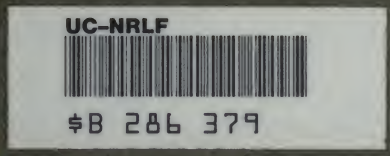
B
3614
C74S7



YB 23405

Pamphlet
Binder
Gaylord Bros.
Makers
Syracuse, N. Y.
PAT. JAN 21, 1908

Croce and Literary Criticism

by

O. K. Struckmeyer.

—

Price Ninepence.

—

Cambridge:
1921

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/croceliterarycri00strurich

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

Croce and Literary Criticism

by

O. K. Struckmeyer.

Price Ninepence.

Cambridge:
1921

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

B 3614
B7457

This Essay was awarded the Le Bas Prize at Cambridge University, June, 1921.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

Croce and Literary Criticism.

I.

ART for Croce is indifferently the creation of, or response to, a work of art, its production or reproduction: and this activity he defines as intuition-expression. It is neither intuition more than expression, nor expression more than intuition, but both equally, because in the æsthetic activity intuition and expression are without any reservation co-equivalent. Yet when Croce is discussing the question of true and false judgment in art, it is with good reason that he defines as the criterion of the value of a work of art its "expressiveness" (1); he might also say "the greatness of its intuition," but the phrase would not only be awkward but slightly incorrect. For, when instead of merely considering the nature of art we come to judge a work of art, a slight difference necessarily arises in the meaning of the two words intuition and expression. The reason is familiar. The tendency of all judgments is to eliminate what is called the personal element and resolve themselves as far as possible into terms of objective certainty. Without some achievement in this direction no judgment is possible. So in the case of judgment in art a slight differentiation is made between the significance of the terms intuition and expression, in order that one of them, the latter, may be selected as being less exclusive of the element of practical certainty. For "intuition" carries with it rather the suggestion of personal response, a thing which must necessarily vary greatly according to the character of the person who responds, while "expression" gives us the idea of some real, unalterable, and even ascertainable quality in what we call the work of art itself.

It might be expected then that, in practice at least, some reservation would be made in the all-embracingness of the term "expressive." But it is clear that in this word, used to indicate the criterion of all art judgment, Croce intends to include the whole significance of the term "intuition-

(1) *Estetica*, p. 44. Cf. also *Ib.* p. 16.

479603

expression." By expressiveness he means no more and no less than the amount of art present. He does not allow that there must be a standard by which we may be enabled to judge the amount of art present in a work of art, explaining to us as far as possible what that standard is or should be; he tells us simply that we are to judge the work of art *by* the amount of art present in it. Differences between works of art, then, like the difference between artistic intuition and the intuitions of everyday life (1), are purely extensive in nature.

But it seems that there is a confusion here between 'difference' and 'differentiation.' Differentiation may be extensive, but how can difference itself be other than intensive? In the case of pure extension comparison is as unattainable as in the case of pure intension; for if the latter is perfect unity, the former is complete disintegration. Pure qualities, indeed, do not submit themselves to valuation, but this is by reason, not of their qualitative, but of their *absolute* nature. Differences in art value must surely be originally and essentially qualitative; the quantitative element is no more than the mere instrument of our conscious realisation of these qualitative values in terms of difference. But quite probably Croce's meaning is that differences in art value are so essentially qualitative that we can only apprehend them as greater or lesser (*i.e.*, extensive) manifestations of that same absolute quality which we call æsthetic activity.

Now, it is a true observation that method of judgment and thing judged are in reality one. If we would judge a work of art our method of judgment must approach as far as possible the reality of the work of art, that is the creation of it. In order to know a thing we must be it. Croce's advocacy of the criterion of expressiveness is then theoretically justified. But in this case can the ideal judgment be said to be any longer a judgment at all? Is it possible for our immediate, absolute and entirely æsthetic intuition of a work of art to be in any true sense a judgment of that work of art? Can criticism be purely contemplative?

Croce's thesis rests on the supposition that there is no qualitative distinction to be made between the creation of a work of art, our response to it, and our judgment of

(1) *Estetica*, p. 16.

it. Whether creation and response are identical in nature or not, we see that it is unlikely that judgment, however immediate, will coincide with the former. Let us assume now, on the other hand, that, because method of judgment and thing judged are one, response to art and judgment of it are the same—it has yet to be seen whether creation and response, although it may not be supposed that they are identical, are even of the same nature.

II.

In Chapter XIII, Part I, of the *Estetica* Croce illustrates the sequence of the æsthetic activity by means of a scheme *a, b, c, d.* "The complete process of the æsthetic production," he says, "may be symbolically represented in four stages. These are: *a*, impressions; *b*, expression, or spiritual æsthetic synthesis; *c*, the pleasure which accompanies this expression, called the pleasure of the beautiful, or æsthetic pleasure; *d*, translation of the æsthetic fact into physical phenomena (sounds, tones, movements, combinations of lines and colours, etc.)." In the same chapter he explains that a work of art is the expedient or aid to memory, created for the purpose of artistic reproduction. We have already alluded to the passage (1) in which he claims that the æsthetic activity is qualitatively the same, in artistic creation as in the intuitions of ordinary life. It would seem then that the æsthetic process in the mind of the ordinary man differs in nature from that in the mind of the artist only in as much as the artist renders more permanent the practical or physical part of his activity. It may be that the result—*i.e.*, the stage *e* (2)—of the artist's creation is a permanence in the 'material' memory of the race, while that of the ordinary man's creation is a permanence in the representative memory of the individual. But very likely Croce would not use these terms.

It is clear, however, that in each case the process is a similar one; it is the process of production *a, b, c, d.* Now, what happens in the case of response to a work of art, that is to say, of what Croce calls a "reproduction"? It must be similar in nature to every other kind of æsthetic process.

---

(1) *Estetica*, p. 16. (2) *Ib.*, p. 114.

For the purpose of illustrating the connection between it and the process it attempts to reproduce, it may be treated as an inversion of the original, in which the physical stimulus resulting from *d* takes the place of *a*. Croce, we have seen, gives this physical stimulus the symbol *e*. We have then the formula : *e, d-b,* with concomitant *c*. But the inversion is, of course, a mere logical convenience ; for the reproduction, being merely a form of the æsthetic process in the mind of the ordinary man, is in reality a new production : *e, b* (*c*), *d*.

It must be new, for the very essence of the intuition-expression is that it is a creative act. But then we are confronted with this paradox : that for our response to be more *re*productive—and our judgment therefore more accurate—it must comply as much as possible with the essential nature of the original production, that is its newness ; but the newer our response the less can it resemble the original production which has preceded it, that is to say, the less can it be reproductive. Where lies the fallacy ? Now, it is obvious that *e* must in some way condition the nature of *b-d* ; otherwise no judgment would be possible. The process of our response *begins* then by being reproductive. Does it *end* in a mere reproduction ? Is it *e, b* (*c*), *d*, or is it *e, b* (*c*), *x* ?

