicon in order to characterize personages and situations, for instance; or finally, he may distort the linguistic components in and of themselves by either subordinating the subject matter to the linguistic deformation, or emphasizing the contrast between the subject matter and its linguistic expression. An example of the first possibility might be [Jakub] Arbes [1840–1914, an early nat-
uralist], of the second, some realistic novelists such as T. Nováková [1853–1912] or Z. Winter [1846–1912], of the third, Vladislav Vančura. It is obvious that as one goes from the first possibility to the third, the divergence between poetic language and the standard increases. This classification has of course been highly schematized for purposes of simplicity; the real situation is much more complex.

The problem of the relationship between the standard and poetic language does not, however, exhaust the significance of poetry as the art form which uses language as its material, for the standard language, or for the language of a nation in general. The very existence of poetry in a certain language has fundamental importance for this language. . . . By the very fact of foregrounding, poetry increases and refines the ability to handle language in general; it gives the language the ability to adjust more flexibly to new requirements and it gives it a richer differentiation of its means of expression. Foregrounding brings to the surface and before the eyes of the observer even such linguistic phenomena as remain quite covert in communicative speech, although they are important factors in language. Thus, for instance, Czech symbolism, especially O. Březina’s [1868–1929] poetry, has brought to the fore of linguistic consciousness the essence of sentence meaning and the dynamic nature of sentence construction. From the standpoint of communicative speech, the meaning of a sentence appears as the total of the gradually accumulated meanings of the individual words, that is, without having independent existence. The real nature of the phenomenon is covered up by the automatization of the semantic design of the sentence. Words and sentences appear to follow each other with obvious necessity, as determined only by the nature of the message. Then there appears a work of poetry in which the relationship between the meanings of the individual words and the subject matter of the sentence has been foregrounded. The words here do not succeed each other naturally and inconspicuously, but within the sentence there occur semantic jumps, breaks, which are not conditioned by the requirements of communication, but given in the language itself. The device for achieving these sudden breaks is the constant intersection of the plane of basic meaning with the plane of figurative and metaphorical meaning; some words are for a certain part of the context to be understood in their figurative meaning, in other parts in their basic meaning, and such words, carrying a dual meaning, are precisely the points at which there are semantic breaks. There is also foregrounding of the relationship between the subject matter of the sentence and the words as well as of the semantic interrelationships of the words in the sentence. The subject matter of the sentence then appears as the center of attraction given from the beginning of the sentence, the effect of the subject matter on the words and of the words on the subject matter is revealed, and the determining force can be felt with which every word affects every other. The sentence comes alive before the eyes of the speech community: the structure is revealed as a concert of forces. (What was here formulated discursively, must of course be imagined as an unformulated intuitive cognition stored away for the future in the consciousness of the speech community.) Examples can be multiplied at will, but we shall cite no more. We wanted to give evidence for the statement that the main importance of poetry for language lies in the fact that it is an art.