

THE POET AND HIS MUSE*

By SIR HERBERT READ

I

MY intention is to show how the myth or image of the Muse in art personifies certain stratagems of the creative imagination that enable the artist to endow his work with universal significance. For my evidence I shall rely on the poets rather than other types of artists, but I believe that the principles to be established hold good for all the arts.

Let me first dispose of one ambiguity: we speak of "creation" or "origination" knowing full well that there is nothing new under the sun, and that no artist, within the limits of human comprehension, has the divine faculty of bringing a new order out of chaos. I have dealt with such ambiguities on another occasion, and shown in what sense we may say that the poet "bodies forth the forms of things unknown". Long usage, however, has justified the use of these metaphorical words for the process by means of which the poet or painter or composer of music combines into a new and newly significant order the images which he takes from his memory: the Muses, from the beginning, were the daughters of Mnemosyne, or memory.

One further preliminary disclaimer. I shall not speculate on the mythology of the Muses, fascinating as this is. There were, as you know, originally the nine muses of classical mythology, representing, with a significance that should not be lost to our divided culture, the sciences as well as the arts. The concept of a single muse, always feminine, was already present in classical times, but her sphere, when not specified, was not necessarily one of the arts. With the decline of classical mythology the Nine Muses tended to merge into one muse, though a muse accessible to more than one kind of artist. Orpheus, the son of Calliope, and perhaps of Apollo, was to assume a special significance as the personification of the magical power of lyrical poetry, and is often invoked instead of the Muse.

The classical muses were tutelary—that is to say, goddesses responsible for the general well-being of their respective spheres of activity rather than for the inspiration of individual artists. It is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that the guardian angel of Christian iconography is a transformation of the classical Muse endowed with a similar tutelary function. In the greatest of Christian poems Beatrice appears at the beginning as the poet's muse:

Io era tra color, che son sospesi,
e donna mi chiamò beata e bella
tal che di comandare io la richiesi.

* An address delivered on 13th May, 1963, by Sir Herbert Read, D.S.O., M.C., Hon.Litt.D. (Leeds), M.A. (Edin.), to a Meeting of the Association in the Great Hall of the University.

“ I was amongst them who are in suspense ; and a Lady, so fair and blessed that I prayed her to command, called me.” It is Beatrice who commands Virgil to guide Dante on his way. Inspired by Beatrice, Virgil becomes *duca, signore, e maestro*—guide, lord and master of the poet.¹

But this is not exactly our modern conception of the poet’s muse, nor indeed was it necessarily the classical tradition. Already in Plato we find two further implications, the first having to do with the fact that the muses were the daughters of Mnemosyne, or memory ; the second with the supposition that to invoke their aid was to risk losing one’s reason.

In the dialogue named after Theaetetus, Socrates asks the young mathematician to imagine, for the sake of argument, that our minds contain a block of wax, which in this or that individual may be larger or smaller, and composed of wax that is comparatively pure or muddy, harder in some, softer in others, and sometimes of just the right consistency. This block of wax is the gift of the Muses’ mother, Memory, and the argument proceeds to show that knowledge of reality will depend on the distinctness of the images recorded by the wax—it is reliable only when the wax is of exactly the right consistency. The Muses in this fanciful metaphor thus act as intermediaries between the Self and Reality : the Self cannot have any true knowledge of Reality without their aid.

In the *Ion* Plato uses another metaphor, that of the magnet or loadstone. The Muse holds a series of rings, and through these rings her magic passes like an invisible force to the poets who cling to them. “ One poet is suspended from one Muse, another from another ; we call it being ‘ possessed ’, but the fact is much the same, since he is *held*. And from these primary rings [the poets], others are in turn suspended, some attached to this one, some to that, and are filled with inspiration, some by Orpheus, others by Musaeus. But the majority are possessed and held by Homer . . . ”²

This is really a very deterministic theory of memory and inspiration. There is a divine source of wisdom—this is taken as self-evident ; this wisdom is transmitted in a causal sequence from Jupiter and Mnemosyne to their children, the Muses, and from the Muses in turn to their children. Though originally reputed to be virgins who successfully defended their chastity, most of the Muses gradually fell from this state of grace. Calliope had three sons, Hymenaeus, Ialemus and Orpheus ; Melpomene lay with the river-god Achelous and begat the Sirens ; Euterpe had Rhesus for a son and Clio Hyacinthus. Thalia gave birth to the Corybantes ; again Apollo was the father and he competes with Amphimarus, a musician, for the father-ship of Linus, the son of Urania. Thamyris was the son of Erato, and Triptolemus of Polyhymnia. In such manner the propagation of the arts was secured.

¹ An interpretation of the significance of Beatrice in Dante’s life and work is given by Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice*, London, 1943.

² *Ion*, 536b.

From one of these children of the Muses the divine spark was transmitted to Homer and from Homer, the father of all poets, to the lesser epic and lyric poets. When the magnetic force reaches the lesser poets, they are "seized with the Bacchic transport, and are possessed". And this is where Socrates's famous description of the poet occurs, as one who "is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, *and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him*".³

I emphasize these last words, because they describe very clearly the dichotomy in the inspired poet, the sense of two things, *Führer* and *Geführter*, leader and led. To make his meaning clear, Socrates gives the example of Tynnichus of Chalcis. "He never composed a single poem worth recalling, save the song of praise which everyone repeats, well-nigh the finest of all lyrical poems, and absolutely what he called it, an 'Invention of the Muses'. By this example above all, it seems to me, the god would show us, lest we doubt, that these lovely poems are not of man or human workmanship, but are divine and from the gods, and that the poets are nothing but interpreters of the gods, each one possessed by the divinity to whom he is in bondage."⁴

This, then, is the classical conception of the Muse; a deity who for the occasion deprives a human being of his senses and uses him as the witless mouthpiece of divine utterance. It is not a conception that is very flattering to the poet as an intelligent human being, and this explains why it was possible for Plato to have a low opinion of the poet while retaining the highest respect for poetry. It is, of course, a conception that has persisted wherever the classical tradition has survived, and it is still possible to regard the best poets and artists of all kinds as childlike or naïve people who inexplicably give birth to works of genius. Indeed, we may say that in a certain sense this has become the popular and even vulgar conception of the poet; any other conception will seem relatively sophisticated.

The Renaissance introduced a typical modification of the classical conception of the Muse. I shall take as my example Milton, not only because he is a great poet of my own tongue, but also because he was a man of great learning and in this respect is representative of the European Renaissance in general.

Paradise Lost opens with an invocation to a "Heav'nly Muse":

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that forbidden Tree . . .
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of *Oreb*, or of *Sinai*, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how th Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of *Chaos*: or if *Sion* Hill
Delight thee more, and *Siloa's* Brook that flow'd

³ *Ibid.*, 534b.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 534d.