The question arises, because we are for the moment at a loss to explain one very obvious difference between creation and response, namely, that in response we never get quite as far as a material reproduction of the work of art. For, deferring until later our discussion with regard to what Croce calls " extrinsecation " (1)—that is the ' making ' of the work of art, a practical activity subsequent to, and entirely distinct from, the æsthetic activity—it is clear that when we look at a picture or read a poem we cannot actually choose again the forms and colours or the words and phrases ; they are already chosen for us. It occurs to us then to ask whether we do not materialise our intuition in some other way, involving a new choice which until we have discovered its nature we may call *x*. Now some kind of choice of form is represented by *d* in Croce's scheme. And if *d* corresponds to that which we have just seen belongs essentially to the creation of the work of art and not to the response, then

(1) For convenience I use this word to translate Croce's " estrinsecazione."

in the scheme of the response *d* should disappear and *x* will naturally take its place. But Croce will urge that there is no real difference between *d* in the scheme of the production and *x* in the scheme of the reproduction ; that as a matter of fact when responding we do actually choose again what the artist chose, and that in each case it is what may be called a *realisation* of form. Certainly, in practice this seems to be in some measure true ; but, if we look more closely, we shall find that it may only be said that this really occurs, unaccompanied by the creation of an additional non-formal element (*i.e.*, *x*), where the form of the poem, or of the picture, expresses to some extent our own personal equation (1) ; that is to say, where we feel that, if we had such an idea or such an emotion to express, we should express it in a similar way, or where we feel that generally speaking our own work would bear some resemblance in form to the work of the poet or the artist in question. This being so, we notice that these occurrences are determined almost entirely by individual temperament and vary according to the personality of the individual who responds, and that therefore—and this is the important point—where this most occurs true judgment is least possible. Where in fact $x=d$, if such be ever the case, judgment may be said to be non-existent.

Now we have assumed, with Croce, that judgment is implicit in response. If this were not at least to some extent true, the principles of the *Estetica* could find no application in criticism at all. It does not imply that response to art is a conscious valuation of it, but that it contains the substance of that ensuing valuation. If this is so, we naturally ask if immediate judgment has any assignable place in the scheme of response: *e*, *b* (*c*) $\frac{d}{x}$. It cannot be present in each stage of the reproduction. For in no sense of the word can judgment correspond to physical stimulus, in the first place,

(1) It might also be said, *theoretically*, to occur where this contemplative "realisation" of form occupies a mathematically infinitesimal position between creative perception (*i.e.*, creative either of *material* form *d* or of the non-formal element *x*) on the one hand, and non-creative, non-æsthetic, practical, everyday perception on the other—a kind of no-man's-land, of which it can hardly be predicated even that it is conscious.

and in the second place, although it may be present in *b*, it can hardly coincide with *b* entirely, if only because judgment tends to be logical rather than æsthetic. Further, we have seen that realisation of form *d* and judgment are mutually exclusive, or at least tend to be so; all that remains is *x*. And it will be universally agreed that judgment, if it finds any place in response at all, must be the conclusion of it rather than anything else; for it is always possible to respond without being conscious of any judgment, but it is never possible to judge without having in some measure first responded. There seems to be no alternative then, but to suppose that in response there is no such thing as realisation of form *d*, but that instead of this there is *x*, a new realisation or materialisation of the intuition *b*, and that this *x* is no other than our judgment of the work of art in some form or other, whether critical or simply appreciative. In this way the paradox seems to find a more or less satisfactory solution. But the evidence also goes to show that there is a fundamental difference in the æsthetic processes of creation and response; for, where *x* takes the place of *d*, the whole nature of *b* must be affected, and the essential character of the entire process therefore changed.

III.

There is a difficulty then in reconciling artistic judgment with artistic production. Probably they are never quite separate from one another. And, because this is so, we picture them as the thrust and the recoil of some ineffable activity which is in reality a oneness, a whole; and yet again they seem like two parallel motions, meeting only in an abstract world. Yet our brief survey perhaps has shown that response and creation can never be the same. Judgment meanwhile we have assumed to be implicit in response; and this we shall continue to do, relying on our argument to explain and, incidentally, to lend support to the assumption. But the nature of the judgment and the nature of the response have now to be indicated. We shall begin by examining the latter.

Croce, in emphasising the importance of historical interpretation in the reproduction of art, that is in the response (1), says: "We, by the aid of our memory, surround

(1) *Estetica*, pp. 147, 148.

the physical stimulus with all the happenings amongst which it took birth ; thus making it possible for it to operate again on us as it operated on him who produced it." Let us take an example, that of the Madonna Rucellai in *Sta Maria Novella*, mentioned by Croce on page 145. Now it is possible to suppose that nothing was known to us of the true origin of this picture. Instead of recognising it as a product of Christian feeling in medieval Italy, we might believe it to be a work of art created by a race of men, hitherto unknown to us, worshippers, we will suppose, of womanhood, and that this worship of womanhood had become a highly developed religion among them: Would these false happenings with which we should thus be surrounding the physical stimulus cause any profound difference in our response? Surely not. The same reverence, the same gentleness, the same ceremonious awe would fill our minds as we looked at the picture, and these feelings we should feel on reflection to be inseparably connected with something in the picture itself, something in the form and colour of it, and not dependent on any knowledge of historical facts. But it may be said that the essential happenings with which we surround the stimulus are precisely those happenings of religious feeling, reverence, gentleness, and so forth, which are common to our experience in both cases. Quite true, but these essential happenings are not given to us by any "historical interpretation," but by the picture itself ; they are, as we have seen, indissolubly allied with what we vaguely call the form. *It is our response to the picture that creates these happenings which surround the physical stimulus.* They are the result of our experience rather than the condition of it. They are the new content which we create ; they are what we have called x in the scheme of response. Expression they must have, yet their expression will not be pictorial, nor poetical, nor musical—for then, indeed, the happenings in question would be not the very content of the intuition, but the mere stimulus preceding its artistic expression—but it will be something in terms of our ordinary experience. A painter in front of a picture, in as far as he is a painter at that moment, will see in that picture, that is to say he will create in his mind, some suggestion of new forms destined to mature only later in his own paintings. In this case the content, the expression, of his intuition will indeed be pictorial, but the more this

is so the less will the implicit judgment in his response be concerned with the value of the picture which is in front of him, but will rather express itself in his acceptance, however sub-conscious, of the theme which is destined to affect his work. It will be turned away from the old picture towards the new ; that is to say, it will not be a theoretical or a scientific judgment, but a practical one. And this is as good as saying that it will not be a judgment at all. But for us who respond in the ordinary way, expression must be in terms of our everyday experience ; for implicit judgment is the very selection of memories from that experience, which afterwards, when we express and define our judgment, we sub-consciously compare with other memories for the purpose of determining their value. " How," asks Croce, " can that which has been produced by one definite activity be judged by another and different activity ? " (1). But, strictly speaking, the original activity of the artist can never be judged. What we judge is really and can only be, our own response to that activity ; and only by determining what part of ourselves, what part of life as we know it, that response expresses, are we able to judge it.

When Croce admits then the necessity of historical interpretation, he is revealing a weakness in his theory of the judgment of art. Historical interpretation is no more than what might be termed a preliminary indication of possible memories serving as the basis of that final selection, which will form our response to, and our implicit judgment of, the work of art. If then, to borrow an instance quoted by Croce (2), our uncertainty as to the religion or profanity of the content of paintings on pre-historic vases effectually prevents our response to them as works of art, and since that content can only have significance for us when we consider it in immediate relation with the paintings on the vases—for it is as it were illuminated by those paintings—we can hardly escape the conclusion that the content and our response are one and the same thing.

From these considerations there emerges the whole problem of form and content. In order to make clearer the distinction between these two elements, we have chosen examples from painting rather than from literature, for it

(1) *Estetica*, p. 142. (2) *Estetica*, p. 148.

is in the criticism of plastic art more especially that the controversy has arisen. It will now be well to fathom their relations for the purpose of explaining what is meant by saying that content and response are identical, and to illustrate our explanation with examples from literature.

Croce in Chapter II, Part I, of the *Estetica* (2) says: "When by matter is understood the emotional quality before it is æsthetically fashioned, or, in other words, the impressions, and by form the fashioning itself or spiritual activity of expression, our meaning must be clear. We must reject the theory which supposes the æsthetic happening to lie in the content alone, in the mere impressions, as well as that which supposes it to be an addition of form to content, that is, to consist of impressions plus expressions."

It is suitable no doubt to designate as matter the impressions which precede the æsthetic happening. But since these are in fact no other than what Croce elsewhere defines as the physical stimulus, it is hard to believe that they have anything in common with what is ordinarily understood by content. Anything in poetical experience which is usually termed content is included by Croce in what he calls form. But it seems that the significance of the two words is in this way very largely foregone; Croce by his postulation that æsthetic activity is equivalent to intuition, which is equivalent to expression, which is equivalent to form, dismisses the question rather than answers it. And it is particularly this ultra-idealist standpoint that makes his æsthetic principles very difficult to apply to actual criticism. For the chief weapon of analysis in the hands of the critic is the division into form and content of what Croce calls only form. It is true that on the other hand the artificial contrast often made use of in criticism between the mere logical meaning, or prose content, of a poem and its technical embodiment has little philosophic justification; it represents an opposite extreme. But if we regard the resultants of the division as aspects of art rather than complements or antitheses, it will appear that their meanings can be so similar that they may almost coincide, and there will be less danger of abstraction. In true literary criticism the distinction between content and form serves no purpose other than

(2) *Estetica*, pp. 18, 19.

that of helping to discover the different qualities present in different expressions of poetic art, by the determination of which qualities alone is it possible to formulate a literary judgment.

It has been supposed by some critics that content and form vary in inverse proportion to one another: that when there is most content there is least form, and *vice versa*; and that since the art lies in the form, the more there is content the less will there be art. This idea originated in the just observation that the more determinateness, the greater the appeal to the abstract or to the objectifying sense, in a work of art, the less will be its æsthetic value. Thus, to take an extreme case, a mathematical problem does not lend itself to literary expression; nor in painting will a mere photographic representation of a scene produce an artistic effect. But the fallacy arises when determinateness is thought to be equivalent to content. Critics, mistaking the latter for the former, have thus gone to the extent of supposing that for a work of art to contain any clear meaning is derogatory to its value as form, that is as art. And they have rejected many of Wordsworth's poems as not being sufficiently obscure; while creations such as "Kubla Khan" have been exalted perhaps beyond their true measure.

Simultaneously with this new development of criticism there has arisen a new school of poetry; and the practice of the one has been in harmony with the theory of the other. It may be worth while, with reference to the problem of content, to quote one of the products of this literary attitude. The complete poem is as follows:—

> "The wild geese fade in the distance—
> The smell of dead leaves on the ground . . .
> Her palanquin waits at the door."

Now each of these three sentences is a separate statement. The poetry then, assuming that we are dealing with one poem and not three, must lie in the connection, such as it is, between these statements. And there seems in fact to be a theme connecting the three parts of this poem. It is a theme not very clearly stated, but which consists in a progressive development through three different states of mind. The first state of mind, that suggested by: "The wild geese fade in the distance," might be described as that of an aery and sylph-like fantasy such as we associate with

what is called a " far-off look." The second is more immediate and real ; there is still a halo of meditation and of calm around the odorous sensation of dead leaves, but there is also a greater feeling of intentness and deliberation. While in the third the imaginary spirit seems to have roused himself, and the mind is filled with purpose, and with the thought of imminent activity. But what is this, which we have described, other than the content of the poem ? There is no determinateness present of any kind ; but if there is a poem at all there is content, for the poetry lies in the coherence of the three statements, and this coherence can only be considered in terms of content. Determinateness indeed so far from being the equivalent of content is rather its antithesis ; and form varies not inversely to content but in direct proportion with it.

It is because of the tendency in the mind of the literary critic to regard form and content as two separate and rather opposite elements in poetry, that form has been persistently defined the mere vehicle of content, that is to say, the lesser part of the whole. But form is that which includes content ; or again, it is the content itself, but the content in its creative, spontaneous vitality, before it is recognised as content. It is more even than the æsthetic value of art ; for all values are in some sense comparative, but form is autonomous and stands alone. It is absolute ; it is the pure quality of that movement into expression which we call art.

The following lines will serve as an illustration :—

" No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell ;

Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it ; for I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot
If thinking on me then should make you woe."

What happens when we respond to these lines ? We become conscious of the poet himself, of the lover in his struggle of self-sacrifice, his mind in conflict between the supreme effort to give and the terrible knowledge that he cannot quite give all that he is offering. There are other

feelings which enter into our consciousness, such as those of pity, of passionate sincerity: indeed, after we have read the poem several times, we are almost inclined to believe that there is no one of the nobler feelings connected with the passion of love which may not become part of our response. These feelings are the content of the poem. Yet we never quite lose sight of what we call the form. We are strongly, almost consciously, affected by certain arrangements of words, and the most important of these can be discovered by means of an analysis. They are, for instance, the pause separating "No longer" from "Than" in the first two lines, the repetition of "vile" in the superlative form in the fourth line, the intensely musical effect of the "so" in "I love you so," due chiefly to its rhyming position; and many others, including, of course, the more elementary effects of metre and rhyme.

Now, what we notice especially is that although these two elements of form and content are very largely fused together in our response, something in either the one or the other is continually being sacrificed. The more we are absorbed in the content, the less can we be aware of the form; while the more we become conscious of what we call the form, the less significant of content, or containing of significance, does that form become—that is to say, the less do we realise either the content or the form in its fulness and vitality. And we ascribe this to the apparent antithesis between the two elements, where in reality it is due to the fact that one of them, the form, is never integrally present in the response. In our realisation of form we are limited to the realisation of something which is already created. The content appears to give us something of the power behind the creation; but when we turn our attention to the content, and attempt to seize this power in order to make it the instrument of our complete realisation of the form, we are baffled by the fact that it is not a thing which we can grasp from without, for in order to make it completely our own we must be impelled by it in the same way as the poet was impelled. All that we are able to do is to create a semblance of it and call it the content of the poem.

The only true response lies in this creation of content. For only a reflection, a shadow of the form can be realised when once the poem has been created, since the full realisation of that form lay in the creation of the poem; on the other

hand the poet himself was not conscious of the content at the moment of his creation of the form, form always being greater than, preceding, and including content.

Now Croce's doctrine rests on the assumption that the sameness of these two elements or activities is more real than their difference ; he states the object of the philosophy of art to be the study of the " common æsthetic nature of men." (1) Any particular manifestation of art then is considered only in so far as it illustrates the general characteristic of æsthetic activity ; what might be called its ' personal ' quality is entirely ignored. The domination of the four moments is supreme. And it seems fair to say that phenomena are made use of by him to exemplify the system rather than that the system is used to illuminate the phenomena. Croce's philosophical method considers every problem in relation to the *composition* of our whole mental activity ; for this reason he condemns the empirical method of literary criticism which fails to discriminate accurately between the æsthetic, the logic, the economic and ethical functions, and which divides art into what appear to be arbitrary categories, such as the sublime, the heroic, the tragic, the comic, the subjective, the objective, etc., etc. (2) Aesthetics, he would say, is concerned with the one distinctive and essential feature of the æsthetic activity, not with the multiplicity of its different forms.