Fast by the Oracle of God ; I thence
 Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song,
 That with no middle flight intends to soar
 Above th'Aonian Mount, while it pursues
 Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime
 And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
 Before all Temples th'upright heart and pure,
 Instruct me, for Thou know'st ; Thou from the first
 Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
 Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
 And mad'st it pregnant : What in me is dark
 Illumin, what is low raise and support ;
 That to the highth of this great Argument
 I may assert Eternal Providence,
 And justifie the wayes of God to men.

This invocation is addressed to an all-seeing power, an all-pervading spirit that will aid the poet in his adventurous song. By comparison with the classical Muses, who also were heavenly but feminine and fallible, Milton's muse is dove-like, brooding, as sexless as the angels. Dante's Beatrice, though an angel, disclosed when we first encounter her sitting in Heaven with "the ancient Rachel", has human traits, comparable to those of the Beatrice Dante had known on earth. Milton tells us that his muse is the same that had inspired the shepherd Moses on Mount Horeb, and later as a leader of his people on Mount Sinai. But Milton gives examples of other places where biblical inspiration had taken place—Sion Hill and Siloa's brook, and even mentions in passing, as an inferior station, the classical source of inspiration, the Aonian mount, or Mount Helicon. Classical inspiration, and even biblical inspiration, was always associated with high places, with mountains, a tradition as old as Assyria and Babylon, whose *Ziggurats* were artificial mountains built to bring men nearer to the heavenly source of inspiration. But then, in conclusion, Milton introduces the individualistic, subjective possibility—the possibility that the Spirit might prefer the pure and upright heart before any geographical site. Inspiration does not depend on temples or holy places : it can be a direct visitation to the mind of man. But it remains a distinct and tutelary force and is not yet to be identified with human consciousness.

The opening invocation is not, however, the only reference to the Muse in *Paradise Lost*. Book VII opens with an equally eloquent and even longer invocation, and this time the Heavenly Muse is identified with one of the classical Muses, Urania, the muse of astronomy. Milton is somewhat ambiguous in this second appeal for inspiration. He wants to make use of the classical conception of inspiration, but in order to make clear that his inspiration is divine and not secular, he chooses Urania

instead of Calliope, and even "the meaning, not the name". But let us look a little more closely at this passage in *Paradise Lost* :

Descend from Heav'n *Urania*, by that name
 If rightly thou art call'd whose voice divine
 Following, above th'*Olympian* Hill I soare
 Above the flight of *Pegasean* wing.
 The meaning, not the Name I call : for thou
 Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
 Of old *Olympus* dwell'st, but Heav'nlie borne,
 Before the Hills appeerd, or Fountain flow'd,
 Thou with Eternal wisdom didst converse,
 Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
 In presence of th'Almightie Father, pleas'd
 With thy Celestial Song. Up led by thee
 Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presum'd,
 An Earthlie Guest, and drawn Empyrean Aire,
 Thy tempring ; with like safety guided down
 Return me to my Native Element :

. . .

Standing on Earth, not rapt above the Pole,
 More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchang'd
 To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil dayes,
 On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues ;
 In darkness, and with dangers compast round,
 And solitude ; yet not alone, while thou
 Visit'st my slumbers Nightly, or when Morn
 Purples the East : still govern thou my Song,
Urania, and fitt audience find, though few.

It will be seen that we have returned to the upright heart and pure, but this time the Muse is specific and feminine, Urania, the muse of the heavenly spheres, the sister of Wisdom. Then, to make quite clear that he has nothing to do with Calliope, the rather earthy muse of heroic poetry, the mistress of Apollo and mother of Orpheus, Milton bids Urania

. . . drive farr off the barbarous dissonance
 of *Bacchus* and his Revellers, the Race
 Of that wilde Rout that tore the *Thracian* Bard
 In *Rhodope*, where Woods and Rocks had Eares
 To rapture, till the savage clamor dround
 Both Harp and Voice ; nor could the Muse defend
 Her Son. So fail not thou, who thee implores :
 For thou art Heav'nlie, shee but an empty dreame.

I do not wish to discuss the various sources of inspiration indicated by the poets, but rather the process common to them all. Milton wishes to distinguish (and to claim for himself) divine inspiration as opposed to merely poetic or lyrical inspiration. But he still maintains the original classical conception of an external source of inspiration, a feminine archetype endowed with wisdom, foresight and omniscience, who, when appealed to, guides the poet in his epic narration, revives his memory, brings illumination and ensures the truth of his great argument, a "celestial patroness", who comes "unimplored"

And dictates to him slumbering, or inspires
Easy his unpremeditated verse.

I will leave Milton as representative of the relation of the Renaissance poet to his Muse and turn now to the Romantic poets, in whom we find a gradual modification of the conception. For the sake of brevity I shall confine myself to three poets, Blake, Shelley and Wordsworth, and will then pass on to what might be called the jilting of the Muse by later poets such as Edgar Allan Poe and Paul Valéry. I think we shall then have enough material to substantiate an hypothesis in the second part of this lecture.

Blake is not a complicated case—he believed quite simply that in the act of writing poetry he was being dictated to by heavenly spirits, sometimes anonymous, sometimes recognizable as historical characters. There is not one "celestial patroness", but many "angels" or "authors in Eternity". "I have written this Poem from immediate Dictation", he wrote to his friend Thomas Butts (25th April, 1803), "twelve or sometimes twenty lines at a time, without Premeditation & even against my Will; the Time it has taken in writing was thus render'd Non Existent, & an immense Poem Exists which seems to be the Labour of a long Life, all produc'd without Labour or Study."⁵

The only point illustrated by Blake that is relevant to my purpose is the dual nature of this process of dictation. The poet is not possessed: he is a detached and passive instrument of a divine purpose. As in Milton's conception of the poet, he is not creative but reproductive, and what he reproduces is a vision, in which not only the images but also the expressive words are "given".

Such words are given to him by miscellaneous representatives of the "Worlds of Eternity". The Daughters of Memory (the Muses) become the Daughters of Inspiration. The poem Blake called *Milton* opens with an invocation to these Daughters:

Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poet's Song,
Record the journey of immortal Milton thro' yon Realms
Of terror and mild moony lustre in soft sexual delusions
Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer and repose
His burning thirst & freezing hunger! Come into my hand,

⁵ *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Edited by Geoffrey Keynes. London (The Nonesuch Press), 1927, p. 1073.

By your mild power descending down the Nerves of my right arm
 From out the portals of my Brain, where by your ministry
 The Eternal Great Humanity Divine planted his Paradise
 And in it caus'd the Spectres of the Dead to take sweet forms
 In likeness of himself . . .

The Muse in Blake becomes prophetic, which was also Plato's sense of the Muse's function. The only difference is that what Blake would call "vision" Plato called "madness"—the deity, he says, has bereft the lyric poets of their senses, "and uses them as ministers, along with soothsayers & godly seers . . . in order that we listeners may know that it is not they who utter these precious revelations while their mind is not within them, but that it is the god himself who speaks, and through them becomes articulate to us".⁶ Blake expressed contempt for "the Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid, of Plato & Cicero", because, he said, their writings were "set up by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible",⁷ but his own writings make use of the same artifices.