But there is another philosophical method, which, although unable accurately to indicate the essential qualities of any four moments, or aspects, of all mental activity, yet attempts to determine in some way the relative values of the various manifestations of that activity, each manifestation being regarded in its concrete integrity. Its aim is to grasp something of what may be called the direction or intention of reality, rather than its composition ; this direction is the ultimate value which determines and is determined by the various relative values. The first method is, or attempts to be, complete ; the second is necessarily incomplete and suggestive, and proceeds from those intuitions which underlie our ordinary judgment of things and form the substance of the conclusions of literary criticism.

If we consider the activity of the spirit as an evolution, a development, a stream, Croce's philosophy gives us an

(1) *Problemi di Estetica*, p. 469. (2) *Estetica*, p. 42 *et seqq.*

accurate cross-section of that stream rather than an index of its flow or its direction. It is a demonstration of what is, rather than of what will be. It necessarily includes what was, since philosophy should be and must be identical with history (1) ; and history is the attitude of the present illuminating the past and, at the same time, knowledge or experience of the past illuminating the present, or, more correctly, the containing of the past in the present, and the coincidence of both in what is called reality. But there can be no involution of past in present without a suggested evolution of the future ; an evolution, it is understood, not of happenings, but of tendencies, in the same way that the involution was a gathering together of tendencies rather than of happenings. It follows then that, if the highest form of philosophy is history in the most vital sense of the word, it must necessarily presage what will be or what should be—and they are the same—rather than what is. Croce's system of the four moments of mental activity, therefore, since it is a limited co-ordination of facts—each fact being represented by one of the four moments—rather than an unlimited suggestion of values, falls short of the ideal which he himself elaborates. For value is the very flash which fires the present off into the future.

The system of the four moments and consequently the underlying principles of the *Estetica* thus seem to stand in opposition to the great conception of the identity of philosophy with history. And they must be difficult to reconcile with any form of literary criticism, since literary criticism is an elaboration of judgment, and judgment is the expression of value. But a philosophy which attempts to correlate the values of literary criticism with such fundamental values as are disclosed by a vision of the potentialities of the future in the present, will be a philosophy determining and determined by, not only the conclusions of art criticism, but also those conclusions of everyday life which are most powerful in establishing our general attitude ; for this general attitude of ours is no other than history in its most concrete significance. Moreover, such conclusions, in themselves the very essence of what is called value, are, it will hardly be questioned, chiefly if not entirely governed by the promptings of our conscience ; for conscience is like some prophetic thrust guiding

(1) *Logica*, Part II, Chap. IV.

our expedition into the future and into the unknown. For this reason we must suppose that the only philosophically justifiable standard of judgment in literary criticism is what may be loosely and vaguely termed the standard of morality.

There is here no question of ethical judgment, nor even of a moral one in the ordinary and conventional use of the word. The term 'morality' is employed to denote that final and real value which any one mental activity possesses, not in relation to other mental activities of the specific order which we call moral, but in relation to all other mental activities whatsoever. Its standard is the common and implicit standard by which we judge things to be good or beautiful or true, or good and beautiful and true. It is, as we have said, the standard of our conscience, the most current in our daily experience, and from which all ultimate judgments must proceed. Its principle is the principle that what is most beautiful is at once most good and true, and what is most good and true must be most beautiful. No such real value can ever possibly be gauged with any degree of accuracy; but accuracy is a purely practical requirement, and judgment may still be judgment, though it be inaccurate.

We see then that Croce's divergence from some at least of the principles of literary criticism, and from such a philosophy as justifies those principles, is fundamental. His conception of value in art as well as his identification of creation and response, of production and reproduction, of form and content, proceed from the very method which has governed the construction of his whole system. Any such application of primary moral values as we have indicated, any such intimate connection as we are attempting to draw between these values and literary judgment, between judgment and response, between response and content, would be foreign to his mode of thought. Yet these are, in one form or another, the conceptions upon the validity of which all true poetics must depend; they are the unavowed, perhaps, yet none the less cogent requisite of practical æsthetic speculation. But to establish and illustrate this more convincingly, a fuller consideration of what we have called the moral standard of judgment in literary criticism will be necessary.

IV.

Morality in its intrinsic significance is what may be called an at-oneness with the intention or direction of life. It has frequently been thought hitherto that at-oneness with the universal as opposed to the individual constituted the highest morality. But the ethical universe is a universe composed of individuals; that is to say, it is quantitative. More moral than this must be an at-oneness with the very nature of universality, and this is its quality; it is life itself in its free, spontaneous expression.

Now since art is expression, it must be at one with life, and therefore it must naturally and in itself be moral. There can, indeed, be no proof that art is the spontaneous expression of life; yet Shelley's saying, that "no man can say 'I will write poetry,'" and other sayings of similar import, corroborate it. Nor is there space here to confirm the probability of this, or to give satisfactory evidence that this at-oneness with life is the highest form of morality; these things must, in some measure at least, be assumed as true. Moreover, provided that sufficient latitude be allowed to the term morality, there seems to be very little reason for objection.

Artistic form then is moral; but, because no morality can be detected in pure form, we persuade ourselves that art and morality are in perpetual division. Yet our inability to judge or measure the morality in pure form is no proof that that form is not more or less intrinsically moral. True, we can only become aware of this morality in what we call the content of a work of art. But the morality itself does not lie only in the content; it is also present—probably in a greater degree—in the manner of creation upon which the content depends, that is in the form. It is in fact surely more moral to create the thing which is afterwards judged moral, even without there being at the time any consciousness of morality, than merely to respond to that thing already created, and to judge it moral. The content, the response, tends to be a judgment of morality rather than the supreme act of morality itself. By judgment, however, is not meant any ethical measurement, nor even necessarily a conscious awareness of any degree of morality, but rather that sub-conscious valuation which conditions the nature of our response. It is what might be called an approval of the work of art by our

own moral potentiality. Response is said to be judgment, metonymically, because the act of judgment proceeds from it. Judgment in itself is, theoretically, a-moral; it is pure science, abstract and disinterested—but in this form it never exists, for a conscious or unconscious assertion of some principle of morality is always implied. Content or response, then, being the assertion of the principle, involving its application, is more moral than the application itself. But form, which has no need of an assertion, and which involves no scientific disinterestedness, must be more moral than content. Form, however, in its immediate reality, is a thing which hardly concerns literary criticism; its value can only be guessed at through the medium of content. And in what way morality is involved in the content may best be seen from an example.

I am, we will suppose, reading Milton's Ode on the Nativity. What I wish to establish is the nature of my thought, during response to the most characteristic or powerful passages of the poem. There is not, or should not be, anything ethical in my mind; for art is never ethically moral, if only because ethics is a science and art cannot be scientific. There is no consciousness in me that I am thinking about the right thing, or that the poem represents something which is right rather than wrong. But this does not exclude morality.

> "Peor and Baalim
> Forsake their temples dim,
> And that twice battered god of Palestine . . ."

The effect is immediate, overwhelming. It is an assertion, and I take part in that assertion. I am invaded by the slow, deliberate movement; and in turn I create, or re-create, it, not in words, not in music or in form, but in a kind of dynamic attitude of mind. I am not dwelling on the thought of pagan deities and their worshippers, nor am I making them symbolic of evil and of wrong; their grandeur stifles all circumstance in me, and I am released from the consciousness of individual thought or action. I become aware of a ceremony, a decree. Violence and calm, sorrow and ecstasy, are alike forgotten; and, like the pale phantoms of heathen worship, flit into the unreal and the unknown. There is only the operation of that which operates, the doing of that which does; the surrender of all things. It is an initiation into that

great triumph of existence which caused the world to be made, and plants, animals and man to follow one another in an unfaltering procession. It cannot last in me ; but in itself it cannot fail.