Shelley was, of course, much more directly and much more consciously indebted to Plato than Blake, but Shelley was a child of the Enlightenment, the first poet consciously of a scientific age, and though he does not surrender the special nature of the poetical faculty, he seeks (but does not find) an explanation of inspiration within the human mind, being in this respect as much a psychologist as Coleridge.⁸ Poetry, he says, "ascends to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar. Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will." He then gives us the beautiful metaphor of the mind in creation being "as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness"; and this power, he observes, *arises from within*, and "the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure". Shelley ends by observing that the same process takes place in the plastic and pictorial arts, but "the very mind which directs the hands in formation, is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process".⁹

In some of his poems Shelley pays conventional tribute to the Muse—Urania herself is invoked in *Adonais*. But his own conception of the source of inspiration is found in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty". There we have the abstract notion of an "unseen Power" "visiting This various world with an inconstant Wing As summer winds that creep from flower to flower", and this power is invoked as:

Spirit of *Beauty*, that dost consecrate
 With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
 Of human thought or form.

⁶ *Ion*, 534d.

⁷ Preface to *Milton*, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

⁸ Both poets were indebted to David Hartley (1705-57), whose *Observations on Man* (1749) has some claim to be considered as the foundation of associationist psychology. The Preface which Wordsworth wrote to the "Lyrical Ballads" (1800) was also influenced by Hartley.

⁹ *A Defence of Poetry* (1821).

The names of "Demon, Ghost and Heaven" are dismissed as :

Frail spells—whose uttered charm will not avail to sever,
From all we hear and all we see,
Doubt, chance, and mutability.

And then the Spirit of Beauty is again invoked as alone capable of giving "grace and truth to life's unquiet dream". The poet relates how "while yet a boy" he had vowed to dedicate his powers to this "awful *Loveliness*", and invites this power,

which like the truth
Of nature on my passive youth
Descended,

to supply its calm to his "onward life", and bind him "to fear himself, and love all human kind".

The Muse is thus depersonified and becomes an abstract force, still external in origin, but consecrating with its own hues all that of human thought and form it may shine upon. If pressed for a rational explanation of the nature of this external force, Shelley would have taken refuge in nescience. Poetry, he suggests, is "created by that imperial faculty whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man". At this point we already look forward to a psychology of the unconscious.

I have mentioned Shelley before Wordsworth because, in the evolution of the theory of poetry, Wordsworth was, in spite of being the older man, less bound to the classical concepts, more scientifically or analytically aware of the workings of the unconscious—he uses the very word :

Unconscious intercourse with beauty
Old as creation, drinking in a pure
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths
Of curling mist.

He refers (in the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads") to the poet's ability to conjure up in himself "passions which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events than anything which, from the motion of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves: whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or *from the structure of his own mind*, arise in him without immediate external excitement". Wordsworth, more than any other English poet, conceived inspiration as an external force in Nature, a *mana* :

the earth
And common face of Nature *spake* to me
Rememberable things . . .

It is Nature that by "extrinsic passion" first

Peopled the mind with forms sublime or fair
And made me love them.

In his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, there are many passages in which he addresses, or invokes, a power external to himself, "Beings of the hills", or, more abstractly, "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe"—

Thou soul that art the eternity of thought
Thou givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion . . .

I have suggested elsewhere that Wordsworth's philosophy has many points of resemblance to Oriental philosophy, more particularly to Taoism, where again one finds the concept of an external force in nature, which the Chinese call *Ch'i*, which is not only the vital force in all art, but in a specific sense a formative agency, endowing the artist's work with rhythm and harmony.

Edgar Allan Poe I mention only because his ideas, which are derived in the main from Shelley, passed into French poetics through Baudelaire and are finally a *point de repère* for the reaction represented by Paul Valéry. There is nothing very original in the theory embodied in the three essays on poetry which Poe wrote: they have had such an effect on the theory of poetry because they were the first attempts to present from the point of view of the poet what Poe called a philosophy of composition, or a rationale of verse. They are the prototypes of the analytical criticism of poetry that has been so popular in our own time. But to explain inspiration we find only such vague generalities as "a sense of the Beautiful", "an immortal instinct deep within the spirit of man", a "struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness". He introduces, as "sole arbiter" in the choice of words, the dreary concept of Taste, and excludes the Intellect or the Conscience. The poetic principle is finally defined, "strictly and simply", as "the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty", and "the manifestation of the Principle is always found in *an elevating excitement of the soul*".

Wordsworth's "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe", like Shelley's "imperial faculty curtained within the invisible nature of man", is an expression of the growing awareness among the Romantic poets of the unconscious as a source of inspiration, independent of the intellectual faculties of man. All the poets and critics of the early nineteenth century begin to make this distinction—Coleridge and Carlyle in England, Goethe and Schelling in Germany, Poe and Emerson in America, de Musset and Lamartine in France—all are searching towards what Carlyle called the distinction between artificial and natural poetry. "The artificial", wrote Carlyle, "is the conscious, mechanical; the natural is the unconscious, dynamical." . . . "Unconsciousness is the sign of creation; consciousness at best that of manufacture."¹⁰

¹⁰ *Essays* ("Characteristics"). I owe this reference to F. C. Prescott, *The Poetic Mind*. New York, 1922. (Re-issue, Cornell University Press, 1959, p. 97.)

It was from such poets and essayists that Freud himself derived his concept of the unconscious. He relates that when he was fourteen years old he had been given the collected works of a German writer called Ludwig Börne, and there he had read an essay, written in 1823, with the arresting title "The Art of Becoming an Original Writer in Three Days". Freud was never to forget this essay, which recommended a method of free association, and Dr. Ernest Jones, Freud's biographer, suggests that Börne's "startling proposal" had sunk into his mind to become the foundation of his psycho-analytical method.¹¹ One quotation from Börne will show his relevance to our present enquiry :

To be creative one must be alone, away from people, from books, and as far as possible, from memories. The true act of self-education lies in making oneself unwitting.

Much more evidence of this kind could be quoted,¹² to emphasize the gradual evolution of the concept of the Unconscious during the past century and a half, but it is now common knowledge and the point I wish to emphasize is that in the process the Unconscious silently usurped the place formerly occupied in the poetic process by the Muses. But that event has merely complicated the process for us. The Muses were convenient and well-defined archetypes. They had names, they were distinct personalities. The poet or any other kind of artist could appeal to them as to a mother or a mistress, and establish an objective relationship. But the Unconscious—how is that amorphous entity to help the poet? It has been shown to be a seething cauldron, full of ugly shapes, a realm of warring shadows, indefinite in extent, fathomless in depth. It is true that it has some connection with memory, the mother of the Muses, and it will, under the right conditions, release some of the innumerable images that are stored there, "curtained within". But all that intangible riot would not constitute poetry, or even the basic material of poetry. The Muses were cast for a role of intercession with their mother: memory had nine spheres, carefully defined, and within each sphere the appropriate Muse had established an order—had reduced the confusion of memory to rhythm and harmony. It was for these formal gifts that the ancient poets had recourse to the Muse, and though it is always assumed that the poet had to be in a condition of transport or possession to make contact with the Muse, what he then received was a gift of art, or order, and not one of babbling confusion. The classical Muse, therefore, is a *deus ex machina*, the governess of an unruly child, and in no sense to be identified with the unconscious as such.