This is no mystical interpretation ; it is a practical result. Whatever is mystical or transcendental here is only the false aspect of that which language is unable to express. This thing might also be described as a complete and intense functioning of all my faculties ; or as a storing-up of future possibilities in me. And this indeed it is, for I remember in my sub-consciousness that ceremony at which I have assisted, its procession continues in me, though I have long ceased to be aware, the strains of its music reverberate in me, though I no longer hear them ; later, from time to time, still without my knowing it, they enter into my decisions, they find utterance in the triumph, the hesitation, and sometimes the torture of my conscience. They become part, not only of my sensibility, or of my conscious memory, but of that great undercurrent of existence which I call my soul.

This, or something like this, is one possible form of expression in response to art. It is intensely moral ; it is an adjustment of personality, a widening of its scope, and an extension of its possibility. It is a recreation of activity. A stone has been dropped in the great pool of life, and I am the ripple which goes out in ever-widening circles ; and although those circles may not reach the shore, yet they have played their part, for they have transformed the face of the waters. It is when the artist recreates not only his own activity, and his possibilities of activity, but the matter beyond—that is, the activities of others—that the circles are wider and swifter, and the waves so large that they beat down upon the banks surrounding them and leave their impress on the sand. For the artist creates not only the content but the form. We receive the form and recreate the content.

But the choice of Milton's Ode will seem perhaps to have been determined by prejudice in favour of an inherent or implicit, if not explicit, moral purpose. It will be well, therefore, to take the instance of some other poem as far removed in significance as possible from the Nativity Hymn. Few poems will suit the case more adequately than the charming " Bacchus and Ariadne " of Lorenzo de Medici. In appearance, at least, this poem is anti-moral ; it is a

flourish of the motto : " Let us live and be merry " . . . and the motive is pleasure.

" Chi vuol essere lieto sia,
Di doman non c'è certezza :
Quant 'è bella giovinezza,
Che si fugge tuttavia ! "

The ethics of it, the prose, may be wrong ; but the beauty of it sobs in our ears. Reason is at liberty to dissect the thought ; but it cannot touch the feeling. How the words throb ! The " bella," and the " fugge," and the " tuttavia " . . . it is like a sigh of wind vanishing across a plain.

The morality of this poem overpowers whatever so-called immorality there may be. It is not as great as that of Milton's Ode, because its feeling is less intense ; we do not respond with the whole of our personality ; but only with the reflective and contemplative side of it. Our free will does not come into play to the same extent as in the other poem ; rather than an assertion, it is a regret. As in the case of Shakespeare's sonnet, we are for a moment brought into touch with the personal feelings of the poet, and thus lose that greater feeling of impersonality which characterises the highest forms of art. The feeling is such as is most likely to occur in certain situations arising from particular relationships between people. It is an exaltation of one aspect of life at the expense of all the rest. There is a desire to retain and to possess ; a subservience to environment, a dallying with the past, and an evasion of the future.

Yet, in spite of all this, there is a hint of something greater than mere personal feeling. The emotion is not so poignant, but it reveals something of the solemnity of the law against which it would rebel. There is no rhythmless abandonment, no sentimental impotence ; the freedom of movement, the grace, the assurance suggest something almost universal. And there is a flash of spontaneity and of the desire to give.

This is the moral significance of the poem. It is its value. If all poetry is to be judged by one standard, that standard must be such a fundamental one as this. For in judgment we deliberate the content ; and content is a more or less conscious affirmation of the values of ordinary experience. Form, on the other hand, it is impossible to deliberate, since no one pure form can be set above another.

Not even an indeterminate comparison may be drawn between the form of Lorenzo de Medici's poem and that of Milton's Ode. They are both perfect, in as much as they are art; because expression always corresponds exactly to intuition. No two things, and least of all two forms, can be directly compared with one another; they can only be valued through the medium of a third thing. You cannot compare redness with blueness; you can only compare red and blue in terms of their common denominator, light, and of its manifestations: intensity, brilliance, saturation, warmth of effect, and so on. The corresponding manifestations in poetry are the qualities of its content. And the common denominator of art is life.

Art is no hieroglyphic. Understanding of it involves no sixth and extraordinary sense. And the only condition of response is greater latitude and depth of experience, and consequently greater sensibility. No esoteric vocabulary therefore is needed to express the qualities of great poetry. We make use, in art as in everyday life, of the attributes: gloomy, sad, monotonous, spirited, beautiful, majestic, sublime. And from such attributes alone it might be possible to fashion a criterion of poetic value. Thus Mr. Bradley, in illustrating his theory of the sublime, places side by side five modes of beauty: sublime, grand, beautiful, graceful, pretty; and he shows that "this series of five constitutes, in a sense, a descending series." (1) This descent, he goes on to say, is not one of value but of 'greatness'; for the sublime is not superior to the beautiful, since both are equally images of Infinity, but differs from it in that it is an image of the transcendence of Infinity, while beauty is an image of its immanence. (2) This may be relatively true. Immanent infinity in a thing, however, means no more than the reality or pure quality of that thing. The sublime in its reality is also immanent; but its immanence is of such a superior kind that it appears to outsoar all ordinary immanence. And it is this outsoaring which we call transcendence. For transcendence is only the relation between a superior and an inferior immanence. It seems then that the descending series of five modes is indeed a graduation of values. This does not mean that the sublime is always greater in value than the beautiful, or even than the graceful, but that it is more often so. For in poetry these modes are after all only

(1) *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 40. (2) *Ib.*, pp. 61, 62.

aspects or views of the reality; they never represent the poetic quality in its integrity. Yet they are none the less expressions of that ultimate standard of value which we have called morality.

There would be little profit in elaborating a scheme of comparative values to include all modes of beauty. But if the attempt were made it would be found that certain among these modes or attributes appear to lend themselves with difficulty to any evaluation. These are the various forms of what has been called the pure æsthetic quality of art. They are, on the one hand, such effects as those of rhythm, balance, volume, etc., more often found in painting and sculpture than in music or poetry; and, on the other hand, certain impressions or tones of feeling, ranging from the uncanny to the sensual, and difficult to describe, chiefly because they verge very frequently on what appears to be strange and unreal. Such effects as these are found in the greater part of modern painting, music and literature. Even in poetry alone, which primarily concerns us, the examples of this are so many and so varied that it would be impossible here to make a representative selection. One or two observations, however, may help to make clear the relation between the theory we have urged and this form of æsthetic manifestation.

In the first place, certain among these æesthetic qualities are said to be qualities of pure form. But, as we have attempted to show, pure form only exists in the act of creation itself. The formal element in these cases seems indeed to be very striking; but analysis reveals that the more this element is considered in and for itself the less effective does it become, while the more it is seen to be connected with, or suggestive and illustrative of something else, the less do we become conscious of it, but it is the more powerful. Thus, we become aware of so-called 'form' when, in reading the last stanza of Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," we remember the similarity of the first. But when in that repetition we feel the presence of something fateful, symbolic, universal, and when again we realise that in it Keats is making his own piognant feelings expressive of humanity in general—then, indeed, the 'form' becomes more real, because it has been transformed into content, and as content we are able to assign it a moral value.

"And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing."