Before we enquire whether the prevailing theories of the unconscious suggest any mental process that would correspond to the function of the Muse in poetic creation, I should like to bring the theories of Paul Valéry into evidence. Valéry, perhaps the most self-analytical of the great poets of our own time, seems to have been largely indifferent to the claims of psycho-analysis. His introspection was a

¹¹ *Sigmund Freud: Life and Works* (London, 1953), Vol. I, pp. 270-1.

¹² It has been assembled by L. L. Whyte in *The Unconscious before Freud*, New York, 1960; London, 1962.

rigorous discipline that never deviated from the matter in hand—the nature of the poetic process in his own experience. In an early essay (1889) Valéry paid tribute to Poe's "curious little work *The Philosophy of Composition*". Himself a mathematician and philosopher, he calls Poe "mathematician, philosopher and great writer", and of Poe's essay on "the mechanics of composition" he says:

None of his works contains more acute analysis or a more strictly logical development of the principles discovered by observation. It is an entirely *a posteriori* technique, based on the psychology of the *listener*, on the knowledge of the different notes that must be sounded in another's soul. Poe's penetrating induction insinuates itself into the reader's intimate reflections, anticipates and uses them. Well knowing the great part played in our mental life by habit and automatism, he postulates methods that since the ancients had been relegated to the inferior genres. He revives repetition of the same words, which, it seems, was an Egyptian practice. He predicts with certainly the overwhelming effect of a bleak refrain, or of frequent alliterations¹³ . . .

In this Essay Valéry was to base what he called a totally new and modern conception of the poet.

He is no longer the dishevelled madman who writes a whole poem in the course of one feverish night; he is a cool scientist, almost an algebraist, in the service of a subtle dreamer . . . He will take care not to hurl on to paper everything whispered to him in fortunate moments by the Muse of Free Association. On the contrary, everything he has imagined, felt, dreamed, and planned will be passed through a sieve, weighed, filtered, subjected to *form*, and condensed as much as possible so as to gain in power what it loses in length: a sonnet, for example, will be a true quintessence, a concentrated and distilled juice, reduced to fourteen lines, carefully *composed* with a view to a final and overwhelming effect¹⁴ . . .

It would seem that Valéry had been particularly struck by a sentence near the beginning of Poe's essay where, having declared his intention to demonstrate the nature of the poetic process from the method he himself had employed in the composition of "The Raven", Poe continues:

It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition—that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.

We know now that Poe was not very sincere, or even truthful in what he wrote about his own compositions. He was a skilful plagiarist and had good reason for

¹³ Collected Works in English, Vol. 7, *The Art of Poetry*. New York (Bollingen Series), 1958, p. 319.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 315, 317.

disowning the visitations of the Muse. As for Valéry, though he was to remain addicted to the mathematical analogy, to the pretence of a *science* of poetics, he nevertheless elaborated the scientific analogy in a very unscientific manner :

We must despair of a clear vision in these matters. One must lull oneself with an image. My image of the poet is of a mind full of resources and cunning, feigning sleep at the imaginary centre of his yet uncreated work, the better to await that instant of his own power which is his prey. In the vague depths of his eyes all the forces of his desire, all the springs of his instinct are taut. And there, waiting for the chance events from which she selects her food—there, most obscure in the middle of the webs and the secret harps which she had fashioned from language, whose threads are interwoven and always vaguely vibrating—a mysterious Arachne, huntress muse, is on the watch.¹⁵

The Muse, as it were, comes in by the back door ; and to her, surprisingly, Valéry gives the name of the Self. Here is what is perhaps the key to his final statement of the problem, from his essay “ Concerning *Le Cimetière marin* ” (1933) :

I enjoy work only as work : beginnings bore me, and I suspect everything that comes at the first attempt of being capable of improvement. Spontaneity, even when excellent or seductive, has never seemed to me sufficiently *mine*. I do not say that “ I am right ”, but that is how I am . . . The notion of Myself is no simpler than that of Author : a further degree of consciousness opposes a new *Self* to a new *Other*.¹⁶

Valéry developed this distinction still further in a later essay—“ Poetry and Abstract Thought ” (1939), pointing to the difference that exists between our *sensibility as a whole* and the faculty with which we elaborate a work of art. He quotes the well-known interchange between Mallarmé and Degas (“ My dear Degas, one does not make poetry with ideas, but with *words* ”) and says that Mallarmé was right. “ But when Degas spoke of ideas ”, he continues, “ he was, after all, thinking of inner speech or of images, which might have been expressed in *words*. But these words, these secret phrases which he called ideas, all these intentions and perceptions of the mind, do not make verses. There is something else, then, a modification, or a transformation, sudden or not, spontaneous or not, laborious or not, which must necessarily intervene between the thought that produces ideas—that activity and multiplicity of inner questions and solutions—and, on the other hand, that discourse, so different from ordinary speech, which is verse, which is so curiously ordered, which answers no need *unless it be the need it must itself create*, which never speaks but of absent things or of things profoundly and secretly felt : strange discourse, as though made by someone *other* than the speaker and addressed to someone *other* than the listener. In short, it is a *language within a language* ”.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4.

We are a long way from the ideal of a composition proceeding to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem which Valéry had accepted as an ideal fifty years earlier. Valéry's long tussle with words and meanings had taught him that the "state of poetry" is "completely irregular, inconstant, involuntary, and fragile, and that we lose it, as we find it, *by accident*". But the same experience had also taught him (and in this he remained faithful to Poe) that inspiration is a private affair. The poet does not become a poet until he has created the state of poetry in others. A world of difference exists between the poetic state or emotion, even when this is creative and original, and the production of a work of art.

More than once in the course of his critical expositions Valéry illustrates his meaning by an anecdote from his own experience. On one occasion as he went along the street where he lived he was suddenly *gripped* by a rhythm that took possession of him and soon gave him the impression of some force outside himself. "It was as though someone else were making use of my *living-machine*. Then another rhythm overtook and combined with the first, and certain strange *transverse* relations were set up between these two principles . . . They combined the movement of my legs and some kind of song I was murmuring, or rather which was being murmured *through me*. This composition became more and more complicated and soon in its complexity went far beyond anything I could reasonably produce with my ordinary, usable, rhythmic faculties. The sense of strangeness that I mentioned became almost painful, almost disquieting."¹⁸

This rhythmical excitement was generated by the poet's "sensibility as a whole", but that is not the point. It may be that such states are induced occasionally in all of us: the poet is the exceptional individual who can make use of such states in a practical way, the way of versification.

What Valéry effected in his poetics was in fact almost a reversal of the traditional conception of the Muse. In the classical conception the poet was content to be a passive instrument, the temporary channel of some kind of supernatural communication. The poet is forced to say to himself: "In your works, my dear poet, what is good is not by you, and what is bad is indisputably yours." In Valéry's theory there is "a special quality, a kind of individual *energy* proper to the poet. It appears to him and reveals him to himself at certain infinitely precious moments. But these are only moments, and this higher energy . . . *exists and can act only in brief fortuitous manifestations*."¹⁹ And to sum up, Valéry suggests that "certain instincts betray to us the depths where the best of us is found, but in pieces embedded in shapeless matter, odd or rough in appearance. We must separate these elements of noble metal from the mass, and take care to fuse them together and fashion some ornament."²⁰ In other words, the Muse is very unreliable, and what she offers is a fitful illumination of the mysteries of life. "Form alone exists—only form preserves

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

the works of the mind"—an assertion which Valéry quotes from Mistral—and form is an object or event of the senses, shaped by the imagination.

Nevertheless, in all this speculation on the nature of the poetic activity, from Plato to Valéry, there is the sense of some *self* "miraculously superior to Myself". The poet's consciousness is in some sense divided, and can *in some sense* maintain separate activities. But occasionally a bridge is thrown across the dividing gulf, and at that unexpected moment a transformation takes place. For some reason this transformation is not a private emotion, confined to the self, but the triumph of life in a universe of things.

II

What we have so far been discussing is the problem of knowledge and inspiration in relation to the self, and we find ourselves involved in a paradox which has been formulated thus: "In the moment of knowing, which is also the real moment of poetic creation, the knower ceases to exist as subject at all; and, conversely, when he comes fully to himself, as subject, he ceases to know."²¹ We have seen that this paradox was personified in myth as the poet's Muse, an archetypal figure representing the memory present to the mind in that state of consciousness we call inspiration; a memory that fades immediately we become conscious as a self of the *self*. I should like, in this second part of my lecture, to delve a little more deeply into the psychology of this distinction, with special reference to the poetic process.

The greater part of the subject-matter of psychology is devoted to a seemingly endless discussion of the nature of consciousness, the validity of the subjective-objective distinction in thought, and to the problem of knowledge in general. I must try not to get lost in this academic wilderness. My object is the limited one of trying to define the conditions under which consciousness, as expressed in words, takes on that particular kind of concreteness we call poetic; and incidentally to distinguish this particular kind of concreteness in poetry from other kinds of verbal expression.

I know, from personal experience supported by the evidence of other poets, that in the rare moments when I am writing poetry, I am in a "state of mind" totally distinct from the state of mind in which I composed this lecture, or am now reading this lecture; totally distinct, too, from the state of mind in which I go about my practical activities while awake—that is to say, while conscious.²² I am not so sure that the poetic state differs essentially from my state of mind when I am asleep and dreaming, but as soon as I become conscious I forget my dream, and even if, on rare occasions, I can recall my dream, it is in a state of mind now distinct from the state of my mind in the act of dreaming. I think we must leave the dreaming mind on one side; it may offer analogies to the state of mind in poetic creation, but since

²¹ Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*. London, 1928, p. 244.

²² I ignore the fact that many of our practical activities are habitual reflexes of which we can hardly be said to be "conscious".

writing a poem is an activity of which the poet is conscious, the dreaming mind is divided from the creative mind by the very faculty we wish to investigate—*presence* of mind. It is presence of mind, by which phrase I think we mean an awareness that the mind *is* functioning purposively, that distinguishes a genuine creative activity from a mere *afflatus*. Here one must guard oneself against a cultural priggishness. The mind is present in the writing of a good ballad or a good popular song: it is the mind that makes it “good” rather than crude or sentimental. But “presence” of mind does not mean consciousness of a self that thinks—indeed, it means rather the absence of any ambiguity, particularly of any confusion between conscious thought and subjective feeling. In writing a poem there is not a stream of feeling carrying words in a pre-determined direction: rather there is an autonomous verbal activity trying to establish a concrete form, a distinct existence, which may afterwards be identified (by the poet or the reader) with a feeling or state of mind. It would be paradoxical but nearer the truth to say that a verbal activity succeeds in presenting to the mind a self which the poet afterwards gratefully accepts as his own. A good poet is a stranger to the self he meets in his poetry.

This suggests that before proceeding any farther we should try to define the self. In common usage this ubiquitous word means the rather indistinct entity present to introspection: we have to indulge in “self-examination” to make ourselves aware of the characteristics of our self. Phrases like “I am not feeling myself today”, or “I was beside myself with rage”, show that the self is something that tends to play hide-and-seek with consciousness—presence of a self is not identical with presence of mind.

To define the “self” has been one of the main preoccupations of modern psychology, certainly one of Jung’s main preoccupations. One of Dr. Jung’s last works has the title *The Undiscovered Self*. But Jung found it necessary to use this word in two distinct senses, sometimes distinguishing one of them by the use of a capital letter.

Psycho-analysis, as a theory and a therapy, rests on the hypothesis of a divided mind—part conscious, part unconscious. These two divisions of the mind are not necessarily in opposition to each other—Jung preferred to call their relation “compensatory”. They complement one another to form a totality, which Jung called the *self*. Though the ideal presented by psycho-analysis is one of unity or integration, or at any rate of equilibrium, it is impossible, as Jung says, “to form a clear picture of what we are as a self, for in this operation the part would have to comprehend the whole. There is little hope of our ever being able to reach even approximate consciousness of the self, since however much we may make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and indeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self.”²³

Jung believed that the unconscious part of the self contains all the forces that are necessary for the self-regulation of the psyche as a whole. The more we succeed

²³ Collected Works, Vol. 7 (*Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*), s. 274.

in bringing into the open the personal motivations that are hidden in the unconscious, the more we shall be able to recognize these motivations for what they are (we say "selfish") and as a consequence participate freely in the wider world of objective interests. This "wider consciousness" is defined as "a function of relationship to the world of objects, bringing the individual into absolute, binding, and indissoluble communion with the world at large".²⁴

Jung then introduces a further distinction—that between the *persona*, the ideal picture of a man as he thinks he should be, and the *anima*, the unconscious feminine reaction within the unconscious to this heroic concept. (In the woman the unconscious masculine reaction is called the *animus*.) In normal life a man's *anima* is often projected, with the result that the hero, as Jung says, comes under the heel of his wife's slipper. But sometimes—and this is where the hypothesis becomes of significance for our present purposes—sometimes the *anima* is transformed into an intermediary between the conscious and the unconscious. "Through this process", writes Jung, "the *anima* forfeits the demonic power of an autonomous complex; she can no longer exercise the power of possession, since she is depotentiated. She is no longer the guardian of treasures unknown; no longer Kundry, demonic messenger of the Grail, half divine and half-animal; no longer the soul to be called 'Mistress', but a psychological function of an intuitive nature, akin to what the primitives mean when they say, 'He has gone to the forest to talk with the spirits' or 'My snake spoke with me' or, in the mythological language of infancy, 'A little bird told me'."²⁵

It is true that in this passage Jung does not mention the poet's Muse, but the application is inescapable, and in every version of the Muse that I have cited in the first part of this lecture, she is unmistakably a *mana*-personality, "a being of some occult and bewitching quality (*mana*), endowed with magical knowledge and power".