Another kind of æsthetic quality, seemingly difficult of evaluation, is that of which many of Swinburne's lines :—

"Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow,"
or, "Not a flower to be pressed of the foot that falls not,"
or, "Dead dreams of days forsaken,"

are representative. Poetry of this class has been naively, yet not incorrectly, described as "sheer music." It owes its force to the magical enchantment of certain arrangements of words. Now several elements of distinguishable moral content are noticeable here. For example, the more or less purely musical element, which may be of the nature of mere sound, in which case it will produce sensations of a definite physical value, or it may be of the same nature as vocal or instrumental music, producing analogous effects, the value of which may be determined according to the emotional content which they suggest. Another element is that which might be classified as the element of supreme facility ; it is present when we become conscious of what seems to be a very great mastery of metre, rhyme and verse-mechanism on the part of the poet. In the case of Swinburne it is attained largely by repetitions of words drawn from a rather specialised vocabulary, thus :—

"Alas, but though my flying song flies after,
O sweet strange elder singer, thy more fleet
Singing, and footprints of thy fleeter feet . . ."

Or in the following lines, which, however, partly owe their effect to a repeated interchange of active and passive ideas :—

"I the mark that is miss'd
And the arrows that miss,
I the mouth that is kiss'd
And the breath in the kiss,
The search, and the sought, and the seeker, the
Soul and the body that is."

In listening to such verses we are fascinated in the same, or at least in a similar way as when we watch a company of dancers exhibiting strange feats of rhythmical movement, or some great conjuror juggling miraculously with oranges. And our response has the value of a pleasure which is passive rather than active, and accompanied by little creative freedom or understanding. The feature of repetition in the passages we have cited is so marked as almost to suffocate the significance which the words are intended to convey ; it is the complete antithesis of plain prose statement. Perhaps the dominant characteristic of this kind of poetry, however, is that of rapture and ecstasy. It is the ' fine frenzy ' of the poet become a self-conscious thing, in itself noble and excellent. And this may be so influential that it will betoken an abstraction from life, and a narrowing of perception, with the sacrifice of one's greater personality. The docility of our response confirms the truth of this.

Yet another of the so-called purely æsthetic elements in poetry is that of impressionism and fantasy. This occurs very frequently in modern literature, and offers in itself alone a very large subject for study. One or two characteristics may be remarked on here. In the first place we notice that, using the general literary distinction in the meaning of the two terms (1), this quality of poetry is much nearer to fantasy than to imagination. That is to say, the selection of words, images, ideas, is determined by something almost akin to chance rather than by deep purposefulness. Psychologically, this form of expression bears an unquestionable resemblance to that of dreams. We are inevitably reminded of the story of the composition of Kubla Khan :—

> " The Author," Coleridge writes, " continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines : if that, indeed, can be called composition, in which all the images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the

(1) Cf. De Sanctis' excellent summary on p. 53, Vol. I, of his *Storia Della Letteratura Italiana* (1912 ed.), where however " fantasia " is equivalent to imagination, and " immaginazione " to fantasy.

correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort."

Further, we notice a general lack of dramatically emotional content. This is not by any means invariably the case, but observations leads us to suppose that this kind of fantasy, and the deep feelings arising from human intercourse and relationship tend mutually to exclude one another, although the attempt is often made—in modern drama, for instance—to combine them. In addition to this there is an element of facility similar to that which we have seen to be present in the poetry of "sheer music." But in this case it is due to effects of imagery rather than of rhythm and sound. Thus J. E. Flecker introduces his poem on the "Gates of Damascus":—

"Four great gates has the city of Damascus,
And four Grand Wardens, on their spears reclining,
All day long stand like tall stone men
And sleep on the towers when the moon is shining."

These remarks, apart from the analysis, which is always inadequate, and which is only used here in explanation, will perhaps be enough to show that our response to poetry of all kinds is of the same order as our everyday experience, though different in nature, and that it therefore lends itself to moral judgment. Examples from the drama and the novel have not been taken, because they have seemed unnecessary; for what has been said seems to apply yet more completely to them.

Poetry is always new; yet it is never so entirely new that it may not be interpreted in terms of what is old. And if it were entirely new there could be no criticism of it. To suppose that it has no share in those values, by which all human thoughts and actions are deemed great or small, is to degrade it from its high estate; it is to esteem it a gesture of caprice rather than an expression of the most noble and dignified purposes of man. For to write great poetry is to have lived it.

V.

Although what we have called morality does not in the least coincide with what Croce calls the moral activity, yet the objections which he raises against the assignment

of moral values to art do, if valid, strike somewhat at the root of the theory which we are advocating here, and seem consequently to disprove the ordinary methods of literary criticism. These objections are founded on the conception that art is a form of knowledge and not of will. The conception is a cardinal point in the system of the four moments; it will be well, therefore, at this point to sketch briefly the relation between it and the conceptions underlying the position which we have enunciated.

Will, according to Croce, follows and is dependent on knowledge. "A knowing, independent of willing," he says, "is (at least in a certain sense) thinkable; a willing, independent of knowing, is unthinkable." (1) And again: "How is it possible really to will, if we do not know both the world by which we are surrounded and the manner in which it is possible to change things by acting on them?" (2) This is the crux of the whole matter. For either will precedes knowledge, or knowledge will. If the latter, then, since the æsthetic activity is clearly not secondary but primary and fundamental, Croce's theory of art holds good; if the former, then what we have affirmed seems more likely to be true.

Let us suppose I perform the action of going out of the room. Croce would say that what precedes the will which makes me perform the action is an intuition, in this case probably an intuition of the 'go-out-able-ness' of the room, that is an immediate knowledge of a situation. But no knowledge, no intuition, however immediate, however far removed from reflective and conceptual knowledge, can possibly precede that determination of sub-conscious memory in me, that arising of will, which makes me know the situation. The so-called knowledge of the situation can surely be no more than that aspect of my action which presents itself to my subsequent reflective consciousness. Knowledge of a situation cannot precede the will to deal with that situation; the knowledge, however purely intuitional, is only the expression of an incipient dealing with it. It is the *form* of our will which is dependent on knowledge, and this because our will in proportion as it is not free, takes the form of knowledge. But the form of our will is not our will itself, it is only our will considered in relation to other will-forms, that

(1) *Estetica*, p. 56. (2) *Ib.*

is in relation to other possibilities of choice. The content of will, its very willing, must precede the form, that is it must precede knowledge.

"Scegliere è volere," says Croce: (1) "to choose is to will." Quite so, but it is not true that to choose is "to will this and not will that; this and that necessarily standing in front of us already expressed." Will is choice, but it is the will itself which creates the variety of possible forms it may take, that is the variety of choice. The things open to our choice may indeed, when we are choosing consciously, be "already expressed"; but it is our will which has expressed them. In so far, however, as the expression is complete, our will has ceased to be active; for will is most active when least conscious of the variety of things possible to choose. Thus Hamlet, through contemplation of "this and that" standing in front of him already expressed, suffered an atrophy of will and could not choose:—

> "And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

So, in cases of hesitation, when we become intensely conscious of the variety of possibilities confronting us, this means that we are for the moment rejecting all these possibilities, and that our will has become dormant. When finally we have made the choice, however, it is found that this was effected in a moment of unconsciousness, in which possibilities of choice ceased to exist, and there was only the beginning of a development of action. In such cases there are two manifestations of will, the first creating the possibilities of choice, the second ignoring all those possibilities with the exception of one of them, and so starting the action.

It may be objected that the first act of considering a question, before we have begun to make a decision, is purely theoretic in nature. But the distinction between practical and theoretic scarcely holds good in the present instance; for it is a distinction *in re*, and we are dealing with a state of mind *ante rem*. Certainly it cannot be an act of pure contemplation, for the purpose of eventually following some one course of action is implicit in the desire to consider. Judgment, consideration, choice may be described as a slowing down of our will preparatory to greater freedom of

---

(1) *Estetica*, p. 59.

movement, and are determined by a constant effort on the part of will to supersede itself. Will, in its attempt to avoid the repetition of itself, tends ever more to become free will, that is to create. And, since one of the most creative forms of human activity is art, will thus in a sense tends to be artistic. But when it becomes artistic, it does not thereby cease to be will. "Scegliere è volere," says Croce; but what higher, what more essential form of choice than art?