Though in a parenthesis Jung identifies the *mana*-possessed *anima* with "the artistic temperament", he proceeds to deal with possession as evidenced in those whom he calls "unpoetical folk". And he is not altogether happy about the result. The ego becomes a *mana*-personality. "The masculine collective figure who now rises out of the dark background and takes possession of the conscious personality entails a psychic danger of a subtle nature, for by inflating the conscious mind it can destroy everything that was gained by coming to terms with the *anima*." The ego becomes "inflated", and is in danger of delusions of superhuman power. What is desirable—and this is what Jung meant by "integration"—is the achievement of a "mid-point" of the personality, "that infallible something between the opposites, or else that which unites them, or the result of conflict, or the product of energetic tension: the coming to birth of personality, a profoundly individual step forward, the next stage".²⁶

I would like you to hold on to this well-known concept *mana*, as manifested in the *anima* phenomenon, for it is undoubtedly the force we are looking for, the power of

²⁴ *Ibid.*, s. 275.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, s. 374.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, s. 382.

inspiration in poetry and all other creative arts. Our problem is to try to discover and describe its creative process, its mode of operation. This process may not accord with the psychologist's aim, which is not to make poets of us all, but balanced personalities. As Jung says, "the immediate goal of the analysis of the unconscious . . . is to reach a state where the unconscious contents (of the mind) no longer remain unconscious and no longer express themselves indirectly as *animus* and *anima* phenomena; that is to say, a state in which *animus* and *anima* become functions of relationship to the unconscious. So long as they are not this, they are autonomous complexes, disturbing factors that disrupt conscious control and act like true 'disturbers of the peace'."²⁷ To use the word Jung invented, they become "complexes", and the more complexes a man has, the more he may be said to be possessed; and when we try to form a picture of the personality which expresses itself through its complexes we must admit (says Jung) that "it resembles nothing so much as an hysterical woman—i.e. the *anima*!" Which corresponds to Plato's description of the poet as a man seized with the Bacchic transport, as one possessed. When a man has got to the roots of his complexes, and in this way rid himself of his possession, Jung says that the *anima* phenomenon comes to a stop. Which is to say, the poet ceases to be poetic.

But Jung then admits that this is merely the logic of the situation. In certain cases the *mana* remains at the disposal of the ego, and then you get your supermen, your geniuses. He mentions Napoleon and Laotzu, but he might have mentioned Shakespeare or Goethe. Such people are to be called *mana*-personalities, and they represent an archetype that has taken shape in the human psyche: the hero, the priest and (though Jung does not say so in this particular context) the poet.

The only question that remains is how do these exceptional people control the flow of their *mana*: how do they avoid falling victims to its destructive forces? What powers in the ego mediate between possession and self-possession?

Jung's answer is: by means of the *self*, a "something" "poised between two world-pictures and their darkly discerned potentialities", "something" that is "strange to us and yet so near, wholly ourselves and yet unknowable, a virtual centre of so mysterious a constitution that it can claim anything—kinship with beasts and gods, with crystals and with stars—without moving us to wonder, without even exciting our disapprobation", a voice that "it is surely wiser to listen to".²⁸

Admittedly the self is no more than a psychological concept, "a construct that serves to express an unknowable essence which we cannot grasp as such, since by definition it transcends our power of comprehension". It will not appeal, therefore, to the scientific mind, but neither, for that matter, does poetry, which also transcends the scientist's powers of comprehension. But as a psychological concept the self does offer a reasonable explanation of those processes of poetic inspiration and creation which hitherto have found expression only in mythological terms. You may say

²⁷ *Ibid.*, s. 387.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, s. 398.

that in substituting psychology for mythology we are merely substituting one kind of picture-language for another kind of picture-language. That should not deter us: the self has no known limits and art has no known limits, and to discuss their relationship is inevitably to indulge in speculation.

Our aim is nevertheless practical, and what is produced by the poet is something concrete, a poem. I think we must therefore pursue our enquiry a little further, to ask by what process does a man possessed produce an object or event of the senses that is *concrete*, "the form alone which commands and survives" (Valéry). If we identify (as I think we must) the Muse with the *anima*, how does this Muse mediate between the demonic power at her command and the order or equilibrium upon which the self depends for its existence? The tutelary Muse "governs" the Poet's song so that the form commands the assent of an audience, creates in them a "state of poetry". It is not such a mystery that we are capable of dreaming or day-dreaming: but by what means does such a fortuitous activity become purposive and effective?

Jung says that it is very difficult for a man to distinguish himself from his *anima*, but that seems to be precisely what the Poet does in the act of composition. To appreciate this fact we must return to the difficult concept of consciousness.

Again I must renounce any attempt to define consciousness—psychology, as a subject, has been concerned with little else, and its conclusions are in the main negative. It may be that the immediate content of consciousness is "always a particular state of the brain",²⁹ but long ago William James showed that even this elementary fact could not be asserted with any sureness. "Whenever I try to become sensible of my thinking activity as such, what I catch is some bodily fact, an impression coming from my brow, or head, or throat, or nose. It seems as if consciousness as an inner activity were rather a *postulate* than a sensibly given fact, the postulate, namely, of a *knower* as correlative to all this known . . ."³⁰ His statement, at the conclusion of his *Psychology*, that psychology consists of "a string of raw facts; a little gossip and wrangle about opinions; a little classification and generalization on the mere descriptive level; a strong prejudice that we *have* states of mind, and that our brain conditions them: but not a single law in the sense in which physics shows us laws, not a single proposition from which any consequence can causally be deduced"—all this remains true seventy or more years since James wrote the words. Almost exactly two centuries earlier John Locke had defined consciousness as "the perception of what passes in a man's own mind"; that is to say, the presence of the self to itself, the ground of personal identity. This remained the accepted notion of consciousness until James pointed out that consciousness is not static, but a process in time—he described it as a "stream", a metaphor that was to have incalculable consequences for psychology and for art. James was already aware that "states of mind" are by no means clearly apprehensible if distinguished from their objects—consciousness is always consciousness of *something*—"the thoughts themselves are the thinkers" . . .

²⁹ Sir Russell Brain, *The Nature of Experience*. London, 1959, p. 64.

³⁰ *Psychology*, London, 1892, p. 467.

“it thinks”. Phenomenology is a philosophy based on the presumed identity of consciousness and object. Existentialism is an attempt to objectify the self so that it can become an object of consciousness—we dam the stream with barriers to make us aware of its flow. The most effective of such barriers are works of art. A work of art is a moment of arrest in the stream of consciousness: a feature of the work of art that distressed Bergson.³¹ The artist has no philosophical doubts: his difficulty is to arrest the stream at a significant moment. This “moment” we can call an “image”.