That art is choice is corroborated by Croce's own vivid description of the character of æsthetic production. I refer to the second paragraph in Chapter XVI, Part I, of the *Estetica*.

> "A man A is trying to find expression for an impression which he feels or begins to feel, but which he has not yet expressed. And so he makes trial of various words and phrases to see if they will give him the form of expression he is looking for, that form which must fit the case, but which is not yet in his possession. He tries the combination *m* and rejects it as unsuitable, inexpressive, lacking in significance or in beauty; he attempts the combination *n*, with the same result. He sees nothing, or at least nothing clearly. The expression still escapes him. After further vain attempts, in which now he comes near, now goes away from, the mark at which he is aiming, he on a sudden formulates (and it seems to happen of its own accord, almost, and spontaneously) the expression which he has been looking for, and *lux facta est.*"

The choice does not lie in the selection from a distribution of possibilities like so many tangible objects, all of equal value, that is to say, of no value at all. It is inherent in the will itself. It is, as it were, a gathering together of memories like swirling waters behind the dam of consciousness. At last the dam is broken, or thrust aside; the waters rush forth, and some new memory is sent forth into the world. The act is indeed spontaneous. That is to say, it is not an expression of our individual nature. But it is not extraneous to our will; it is the free attainment of it.

But for Croce there is no choice in art, since choice is the same as will, and will has no place in the æsthetic activity. In his system the sphere of will and choice extends no further than that of volition-action, that is the activity

by which man changes things. Now it is clear that in the case of a picture painted or a poem written some change has been effected, and therefore some action, some volition, has taken place. Croce agrees that this is so, and explains the occurrence by saying that the change effected, the action done, lies only in what he calls the "extrinsecation" (1), which is an activity subsequent to the æsthetic activity and purely practical in nature. But there is something unreal, almost artificial, in such a rigid division as this. For it seems difficult to believe that artists are prompted merely by ethical or economic motives in the communication of their feelings to other men. And is there in fact any point at which one can say that the æsthetic activity has ceased, and the practical activity begun? Are they even very widely different in nature? It is surely impossible that a poem or any part of a poem can be created without a choice of words; if such poetry existed it would be a poetry without music, if not without imagery. The poetic intuition and the choosing of the words must be one and the same act, similarly the pictorial intuition and the choosing of forms and colours. The putting down of the words on paper, the copying of them, and their translation into print, have admittedly nothing to do with the creation of the poem; but they can hardly be said even to be part of its "extrinsecation," for this was completed as soon as the words were chosen. In the case of a picture the "extrinsecation" is probably not complete until the paint has been applied. But this does not mean that the artist's brushwork is a subsequent activity; for the vision and its realisation on canvas must be identical. When an artist expresses his inspiration in terms of paint there can be no *consciousness* of practical activity, that is to say, there can be no *effort* of will, or the inspiration, the vision, would immediately be suffocated, and his artistic expression would degenerate into mere craftsmanship. Yet the practical activity, the act of will, must nevertheless have taken place, for a change in matter has been effected, as the canvas bears witness. There must have been some actuality of will, though of a will, it is true, different in order from that which we usually associate with the term volition. We can only conclude therefore that the creation of a work of art is the expression of some form of will.

---

(1) See footnote on p. 6.

Emphasis must be laid on the fact that this form of will is spontaneous, unconscious rather than volitional, deliberate. This means that it is an expression of something higher than mere individual effort. And in this respect we have quoted Shelley's dictum : " No man can say, ' I will write poetry ' " ; for the stress is equally well placed on the ' I ' as on the ' will.' For this reason, no poem can be judged as though it were a moral *effort.* But since the successful treatment of a moral subject-matter involves moral feeling, it is difficult to think that there is not some relation between the morality, in the ordinary sense, of the subject-matter, and the morality, in our sense of the word, of the poetic will which that treatment expresses. As this bears directly on Croce's position, however, it will be well to see how the matter is viewed by him.

In the *Breviario di Estetica* this same point is dealt with. " An artistic image," he says, " may represent an act which is worthy of moral praise or blame ; but the image itself, as a mere image (' *in quanto immagine* '), is open neither to moral praise nor blame." (1) No one would deny that a mere image cannot be ethically right or wrong. But does the art lie in this ' mere image ' ? Croce is surely substituting an abstract part for the concrete whole. He is treating as art itself that one quality of it by which it is distinguishable from the other mental activities. The nature of art does not lie in its mere imagery, but in the whole activity of mind which creates that imagery. There is of course no question that the morality or immorality of an act, regarded as an act in itself in abstraction from the work of art portraying it, is of no æsthetic consequence. Similarly, the differential æsthetic quality of the work of art, its technical character that is to say, taken in complete abstraction from any subject which it may represent, can in no sense be judged moral or immoral. And the reason is that the moral and the æsthetic being two different expressions of human activity, the one expression cannot possibly be judged in terms of the differential quality of the other. But since both are said to be expressions of one thing, it is natural to suppose that in that one thing may be found some more fundamental standard, according to which the more significant values of each may be determined. Thus, in the instance cited by Croce, if the ethical value of the act has no connection

(1) *Breviario di Estetica,* p. 18.

with the technical value of the work of art portraying it, the reality of the act in itself, as an act, must yet be related in some way with the reality of the creation of the work of art. In the case of the drama, which is most intimately concerned with the actions of men, it is often said that the poet assumes the reality of those actions in himself in order to recreate them. Moreover, if there be any deep moral truth in the ethical judgment, that truth must be traceable in the reality of the act itself; we must suppose, therefore, that in as far as the reality of the act is present in the poet's mind in his recreation of it, that quality of it which gave rise to the ethical judgment in question will also find some sort of re-creation in the work of art, or that it will at least have some influence on its quality.

A sufficient example is afforded by the story of Francesca da Rimini in the 5th Canto of the Inferno, alluded to by Croce in this particular passage. (1) Now it should be clear at once that there can be no question of treating this happening as a mere instance of uxorial infidelity; for to defend art from the law-court is not the same thing as to dissociate æsthetics from morality. Such a treatment would be an abstraction concerning ethical science alone, not moral judgment. What we must ask is, on the one hand, how moral or immoral should we judge the occurrence related by Dante to be, if it presented itself to us in ordinary life, and, on the other hand, what would be the relation between this judgment and the value of the poem itself.

Now there can be little doubt that, on hearing of this as an actual event in life, any feeling of moral repulsion we might entertain for Francesca's relations with Paolo would be very greatly outweighed by pity at their fate and disgust at the selfish and cruel vengeance of Gianciotto Malatesta. The balance, and it seems much more than the balance, would surely be restored. The fearful punishment which overtook the two lovers would surely swallow up the blame. And it must be a false moral judgment which fails to take account, not only of the punishment, but of the full nature of the wrong committed, its mode, its significance; the involuntariness of the deed, the helplessness, the innocence almost, of those whom we think of, not as culprits, but only as victims—their impotence, their pitiful unawareness:—

"Soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto."

---

(1) *Breviario di Estetica*, p. 18.

So we come to the poem itself; for the poem and the event are one. And it is a poem which we can only think of as one vibrant with moral feeling.