Consciousness, says Sartre, is always intentional. That is to say, we become conscious of an object in the course of an action, in order to situate that object in our pursuit of Being. Consciousness is therefore a creative (or perhaps one could say a “concretive”) activity—without consciousness there would not be a world, mountains, rivers, tables, chairs, etc.; there would be *only* Being. In this sense *there is no thing* without consciousness, but there is not *Nothing*. Consciousness causes *there to be* things because it is itself nothing. Only through consciousness is there differentiation, meaning, and plurality for “Being”.³²

As I have said, I want to avoid getting lost in these definitions of consciousness. I shall try therefore to confine myself to what I believe to be a very practical problem—the corruption of consciousness that results in bad art. This corruption is the key, not only to the distortion and loss of inspiration in the individual artist, but also to the decline of art in a civilization—and therefore, consequently, to the decline of that civilization. And that is the point of my argument: corruption of consciousness takes place when the Poet abandons his Muse.

A young philosopher, with whom I generally find myself in complete sympathy, has pointed out that the basic premise of existentialist as opposed to classical thinking is “that truth is those arrangements or patterns of things which man as a purposeful activity has brought into being and which is therefore accessible to *consciousness* and which need not be sought out by reason”.³³ The key word in this definition is “things”—things brought into being and *therefore* made accessible to consciousness. There is no consciousness without things and consciousness may therefore be described as a process of reification—a making of “things” by virtue of which we become conscious. If we can imagine a world without things in which nevertheless human beings existed, such human beings would be without consciousness, unconscious.

The world is, however, “full of a number of things” and these enter into consciousness by the normal process of perception. But things “out of this world”, as we say—feelings, emotions, intuitions, etc.—are only brought into consciousness in the degree that they are reified, i.e., given “thingly” or concrete existence. The process of making things is, as Vico was the first to point out art: art is the creation of things which therewith become accessible to consciousness. We do not normally call everything that we make a work of art: many things we make are merely replicas

³¹ Cf. *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. Paris, 1911, pp. 10–4.

³² Introduction by Hazel F. Barnes to *Being and Nothingness*. London, 1957, pp. xix–xx.

³³ Everett Knight, *The Objective Society*. London, 1959.

of existing things, and familiarity with things breeds an unawareness of their existence. But when we make a new thing to stand for a feeling, emotion or intuition hitherto unexpressed, then we make a work of art. An unreified feeling is what Valéry calls the poetic state of mind and a poem is a thing that stands for this state of mind. The world might therefore be said to consist of poetry and prose, of things and their replicas.

William James has a vivid image which beautifully illustrates this distinction. "When we take a general view of the wonderful stream of our consciousness, what strikes us first is the different pace of its parts. Like a bird's life, it seems to be an alternation of flights and perchings. The rhythm of language expresses this, where every thought is expressed in a sentence, and every sentence closed by a period. The resting places are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations of this sort, whose peculiarity is that they can be held before the mind for infinite time, and contemplated without changing; the places of flight are filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matters contemplated in the periods of comparative rest. *Let us call the resting-places the 'substantive parts', and the places of flight the 'transitive parts' of the stream of thought.*"³⁴

Without realizing that he had done so, James in this paragraph has defined the essence of the work of art—it is a resting-place in the stream of consciousness, which was also Bergson's definition of a work of art. But James goes on to point out that in normal processes of thought it is very difficult to see the "transitive" parts for what they really are. "Our thinking tends at all times towards some other substantive part than the one from which it has just been dislodged." But equally, in normal processes of thought, it is very difficult to linger on the perch: not only is the rush of thought so headlong that it almost brings us up at the conclusion before we can arrest it (James); or if we are nimble enough and do arrest it, then, says James, it ceases to be itself. "As a snowflake crystal caught in the warm hand is no longer a crystal but a drop, so, instead of catching the feeling of relation moving to its term, we find we have caught some substantive thing, usually the last word we were pronouncing, statically taken, and with its function, tendency, and particular meaning in the sentence quite evaporated." But suppose that we could catch that substantive thing, supposing that the snowflake in all its crystalline perfection were to remain unchanged in our warm hand—why, then we should have caught a thing of beauty and a joy for ever: a work of art!

There would be many qualifications to make about such a metaphysical representation of the poetic process, some of which James himself makes when refuting what he calls "the ridiculous theory of Hume and Berkeley that we can have no images but of perfectly definite things". It is true that there was a school of poets which strove to hold on to the image in all its pristine precision—they were called the Imagists and I belonged to it. But the attempt was vain because, as James says, "every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 160.

round it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead. The significance, the value, of the image is all in this halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it—or rather that is fused into one with it and has become bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh; leaving it, it is true, an image of the same *thing* it was before, but making it an image of that thing newly taken and freshly understood.”³⁵

Armed with these psychological insights let us now return to Valéry’s conception of the faculty with which we elaborate a work of art, “a kind of energy proper to the poet”, and let us see whether we are now in a position to account for the persisting myth of a poet’s Muse.

We have seen that modern psychology has disintegrated the notion of an all-knowing, self-knowing self. This disintegration is an empirical fact, and when, as in Jung’s psychology, we speak of the re-integration, or “individuation”, of the personality, we are expressing an ideal of some sort, a state of mental equilibrium, desirable perhaps from the point of view of sanity or morality, but not necessarily consistent with the “Bacchic transport” of a poet, with the experience of inspiration. It may be that from the point of view of the poet’s audience the experience of poetry is desirable as catharsis: that was Aristotle’s point of view, and it implies, as we have seen, that we must carefully distinguish between the process of poetry and its effects. For the moment we are concerned only with the process, with the creative self and not with the ideal social self. I am inclined to the hypothesis that there is a self that flies and a self that perches, and that the work of art is the state of consciousness at the moment of perching, the resting-place itself and therefore something distinct from the flight, from the so-called stream of consciousness. I call this resting-place the *image*, but only on the understanding that we define the image in concrete terms, and distinguish it clearly from what philosophers call universals or ideas. Art is an awareness of the particularity of particular things—I think all philosophers of art from Plato to Coleridge and Collingwood have said something of the kind. Particulars are bright points of vision precipitated by the stream of consciousness, and to the degree that these bright points are held in suspension, a “Heraclitean fire” (to use Gerard Manley Hopkins’s phrase) redeemed from the flux, to that extent (even if they are no more than a verbal image or a musical chord) they are works of art. The poet is the redeemer of words from the “free flow”—words which may nevertheless be steeped in associations.

Since the immediate data of a state of consciousness correspond with a state of the brain, we must ask what trigger mechanism releases any particular image from the brain and sends it into the stream of consciousness. To this we can only reply that it must be an intensification of feeling, which results in an apperception of value: a vague feeling-tone becomes concrete, acquires direction and is precipitated into consciousness as an image. But the odd thing is that the image, like the snow-crystal, enters consciousness fully formed, effective by reason of its form. What agency,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 165–6.

behind consciousness, has had this formative function? That is the final and most significant question.

Valéry, in one of his dialogues, asks the same question through the mouth of Socrates: "If some Reason were to dream, standing hard, erect, her eyes armed, mouth shut, mistress of her lips—would not her dream be what we are now looking at—this world of measured forces and studied illusions?—A dream, a dream, but all charged with symmetries, all order, all acts, all sequences! . . . Who can tell what august Laws are here dreaming that they have clothed their faces with brightness and agreed to make manifest to mortals how the real, the unreal, and the intelligible can fuse and combine, obedient to the Muses?"³⁶

If Reason herself were to dream "a dream of vigilance and tension"—there we have the hypothesis we need! But can we translate such a concept into psychological terms?

I think we can if we assume that the brain is not merely a storehouse of buried impressions (of psycho-physical correspondences) but also a system of molecular structures. We assume that the brain is a system of physical molecules, but I think we must suppose that it is also a system of mental facts or monads—that the infinite store of impressions fed into the brain by sensations is automatically sorted into *Gestalten*, metaphysical configurations of infinite significance and viability. If I am told that there is no empirical evidence of such a process taking place, I can only reply that perception itself is precisely this process: it is the internal "requiredness" thanks to which, according to the *Gestalt* psychologists, a coherent vision of the external world is possible. A work of art, as Koffka has said, is not an idle play of the emotions, but a means of helping us to find our place in the world—"in a universe that is infinitely greater than our egos". Or, as the same psychologist puts it, in a work of art "mere factuality is subordinated to requiredness".³⁷

We thus finally come to identify the Muse with Reason—with a Reason that dreams in measure and order, in symmetry and rhythm. But the dream visits the consciousness of the poet—is perhaps called to that consciousness by the blind necessities of feeling or emotion. In that case why are not all our minds immaculate screens waiting for the impress of the Muse's images?—or, to use Plato's metaphor, why are they not all blocks of wax of the right consistency? Why are great poets such rare mortals?

Because, I would suggest, our mental screens are for the most part neither pure nor luminous. Most of us suffer from a corrupt, one might even say a defiled consciousness. We have lost "the innocent eye", the inner eye of direct or primitive sensation. We realize this whenever we look at the world through a child's eyes, as recorded in the paintings and poems of children. We realize it too, whenever we

³⁶ "Dance and the Soul", trans. by Dorothy Bussy (slightly modified), London, 1951. Quoted from Brain, *op. cit.*, p. 73. A more recent translation in Paul Valéry, *Dialogues*, trans. by William McCausland Stewart. Collected Works, Vol. 4. New York (Bollingen Series) and London (Routledge & Kegan Paul), 1957, p. 35.

³⁷ "Problems in the Psychology of Art." *Art: a Bryn Mawr Symposium*, Bryn Mawr, 1940, p. 272.

look at the world through the eyes of a so-called "savage" (who is not so savage as we who conspire to destroy the human race), the savage for whom the image is more real than the phenomenal object, the dream more real than deliberate action, or more real than the purposive thought that leads to deliberate action. In effect there are two stages in "becoming conscious" of something, first the image, then the idea—first we look at the burning coal, then we see the colour red. Generally speaking we distinguish between sensation and imagination, but we do not often realize that imagination can be concrete—Goethe defined art as the faculty of exact sensuous imagination.³⁸

This distinction is of profound significance for the theory of art, as perhaps among philosophers only Collingwood has realized. He pointed out that consciousness has a double object where sentience has a single one. "What we hear, for example, is merely sound. What we attend to is two things at once: a sound and an act of hearing it. The act of sensation is not present to itself, but it is present, together with its own *sensum*, to the act of attention. This is, in fact, the special significance of the *con-* in the word consciousness: it indicates a togetherness of the two things, sensation and *sensum*, both of which are present to the conscious mind."³⁹ It follows that when we pass from sentience to an act of attention, of awareness or consciousness, the impression has changed into an idea and a new principle is established. "Attention is focussed on one thing to the exclusion of the rest. . . Consciousness, master in its own house, dominates feeling." And at this moment (the moment to recall James's metaphor, of rest on the perch) feeling takes *form*. Collingwood actually uses words which seem to echo William James: "Attending to a feeling means holding it before the mind; rescuing it from the flux of mere sensation, and conserving it for so long as may be necessary in order that we may take note of it"—in order, I would say, that we can have an image of it.

But we must, if we are poets, hold on to this precision of the process of fixation. Consciousness, as Collingwood points out, is a level of thought that is not yet intellect. "Consciousness is thought in its absolutely fundamental and original shape." In that shape it does not always meet with the approval of the intellect. The intellect, the ego of the psycho-analysts, then becomes a censor of the imagination and from this fact results that corruption of consciousness which is not only an abortion of poetic feeling, but, as we may agree with Collingwood, a disease of the mind which eventually leads to the corruption of language and the decline of a civilization.⁴⁰

I am not trying (and certainly Collingwood would not have condoned such an attempt) to identify imagination with sensation or art with feeling: between the feeling and the work of art there is a force (*mana*: the "energy proper to the poet")

³⁸ Jubiläumsausgabe, Vol. 39, p. 374.

³⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 206. *The Principles of Art*, by R. G. Collingwood. Oxford, 1938.

⁴⁰ Cf. Collingwood, *ibid.*, p. 220: "The condition of a corrupt consciousness is not only an example of untruth, it is an example of evil. The detailed tracing of particular evils to this source by psycho-analysts is one of the most remarkable and valuable lines of investigation initiated by modern science, bearing the same relation to the general principles of mental hygiene laid down by Spinoza that the detailed enquiries of relativistic physics bear to the project for a 'universal science' of mathematical physics as laid down by Descartes."

which fuses the impressions of sense into formal and significant images. Collingwood says that in attending to a present feeling consciousness perpetuates that feeling. But only by giving it form, by creating a clear and distinct image. Such images, in their purity, are the primary elements in poetry and in all the arts.

When we say, as Collingwood and William James say, that consciousness is "absolutely autonomous",⁴¹ we are really saying that the mind is divided into two fields—"a background or penumbra from which attention is withdrawn" (Collingwood) and an object of attention—the distinction between hearing and listening, between seeing and looking. The poet's creative mind is equally divided between sensation and attention—between hearing and seeing on the one hand and looking and listening on the other. His sensations he cannot control—they enter consciousness as "brain states", "patterns of electrical impulses, or electrical fields, of great complexity".⁴² But then they are shaped by a distinct force, the energy proper to the poet, Coleridge's "shaping power of the imagination". The Muse is clearly an archetypal figure conceived at the dawn of civilization to represent this shaping power, and such an archetype is still serviceable for a modern theory of poetry, for an adequate philosophy of art. Whence the Muse's power proceeds we must leave as a biological mystery—it is the *mana* we identify with the source of life itself, which is formative in its deepest recesses. To the extent that we allow our sensibility to be guided by this shaping power, this "dream of vigilance and tension", and exclude all judgements and prejudices proceeding from the passions (which Plato called "the lie in the soul"⁴³) to that extent we are true poets and worthy to receive the truth revealed by the Muse.

⁴¹ Collingwood, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁴² Brain, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

⁴³ *Republic*, 382a-c: "the falsehood in words is a copy of the affection in the soul, an aftervising image of it . . ." Trans. Paul Shorey.