For is it to be supposed that the mere recital of a guilty act would make good poetry? What would be the effect of the Paolo and Francesca story, however beautifully told, if the event were circumscribed to the expression of a sensual desire? There is no reason to suppose that a poem could not be made of the subject; but there is every reason to believe that artistically it would bear no comparison with what Dante has produced. How does the story begin?

"Amor, che al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
Prese costui della bella persona
Che mi fu tolta; e il modo ancor m'offende.
Amor, che a nullo amato amar perdona,
Mi prese del costui piacer si forte,
Che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.
Amor condusse noi ad una morte:
Caina attende chi vita ci spense."

It is like the black wind of fate, whirling the unfortunate lovers along, and sobbing as it whirls—until, as though in sudden and fearful relief, it sweeps down into the abyss and descends upon the traitor whose crime no pity can absolve.

What, indeed, would be the poetical effect of the dozen lines or so in which the actual occurrence is related, if we were ignorant of its terrible consequences, and had not present in our minds the whole significance of Francesca's attitude; her sadness, her consciousness of innocence, her almost defiant loyalty to him who suffered with her and whom she still loves? There is a rebellion in the theme. It is weakness inarticulate against the power of wrong; it is the cry of the sparrow as the hawk swoops down upon its young. And what is Dante's own comment on what he has just heard?

The last four lines of the canto—no simpler thoughts were ever penned—sufficiently reveal the volume of his mind; there is no question, no argument.

"Mentre che l'uno spirto questo disse,
L'altro piangeva si, che di pietade
Io venni men cosi com'io morisse;
E caddi come corpo morto cade."

VI.

"As to the poetic character itself . . ." writes Keats, (1) "it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. It has as much delight in conceiving a Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet." Poets have always scorned or rebelled against conventional morality. There is a pedantry in ethics which repels the genial mind. The Inferno is greater than the Paradise, it is said, and Satan than all the angels of Heaven. A Iago may be sublime where an Imogen is only pretty. But this only confirms what we have been saying; for that which is important is not the form of the deed but the nature of the doing, and what is sublime remains always and unchangeably greater than what is pretty. Nor is the creative labour of the poet open to moral censure, for as Keats exclaims: "it is not itself—it has no self." Poetry is not the effort of will, but the freedom of it.

A more deliberate plea for the moral greatness of art might have been put forward in the case of tragedy. Nor does the familiar definition of Aristotle come amiss. Tragedy in fact has always borne the trace of its religious parentage; something of the ceremony and the discipline has lingered on, and of no great tragic poem can it be said that it is not profoundly moral. Shall we say of the Shakespearian drama that it is no more than an æsthetic intuition? Shall we say of Shakespeare the poet that he cared nothing for what was good, and only desired to create something which should be beautiful? Morality would be a small thing if it remained fettered to our conscious purposes; for there is a greater purpose in us than that which makes itself aware. It is not true that the poet has no traffic with the man. The author of Hamlet may have known what it was to be dissolute. (2)

---

(1) *Letter to Richard Woodhouse,* Hampstead, 27 Oct., 1818.

(2) See especially Croce's chapter on Shakespeare the man and the poet, in his essay on Shakespeare in the recently published volume (*Laterza,* 1920, pp. 75–87), entitled: "Ariosto, Shakespeare e Corneille"; also the passage on page 91: "Ma nessumo osa poi giudicarlo perciò irreligioso, immorale, fatalista e pessimista . . ." etc.

What matters it? Can a man be brave who knows not what fear means? But it was no dissolute state of mind which uttered forth these words:—

> "If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw they breath in pain."

But our main argument has been to show that whatever sort of thing the utterance of poetry may be, the reply to it is no mere contemplation. It may be that neither the production of art, nor the reproduction, are speculative, nor economic in their character, nor ethical; and it may be true that they are forms of expression possessing great similarity. These distinctions, however, cannot be of much use in any artistic or literary criticism. We must be allowed to speak of content if we are to interpret at all what was originally no doubt pure form, but has been translated into something less absolute and more intelligible. The qualities which we observe in poetry; classical, romantic, lyrical, descriptive, personal, impersonal, may be relative and imperfect, they may even "reveal a philosophic emptiness when they attempt to resolve themselves into clear definitions" (1)—yet the use of them may involve less likelihood of abstraction, may even be ultimately more philosophic, since partially to suggest what things are true is perhaps more valuable than completely and finally to assert what things are not true.

We have assumed rather than shown that the most important thing in literary criticism is the determination of values. But importance being itself a matter of value, our premise remains as assumption; for the ultimates of value cannot be proved. It will, however, be generally admitted that a philosophy which indicates in some way the nature of such ultimates will have greater possibility in application where this aspect, if it indeed be no more than an aspect, of literary criticism is concerned, than one which is more purely idealistic in standpoint. In illustration of this we have attempted to set up against the criterion of expressiveness that standard which seems to be inherent in what might be called the fundamental instincts of literary criticism.

---

(1) *Estetica*, p. 81.

Yet in doing so we have omitted to explain the importance of the former, not as a norm of poetic value, but as a test of poetic validity. For, if creation and response are different, there must nevertheless be a correspondence between them. What we pretend to judge is the work of art, that is the state of mind which produced it; and it is for the very reason that our reproduction differs from that state of mind, that we find it continually necessary to test the correspondence between it and the work of art. Thus we ask ourselves if the words and rhythm of the poem, or the colour and form of the picture, are indeed 'expressive,' and if what we have been feeling is, so to speak, contained in them, and is not the mere revel of our imagination. In this way we perceive, but hardly recreate, that peculiar vitality of great poetry which we call form, for we are made aware of its presence, nothing more. It is like a recognition; but a recognition where two men pass on—there is no greeting. It is negative rather than positive: it tells us that here there is no poetry, nor here, nor here; though it also tells us that *there* is poetry, where the poetry is grand, and that *there* is poetry, where it is mean and pitiful, and sometimes alas! that *there* is poetry, where there is no poetry at all.

If we would know what manner of thing a poem is, its status, its rank, its dignity, whether it be noble or pleasing, great or small, if we would understand it, if we would be certain of it—we must appeal to a higher court, a court where ultimately all questions are tried, than whose law few things are more inscrutable, than whose decisions few things more weighty and evident. And this, though a higher, is no seldom and mysterious thing. It is not privileged or exclusive, not wrapped in purple, not seen at intervals and in solemnity. It is common and ordinary; too ordinary for us to acknowledge it, too common for us to remark its absence. We may deny it with our lips, but it is crying out in our heart. We may forget it, but we by it are never forgotten. Upon it, like all the storming of the elements, our rage, our selfishness, our sorrow, our despair beat down; but it still grows, unnoticed and unknown. The winds of heaven gave it birth; it flowers in dark places, and its sweet odour fills our mind. We would illumine it with thought—we would make it a vision, a reality; but like the shadow of a vision, it has fled.

---

14 DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED
LOAN DEPT.
This book is due on the last date stamped below, or on the date to which renewed.
Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

JUL 10 1971 2 0
IN STACKS
FEB 7 1967
REC'D LD
MAR 27 '67 -11 AM
APR 10 1967
REC'D LD
SEP 9 71-1 PM 0 0
REC'D LD
JUN 22 1967
IN STACKS
JUL 6 1967 10
SEP 23'67 -8 AM
OCT 22 1971 0 6
REC'D LD OCT 18 71-8 AM 65
LOAN DEPT.
LD 21A-60m-7,'66
(G4427s10)476B
General Library
University of California
Berkeley

YB 105

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES

C045407045

479609

B3614
C74S7

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY