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THE INSTRUMENTS OF ORACULAR EXPRESSION

Romanticism fabricated a poet of vast oracular powers largely from superstitious notions and suspicious philosophies which the Renaissance had gathered up somewhat by chance with the rational part of the Graeco-Roman legacy. The model was surely an imposture and, historically considered, a scandal. Seer, sage, prophet, mage—the pretensions varied, but all were titles to transcendent disclosure in times increasingly committed, at least officially, to a unified scientific view. That the poet could be confirmed to any degree in this anachronistic role was probably owing to the circumstance that the general cultural reflex following the Enlightenment reawakened widespread interest in those dark and excluded passages of the human spirit which mystics and seers were thought to frequent. Poets who pretended to voyance benefited from the muffled but persistent rumor of profound mysteries accessible to the high priests of Kabbala and the Corpus Hermeticum, to Illuminists, Rosicrucians, and Neopythagoreans. Western Europe had never ceased to acknowledge, even in such unlikely periods as the later Middle Ages, the aboriginal priestly and prophetic functions of the poet; but romanticism contrived—out of occultism and neoplatonism, antirationalism and anticlassicism—such a warrant for unabashed oracular saying as Antiquity had scarcely imagined. While

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perhaps none of the romantics was actually prepared to grant the poet his ancient powers in full measure, few seemed inclined to diminish the stature of the heroic abstraction, who symbolically contested the claims of naturalism and positivism.

The pretensions of the romantics to such wisdom as oracles possess focused attention on revelation rather than on quality of expression; and modern critics, inclined in the main to support this emphasis, have busied themselves considerably more with interpretation than with stylistic or rhetorical inquiry. It may be that the enduring merit of romantic poets consists in profound insights and not in the mastery of language; and yet their discernible ideas are not in the last half of the twentieth century impressive either as philosophy or as psychology. But to suggest that the form of romantic expression may be, on the whole, more significant than the cognitive part is to appear, on the one hand, to ignore a great deal of slack and imprecise verse and, on the other, to discount such high truths as inspiration supposedly draws down. Whatever the merit of romantic claims to knowledge (and these continue to be stoutly asserted), the language of inspiration has its own peculiar interest and all the more so in the nineteenth century because poets conspicuously neglected to answer whether the gift of the muses included forms of expression as well as of thought.[1] In scattered theoretical conjectures, however, the romantics set thought and expression in a highly problematic relationship and created enduring uncertainties about the perception of verbal properties.

I.

The romantics, in truth, seldom invoked the muses but rather looked for inspiration to the inner light and the great book of nature. In reclaiming the ancient status of the poet, they signally ignored the disabilities which superstition had laid upon voyants[2]

[1] In the *Moralia* (397B-D, 404B), Plutarch recorded a not altogether serious discussion of the relation of inspiration to expression, in which it was concluded that deity provided the inspiration for, but not the language of, oracular utterance.

[2] See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, London and New York, 1958, pp. 13 f.; Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, New York, 1952, p. 78.

and proposed out of superior personal powers to make manifest, in Carlyle's resonant phrase, the "sacred mystery of the Universe." It may have been that even so early as Hesiod the muses were only a rich metaphor for the inexplicable creative impulses in man, but they constituted a self-effacing warrant for utterances which surpassed normal human powers. So considered, his *Theogony* was not so much a personal enterprise as a divine mission: "and they [the muses] plucked and gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy olive; a marvellous thing, and breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and things that were aforetime . . ." (11. 30-33; Loeb trans.) Two and a half millennia later, the poet was no longer the mouthpiece of the muses but often an approximation of the demigod.[3] William Blake, perhaps the first of the modern oracular poets, was surely less presumptuous than some of his nineteenth-century successors, and yet his seer appears to have had access to the deepest wisdom;

> Hear the voice of the Bard!
> Who Present, Past, & Future, sees;
> Whose ears have heard
> The Holy Word
> That walk'd among the ancient trees . . .

This is not a passive communicator of divine intelligence but an autonomous voice of doom and destiny, guardian of the Logos and hence of the mysteries emanating from that ambiguous and ubiquitous Stoic concept. Blake's preposterous claim insulates oracular poetry against either critical or philosophical inspection: inasmuch as inspiration is incontestable and the Word impeccable, the Bard's expression is a proper subject only for rapt attention.

The Socratics usurped for philosophers the authority to utter cosmic generalizations and understandably contested the credentials of those competitive classes of sayers, the poets and Sophists. While the Sophists received, perhaps undeservedly, the enduring name of public deceivers, the poets were substantially denied integrity when sane and sanity when authentically oracular. What virtue the poet possessed, the *Phaedrus* (245 A) made plain, he

[3] Cf. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, London, 1935, pp. 208 f.

possessed at the expense of personal autonomy: "And a third kind of possession and madness comes from the Muses. This takes hold upon a gentle and pure soul, arouses it and inspires it to songs and other poetry . . . But he who without the divine madness comes to the doors of the Muses, confident that he will be a good poet by art, meets with no success, and the poetry of the sane man vanishes into nothingness before that of the inspired madman." (Loeb trans.)[4] In the Republic (X), the sane poet, represented as a mere imitator, is denied the ability to discriminate between truth and falsity and hence the ability to grasp reality. While prophecy seems to have been very anciently associated with madness, the notion of the *furor poeticus* arose perhaps as late as the fifth century.[5] Invoked together, these superstitions served Greek rationalism by limiting the personal powers of the type of the poet-priest-prophet, exemplified by the mythical Orpheus. Socrates' seeming flippancy suggests considerable skepticism of inspiration, if not of the gods. Not less importantly for romantic theory, his argument thrusts a shrewd barrier between inspiration and conscious art.

Socrates' insistence that the mantic entails the manic, though doubtless a self-serving limitation on pretentious poets, raised indirectly the general question of the warrant for speech of whatever kind. For the Greeks of the fifth and fourth centuries, language, yet invested with magical potency, was an instrument useful not merely for communication but for effecting remote and even perilous results. Madness tended as a necessary condition to vouch for inspiration and at the same time to relieve the poet of personal responsibility for his speech. On the other hand, manifest artfulness minimized inspiration and raised the question of imposture. The early romantic preference for simple expression, as opposed to rhetorical virtuosity, probably owed something to a felt need to give evidence of ingenuousness and thereby to authenticate the products of vision. Simple, though not necessarily clear, expression appears to have had a long-standing association with inspired speech, as the Heraclitean fragment No. 79 suggests: "The Sibyl with raving mouth

[4] Cf. Ion (533D-534E) and *Laws* (719); Longinus, *On the Sublime*, VIII 4.

[5] E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951, pp. 70, 82; E. N. Tigerstedt, "*Furor Poeticus*: Poetic Inspiration in Greek Literature before Democritus and Plato," *JHI*, XXXI (1970), 163-78.

utters solemn, unadorned, unlovely words, but she reaches out over a thousand years with her voice because of the god in her."[6] Much romantic theorizing about imagination and inspiration seems in historical perspective to have been an effort to produce a plausible substitute for the divine source of oracular utterance and thus a warrant for expression which, otherwise considered, arose inexplicably and tended uncertainly. Emerson left in "Instinct and Inspiration" an oblique acknowledgment of the problem along with a solution which could have been enlightening to few: "The poet works to an end above his will, and by means, too, which are out of his will . . . The muse may be defined, *Supervoluntary ends effected by supervoluntary means.*" While there is no suggestion of madness, Emerson's poet is not altogether his own man. The statement is significant of the confusions and contradictions encountered by nineteenth-century theorists in attempting to recover a distant mythic speaker and therewith such oracular presumptions as rationalism contested.

Western literary tradition seems not, at first glance, to have been much affected by the Socratic reservations, for every succeeding period reconfirmed the poet in his exalted functions.[7] Actual practice, however, was largely governed by imitation theory and by the Horatian proprieties, which, though variously construed, probably had the effect of damping down oracular fervor and limiting excesses of expression. If the European poet continued to invoke the muses, he commonly maintained the posture of free agent and conscious artist. Boccaccio's *vates*, as sketched in the *Genealogia deorum Gentilium* from late classical sources,[8] lost nothing of either reason or personal freedom from enjoying divine inspiration. Poetic expression, at least until the end of the eighteenth century, answered directly to the trivium and conspicuously registered the influence of textbooks of rhetoric. As a practitioner of verbal art and thus a conscious manipulator of language, the poet lacked the presumption of infallibility afforded by inspiration and the muses and consequently stood liable to the suspicions which

[6] Trans. Philip Wheelwright, *Heraclitus*, Princeton, 1959, p. 69.

[7] Gwendolyn Bays, *The Orphic Vision: Seer Poets from Novalis to Rimbaud*, Lincoln, Nebr., 1964, p. 3.

[8] C. G. Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry*, Princeton, 1930, pp. xl f.

Antiquity entertained about rhetoricians. Yet imitation theory, stressing representation rather than creative initiation, provided a defense of sorts against charges of hubris or of imposture, though of course leaving poetry open to correction. The Middle Ages and Renaissance cannot be said to have removed the old Platonic doubts, and yet most poets of these eras were manifestly concerned to uphold virtue in language decorous and rational. Romanticism, to be sure, rejected none of the good purposes of literature; but the romantic conception of poetry as product of transcendent vision tended to free the poet from classical canons of thought and expression and from such obligations to convention (if not to objective reality) as imitation theory imposed. Claiming their freedom from the constraints which had allegedly stultified neoclassical poets, the romantics were under strong compulsion to evolve a contrasting poetics and to adopt an appropriate psychology and metaphysics. Their theoretical labors, although sometimes studied as systematic expositions, are perhaps valuable in the main for occasional insights. Yet, in attempting to be seers, they may have rediscovered ancient instruments of oracular expression and at the same time uncovered serious problems relating to the order of language.

II.

The language of romantic poetry, although varying greatly and perhaps agreeing in little, represents out of theoretical necessity some degree of rejection of the norms implicit in classical expositions of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Inspiration could not in principle be amenable to language rules of unproven universality. Nineteenth-century poets, to be sure, failed to exercise their expressive privileges to the fullest, and it remained for surrealism to demonstrate what extraordinary departures painting the inner reality might entail. Romantics were better justified than they perhaps realized in doubting the lessons of the trivium, for classical expositions of the arts of language were not only normative but, to a considerable extent, deductive. The textbooks neither reflected common usage in any historical interval nor exhausted the possible forms of expression. It is

some credit to the intellectual powers of the ancients, however, that their allocation of the facts of language were not overcome in grammar and logic until the twentieth century and in rhetoric not even until the present. Yet they wrought much less impressively with rhetoric, perhaps for the reason that it was less amenable to deductive elaboration than the other arts and was, besides, vexed with ethical perplexities. Expression theory revived all the ancient doubts about the instruments of persuasion, and the romantics, without much apparent reflection, associated them with artificiality and insincerity. If rejected in principle, rhetoric survived conspicuously in practice; and the contemned artifices can be readily illustrated in nineteenth-century verse, even if not so abundantly as in that of the Renaissance, when the old art was unashamedly acknowledged as the basis of effective writing. For the continuing confusion about the character and potentiality of rhetoric, classical philosophers were somewhat to blame; but for reasons not entirely clear poets and critics tended to accept uncritically the dubious notions by means of which the art was originally prejudiced. Although it is not to be supposed that the nineteenth century could have given decisive answers to the ultimate questions posed by rhetoric, even superficial inquiry might have raised serious doubts about the literary consequences of inspiration.

While rhetoric as a complete art of composition survived flamboyantly in nineteenth-century oratory, it seems to have signified for the purposes of poetry chiefly elocution or style and the decorative employment of the figures. This was the part of rhetoric which literature incontestably shared with oratory and the part which philosophy has usually viewed with suspicion. In the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (III.x.34), Locke had expressed the persisting opinion that figurative language, though not a fault in matter designed to give pleasure, was inappropriate to factual discourse.[9] Examined in the context of doubts about the figures, Wordsworth's wavering discussion of language in the "Preface" (1800) is understandable; but to forgo personified abstractions and otherwise efficacious expressions which inferior poets of the eighteenth century had abused

[9] Cf. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I. 4, 8; T. L. Peacock, "The Four Ages of Poetry"; R. W. Emerson, "Divinity School Address" (1838).

was not *ipso facto* to forgo rhetoric. Nor was the language of men, in which Wordsworth proposed to enshrine philosophical truth, noticeably free of the suspected artifices. If romanticism transcended neoclassicism, it was by means other than the avoidance of rhetorical furniture. Indeed, characteristic romantic poetry, unsupported by divine or pragmatic warrants for expression, could succeed by nothing if not by artfulness, however poorly that circumstance sorted with claims for the inner voice. The romantics actually were far less concerned to deny art than to reconcile it with inspiration. This feat can perhaps be accomplished in a number of varyingly plausible ways, but Baudelaire's is particularly interesting inasmuch as it identifies at least one rather important advantage provided by the mystical philosophies for romantic theory: "Chez les excellents poëtes, il n'y a pas de métaphore, de comparaison ou d'épithète qui ne soit d'une adaptation mathématiquement exacte dans la circonstance actuelle, parce que ces comparaisons, ces métaphores et ces épithètes sont puisées dans l'inépuisable fonds de l'*universelle analogie*, et qu'elles ne peuvent être puisées ailleurs."[10] The doctrine of correspondences and the poet's ability to read the signs accepted, poetic expression is as innocent as the sibyl's utterances—even if it exemplifies all the places, schemes, and tropes of the whole art of rhetoric.

Much the same question about the source of the tropes which Baudelaire answered so very confidently—and sophistically—George Campbell had considered in the previous century without mystical bias and, perhaps accordingly, with more genuine insight into the character of figuration. While not pursued to a significant theoretical conclusion, his proposition marked an advance simply for associating the instruments of poetic production with normal mental activity: "Having now discussed what was proposed here concerning tropes, I shall conclude with observing that in this discussion there hath been occasion, as it were, incidentally to discover—that they are so far from being the inventions of art, that, on the contrary, they result from the original and essential principles of the human mind . . ."[11] The eighteenth century doubtless lacked psychological theory adequate to support

[10] *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Yves Florenne, Paris, 1966, III, 573.

[11] *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, III, 1.

elaboration of this notion, and Campbell contented himself with a general remark about the problem: "But as to the tracing of those figures to the springs in human nature from which they flow, extremely little hath as yet been attempted." The matter was so little pursued that H. W. Wells could observe early in this century as introduction to a study of poetic metaphor: "Scholarship has here advanced little beyond the work of the classical rhetoricians."[12] A few years later, Paul Valéry rediscovered the same defect in scholarship and issued a sharper complaint: "Que si je m'avise à présent de m'informer de ces emplois, ou plutôt de ces abus du langage, que l'on groupe sous le nom vague et général de 'figures,' je ne trouve rien de plus que les vestiges très délaissés de l'analyse fort imparfaite qu'avaient tentée les anciens de ces phénomènes 'rhétoriques.'"[13] It was not, of course, correct to say that the poetic uses of figuration had been entirely neglected, for the figures engaged the attention of that considerable number of European scholars who practiced stylistics. Stylistics, however, was then, as earlier, occupied with the differentiae of individual and period styles and not ordinarily with linguistic features in the abstract. Valéry was entirely correct in supposing that analysis of the figures, considered as mental phenomena, had not been accomplished.

Traditional rhetoricians regarded figurative language as an embellishment and thus a departure from the norm,[14] calculated to saturate any alleged truth statement with feeling conducive to audience acceptance. To be sure, Aristotle praised metaphor as an aid to effective discourse,[15] and the medieval Church considered extended metaphor, or allegory, a proper garment for divine wisdom. Nonetheless, the belief persisted that figures were somehow verbal aberrations or, as George Puttenham thought, "in a sorte abuses or rather trespasses in speach, because they passe the ordinary limit of common vtterance, and be occupied of purpose to deceiue the eare and also the minde . . ."[16] Far from excepting metaphor and allegory from this generali-

[12] *Poetic Imagery*, New York, 1924, p. 2.

[13] "Questions de Poésie," *NRF*, XLIV (Jan.-March, 1935), 64.

[14] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, IX.i.4-5; *De rhetorica ad Herennium*, IV.xxxi.

[15] *Rhetoric*, III.ii.9.

[16] *The Arte of English Poesie*, III.vii.

zation, he placed them at the head of a list of examples which included aenigma, paremia, ironia, sarcasmus, and hyperbole. Basic to the identification of the figures was the assumption that difference of form entailed difference of effect, and Puttenham acknowledged this circumstance by rendering the Greek terms as epithets descriptive of their discrete functions. His analyses, however, scarcely touched the fundamental questions about the production and perception of figures or, indeed, advanced understanding of their relation to thought much beyond the point at which the ancients left off. In the first century A. D., Demetrius had accounted for the power of allegory by reference to the fear and trembling which obscure and suggestive expression evoked.[17] Quintilian had supposed that hyperbole proved attractive for the reason that no one is content with the exact truth.[18] Eighteen hundred years later Campbell was unable to improve on such superficial explanations, citing synecdoche, for example, as a trope which produced vivacity by reason of fixing on the most interesting part of a subject.[19] The same defect of general theory is conspicuous in Wells, who assessed the effect of the "sunken image," defined as a mere suggestion of metaphor, in vague and affective terms: "It invigorates, elevates and ennobles the language of Shakespere, and makes poignant the lines of Spenser."[20] Conjectures such as these betray the original and largely uncorrected bias of the *ars rhetorica*: forms of expression were classified and illustrated from exemplary authors for pedagogical purposes and without much concern for their effect on the shape of perception.

To judge from a rather indecisive discussion of tropes and figures at the beginning of the ninth book of the *Institutio oratoria,* Quintilian was disinclined to allow to figuration any function other than unselectively exciting the feelings. He dismissed in passing the contemporary opinions that the figures relate to unitary emotions and, more importantly, that cognitive

[17] *On Style,* II.100-101.

[18] *Inst. orat.,* VIII.vi.75.

[19] *The Philosphy of Rhetoric,* III.i.2. Baudelaire, III, 600, placed high value on hyperbole and apostrophe "puisque ces formes dérivent naturellement d'un état exagéré de la vitalité."

[20] Op. cit., p. 227. Cf. Sister Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language,* New York, 1947, pp. 288 f.

contents are substantially altered by figuration. In the orator's view, thought is largely impervious to the various embellishments required by persuasion—"For the same things are often put in different ways and the sense remains unaltered though the words are changed." (Loeb trans.)[21] Whether Quintilian divined the implications of the contrary—that is, the unity of thought and expression—is of course unknowable; but he can scarcely have failed to realize that to allow the figures an integral (and hence modifying) function in discourse exposed the art of oratory (and poetry no less) to attack by the philosophers. Considered as mere ornaments, the figures might have been supposed to obstruct rational process in some degree; but considered as actual forms of thought, they celebrated and exploited all those irrational proclivities of mind which philosophy was dedicated to overcoming. Rhetoric could be a sanitary art only so long as it answered to philosophy,[22] but logic could not in Antiquity or afterward be drawn so as to do justice to figurative language.

Whereas the integrity of rhetoric in the rationalist tradition required the theoretical separation of thought and figuration, romantic pretensions required their organic relation. Embellishing the products of inspiration, even though for good and worthy purposes, could be scarcely less than tampering with the order of divine saying. But accepted as integral to the poetic process, the figures, which were sometimes viewed as abuses of language, became by the same token abuses of mind. Rationalism had stood in no danger from the precept that expression should fit thought much like a glove, though the glove might be so ornate and complex as to obscure the hand. The necessary organicism of romantic theory, however, dissolved the distinction between hand and glove and thus implicated poetic vision as never before with the instruments of its expression. The language of poetry, insofar as it depended on figuration and thereby departed from supposed norms of discourse, appeared to be a mode of saying which in principle challenged syllogistic reasoning and thus the criteria for good sense incorporated in traditional expositions of logic.[23] Oracular poets from Blake to Yeats contested

[21] *Inst. orat.*, IX.i.16.

[22] Cf. Cicero, *De inventione*, I.i.

[23] See Elizabeth Sewell, *The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History*, London, 1960, pp. 30-33.

the claims of positivists and naturalists to account adequately for the experiential world; but they were not at the same time prepared to maintain on acceptable theoretical grounds that their own intuitive mode of knowing entailed a mode of saying which departed radically from scientific discourse and most conspicuously through figuration. While surrealism ultimately allowed language free rein to celebrate the irrational aspects of experience, early English romantics could not without serious embarrassment fully acknowledge their dependence on artifices long associated with deception or overtly challenge the logical model of thought upheld by rationalism. Constrained by the doctrine of inspiration from separating thought from expression,[24] they meant nonetheless to imitate Sidney's "right popular Philosopher" and accordingly could not allow, without confessing irrationality, that figuration provided the models to which their higher truths conformed. It was thus one thing to reject decoration as false art and quite another to accept such figurative language as poetry necessarily uses as truly commensurate with experience.

If rhetoric entailed manipulation of language in the interest of persuasion, logic entailed the ordering of language according to an axiomatic system which could not in principle accommodate the vagaries of the poetic imagination. While Aristotle's *Organon* provided nothing resembling a description of actual mental process but only a collocation of rules for determining the validity of propositions, it in effect defined right reason for purposes of discourse and imposed norms of rational expression upon poets no less than upon other speakers. Between Virgil and Gray, poets admitted to no difficulty in registering excesses of spirit, but their ordering of language answered much less to the actual jumble of perceiving and conceiving than to rules of reason. *Elocutio* excepted, the rhetorics were through and through logical, and the figurative forms of even this problematic division were fenced off from thought content by the theory of decoration. The nineteenth century, as Thomas De Quincey remarked in his essay "Rhetoric," tended to identify the old art of persuasion with gaudy figuration, although the figures were the great source

[24] In the *Biographia Literaria*, chap. 1, Coleridge may be supposed to have affirmed the inseparability of thought and expression, though in truth his remarks are indecisive.

of embarrassment to that controversial art. They were an even greater embarrassment to the poets inasmuch as their theory committed them to the identification of thought with expression and thus to a mode of saying which to the extent that it utilized figures implicitly contested rules of reason. In the "Preface" (1800), Wordsworth seems to have recognized the problem and to have elected to stay with the rational tradition. While inclined to believe that the language of the poet cannot "differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel vividly and see clearly," he yet supposed that a poet might "use a peculiar language when expressing his feelings for his own gratification, or that of men like himself." The question of contradiction aside, Wordsworth apparently concluded that the form of expression, whether oracular or otherwise, ought not to depart from the rational order: "Unless, therefore, we are advocates for that admiration which subsists upon ignorance, and that pleasure which arises from hearing what we do not understand, the poet must descend from this supposed height: and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves." The antirational character of the romantic stance considered, this is a surprising statement; it supposes that impulses from vernal woods can be rendered according to rules of reason and in relatively transparent language. While Wordsworth doubtless justified his affection for sonorous general statements and his ambition to be taken as a poet-philosopher, he disavowed the very means by which seers have commonly sought to make the ultimate mysteries visible. Neither Blake nor Shelley was so disposed to dilute the voice of inspiration, nor, of course, the *symbolistes*; but these last considered that men are most illuminated by what surpasses their understanding.

Poetic theory and poetic style assuredly vary reciprocally, but neither the actual mental processes which may be said to cause poetry nor the perception of expressive features can be shown to vary in consequence of theory or other accidental circumstance. As far as anyone could ever know, the habits of mind which poetry uses have not changed since Homer, even though, as supposed, the scientific view of the world has largely replaced the mythopoeic. Far from dissipating the mysteries of poetic production, theory has functioned somewhat to support practical

norms but chiefly to define and rationalize the relation of poetry to various conceptions of the real. Thus, nothing significant for composition but rather some degree of commitment to metaphysical realism is reflected in Pope's classical conception of expression as the "dress of thought," in Wordsworth's decision to render vision in the language of common understanding, and, indeed, in Eliot's exposition of the "objective correlative." Practically considered, this dichotomizing insulates the ideational essence from the superfices of language, notably the figures, and thus confirms poetry as a conservatory of the eternal truths. While poetry is in some sense an institution of this sort, it is yet not an Academy or Lyceum and could not tolerate dialectical methods for discovering truth. Symbolist and seer, Eliot well understood the liabilities of transparent general statement and understood no less the central position of figuration in oracular utterance. The usefulness of the objective correlative for him, as for Valéry,[25] may have been to demystify the romantic sources of expression rather than to affirm the logical bias of traditional poetry. If doubtful of the "universelle analogie," Eliot characteristically demonstrated what Baudelaire regarded as an effective use of language—"Manier savamment une langue, c'est pratiquer une espèce de sorcellerie évocatoire."[26] This is nothing less than a rhetoric of mystification, which, insofar as it frustrates the abstractive process, contests the classical separation of thought and expression. Expression theory, of course, could not easily tolerate so much premeditated artfulness; even so late as Eliot poetic gift implied, a well as craft, some trafficking with the muses.

Insofar as they were mystics, the romantics could comfortably entertain the notion that the mysteries of the supernatural order which flickered briefly in periods of trance quite surpassed the powers of human utterance. As poets, however, they could not conveniently share the mystic's doubts about the capabilities of language. But if obliged to affirm the capacity of poetry to provide at least intimations of the mystic's deep insights, the poet as mystic yet could not allow that language participated in vision.

[25] See A. P. Bertocci, *From Symbolism to Baudelaire*, Carbondale, Ill., 1964, p. 68.

[26] *Op. cit.*, III, 556.

With his usual caution, Wordsworth confessed himself in "Tintern Abbey,"

> well pleased to recognize
> In nature and the language of the sense
> The anchor of my purest thoughts,

but the thoughts, though testified to by his language, are not in any indicated way responsible to it. Romanticism was capable, however, of generating from its diverse sources an entirely magical view of the function of language, as a wonderfully confused passage in *Prometheus Unbound* evidences:

> Language is a perpetual Orphic song,
> Which rules with daedal harmony a throng
> Of thoughts and forms,
> Which else senseless and shapeless were.

To Shelley at this moment, language was not the futile instrument of the poet mystified by divine splendors but the creative Word of the mage, who, through the manipulation of sign and symbol, ordered and thus mastered the mystic's shadowy realm. Mystic and mage are not entirely opposed roles, as Karl Vossler remarked;[27] and the latter gained the ascendancy, first in Victor Hugo and subsequently in the *symbolistes*, without extinguishing the former. By exploiting the magical properties of language—and most conspicuously the symbol—the seers pretended to make visible what the mystics could report only in vague terms.[28] Their claim to perception of patterns of eternity required an impressive warrant, and this much at least occultism furnished even so late as Yeats.[29] What actual treasures the distant voices brought can hardly be ascertained; but voyants were increasingly disposed to refine the language of inspiration with considerable regard for its expressive qualities. If Baudelaire, following Poe, insisted on mathematical exactitude, Mallarmé

[27] *The Spirit of Language in Civilization*, trans. Oscar Oeser, New York, 1932, pp. 4 f.

[28] See Georg Mehlis, "Formen der Mystik," *Logos*, II (1911-12), 250 F.

[29] See Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image*, London, 1957, p. 131.

counselled such stratagems as rhetoricians use, though, to be sure, in the name of Orpheus. In truth, the old, defeated philosophies, which had enabled the romantics to execute a more or less convincing revolt from the rationalist interpretation of experience, entailed a vatic posture and thus considerable equivocation about the sources of verbal art. A theory of perception which does justice to their oracular voices sorts very awkwardly with their pretensions to inspiration and revelation and exposes manipulative skills of an embarrassingly high order.

III.

The romantics, insofar as they claimed access to the supernatural, were under some obligation to bring forth new knowledge; but what they revealed, as the nineteenth century doubtless realized, was not new and not always knowledge. Poets are not, of course, barred by professional disabilities from significant discovery, and it is entirely possible that in times past novel insights into human and cosmic relations were owing to them. Nonetheless, in recorded times the demonstrable novelty of poetry has consisted in the ordering of expressive elements rather than in truth statements. Although much romantic verse has invited extensive analysis in philosophical terms, the results have been of doubtful significance for literary art and perhaps none at all for systematic philosophy. Such philosophical concepts as poets effectively used in the nineteenth century, as earlier, were great or small commonplaces,[30] and these can scarcely be reckoned the principal ground of poetic success. To discount the debt of the commonplaces to revelation is yet not to deny their poetic uses; if thought, considered as an abstractable entity, furnishes poor indications of literary achievement, the forms which thought takes may be of very great significance for what is loosely called poetic effect. The form of thought is, however, a vacuous concept unless it can be plausibly related to (and at some level identified with) the form of expression. The characteristic forms of poetic expression, as thus far identified, are largely the rhetorical form; and these, as previously indicated, can be associated

[30] See E. M. W. Tillyard, *Poetry Direct and Oblique*, rev. ed., London, 1948, pp. 39-49.

with thought only at some expense to rationality. The forms of thought pose a further difficulty inasmuch as they appear to presuppose the form-content dichotomy and thus leave the cognitive part theoretically separable from language. Yet thought is unknowable—indeed, inconceivable—without the terms of its expression;[31] it is more fruitfully regarded as process, in which ideas operate as terms of successive relations. The novelty of poetry, if not ideational, is necessarily formal; and the commonplaces, it follows, have power to move only in consequence of their figured form. Contrary to the opinion of the ancients, however, the figured forms of expression may well be the models of the actual experience of the commonplaces rather than mere verbal ornaments.

While all acoustical, ideational, and formal properties which analysis can identify in poetic discourse are *ipso facto* accessible to perception, no property or set of properties can be said to enter, by demonstrable necessity, into perception and to occasion specific consequences. Uncovered by warrantable generalizations, statements about poetic effects are of the character of subjective perceptual judgments, advanced as reasons[32] and varying in degrees of persuasiveness. If the expressive values of peculiarly poetic features cannot be objectively determined, the quality of perception is nothing predictable and, indeed, nothing knowable save as personal testimony. Impressions produced by poetic discourse vary so greatly as to permit few fruitful inferences and accordingly suggest, contrary to the assumption of at least one cultural anthropologist,[33] that the forms of perception, whether conscious or unconscious, are not equally available to all individuals. Analysis proceeds without direct reference to differences in perceptual capacity, although implicitly appealing to a well-educated reader; the allocation of facts depends on posited formal relations, which, if not entirely arbitrary, cannot be validated.[34] The defect is to a degree reparable, however, if

[31] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 4th ed., Paris, 1945, pp. 213 f.

[32] See William Righter, *Logic and Criticism*, London, 1963, p. 22.

[33] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jakobson and B. G. Schoepf, New York and London, 1963, p. 21.

[34] See my article, "Formalist Criticism and Literary Form," *JAAC*, XXIX (1970-71), 21-31.

figuration can be shown with some probability to consist in forms which are crucial for perception. Excluded on principle from scientific discourse and identified as the conspicuous differentiae of poetic language, the figures are inferentially the cause of those effects peculiar to poetry. This proposition entails neither the correlation of figures with unitary emotions nor the acceptance of a common human nature. It is compatible with the view that the forms of expression are the forms of thought, or, to do justice to the total mental and physical response, the forms of experience. So regarded, the figures are shareable perspectives which conjecturally exhaust all the forms of experience which can be articulated; and they are, accordingly, components of discourse which in perception have selective consequences. If actual experience runs in the grooves described by figuration, poetry reveals nothing so much as the perspectives from which perception orders the phenomenal world. That that should seem on reflection a world of skewed relations and absurd identifications is probably not owing to the eccentricities of poets but to the circumstance that reflection reorders perception according to the rational model. If this is indeed the case, the romantics may be said to have affirmed the quality of real experience and to have narrowed the gap which Kant held open between thought and perception.

To say that figuration in principle exhausts the forms of expressible experience is not to say that the approximately two hundred figures identified and illustrated between Antiquity and the Renaissance are either inclusive or in all cases perceptually valid. It is altogether probable that some significant forms, though noted in analysis of particular poems as novelties, have not been recognized as legitimate additions to the traditional lists; but it is even more probable that rhetoricians have multiplied distinctions beyond necessity. While experience doubtless registers repetition, for example, in considerable variety, numbering the kinds[35] very nearly to the limit of ingenuity seems as misleading as recording minute allophonic nuances in speech. On the other hand, the possibilities of irony are assuredly not exhausted by antiphrasis, paralipsis, and epitrope. Inasmuch as the rhetorics are practical rather than theoretical in character, sets of related

[35] Joseph, pp. 35-07, lists fourteen figures of repetition.

and affectively indistinguishable figures are perhaps valid as means to elegant variation, though to grant as much is to slight the question whether nuances of language bespeak nuances of thought. It is significant that modern critics, while indifferent to the nice discriminations (and bewildering terminology) of the figurists, have singled out some figures as peculiarly agreeable to poetry, most notably metaphor, irony, paradox, and ambiguity, which, it is important to recognize, may appertain to the whole as well as to the part. Although there is no obvious reason for preferring these over (say) auxesis, hyperbole, paronomasia, and simile, they may be in fact salient members of a thus far unverified class of verbal forms which describe the more important perspectives available for human experience. To state the matter in general terms, some forms—whether classified as tropes, *figurae verborum*, or *figurae sententiarum*— appear to be crucial for the shape of perception and others a matter of relative indifference. It cannot be assumed, contrary to the view of some linguists, that a verbal distinction by the fact of its discoverability is realized in experience. The significant figures, if identifiable, might be expected to connect language and experience in meaningful relations and to expose thereby the properties of the aesthetic object which effectively determine the quality of perception.

If figuration is commensurate with perception, then the world of sense impressions—the only world directly knowable—is plagued irremediably by indeterminacy, contradiction, and mutability. In representing these properties, poets, by the Platonic view, imitated not reality but mere appearance and accordingly stood condemned as falsifiers. Nonetheless, post-classical poets, although possibly more acutely aware than the ancients of the multifarious character of existence, for a good many centuries accepted and sustained an orderly and rational world picture in the best Platonic sense. Artful and resourceful manipulators of language perhaps without peers, Renaissance poets may have very nearly exhausted the formal perspectives from which the human condition can be plausibly contemplated; but for all their contriving to make manifest the complexity of the world as perceived, the rational real remained intact and supreme. In principle at least, reason ruled rhetoric, not excepting *elocutio*;[36]

[36] Joseph, p. 398.

and figuration was allowed no other virtue than dressing up the plain terms of propositional truth. The actual relation of forms of expression to experience was, of course, unaffected by the theory of decoration; but in the Renaissance—and, to be sure, in the Enlightenment—verbal display conformed to the firm logic of rational argument. While the romantics cannot be said to have generally advocated expressive license, their language in principle answered to inspiration and the problematic vagaries thereof; the figures, accordingly, acquired unprecedented and unforeseen integrity and implicitly called in question the primacy of rules of reason. It is unlikely that the romantics were ever prepared to accept the full consequences of George Campbell's conjecture that the figures "result from the original and essential principles of the human mind," for the world thereby adumbrated neither flatters the human condition nor offers much hope of improvement. Regarded simply as forms of expression and played against rational norms, such figures as paradox, irony, ambiguity, oxymoron, and antithesis may be supposed to describe the perverse and accidental quality of existence; regarded as forms of experience and models of the real, these figures shatter confidence in cosmic order and raise up the prospect of incoherence, malfunction, and irrationality in the very nature of things. Somewhat less portentous, the tropes, metonymy and synecdoche have an essentializing function and often appear to apprehend the essential real; yet knowledge of essence thus won entails deformation and even caricature of simple appearance. Analogy, by contrast, seems perfectly innocent, knitting up the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms in fruitful and logically agreeable one-to-one relations. But if analogy is the road even to scientific insight, the rampant metaphors of the poets call common sense in doubt and collapse the nice partitions of objective viewing. Martin Foss some years ago remarked the potentiality of metaphor for simultaneous illumination and obfuscation.[37] While the poets freely confound the kingdoms of kind, animizing and de-animizing, dwarfing and magnifying, their ordering of language usually seems incommensurate with their unlikely perspectives. The grammar of absurdity differs so little from the grammar of reason that the preposterous identifications and

[37] *Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience*, Princeton, 1949, p. 56.

predications of the poets in some fashion parody the standard forms of the logicians. If, however, figures are models of the perceptual real, it may be the logicians who unconsciously parody the forms of ordinary experience.

The ancients sought by exploiting the affective properties of language to make truth agreeable; the romantics sought by uttering the inspired word to make a higher truth visible. Rhetoric, as classically conceived, presupposed basic mental infirmities which could be played on by means of verbal artifice. Romanticism celebrated feeling—in effect denying the infirmities—but barred poets from practicing on perception with features of language which smacked of persuasion. If it is granted that early and late their revealed truths consisted in recast commonplaces which ordinarily required neither defense nor extensive exposition, then it can be accepted that the practical concern of the romantic seers was not persuasion but creating problematic occasions without recourse to dialectical methods. While revelation seemingly disavows such aids as rhetoric uses, commonplaces, considered simply as abstract statements, have small affective virtue. Wordsworth proposed to generate interest by the "coloring of imagination," and other romantics cultivated suggestiveness and *étrangeté* apparently for the same purpose. All things considered, their frequent success can have been owing only to their magnifying, by whatever means, the projective tendencies of perception. If so, such liberties of expression as poets claimed by virtue of inspiration the romantic audience matched with commensurate liberties of perception; and in the absence of rational norms there were no obvious restraints on the energies of re-creation. While the romantics staked a good deal on the power of suggestive imagery, it is yet likely that projection is most active when perception encounters firm, but nonetheless problematic, *Gestalten*, that is, such relations as figures describe. Poe is supposed to have commenced with form, allowing sense to emerge in consequence of suggestion;[38] but it is observable that his formal perspectives are often so ill defined that sense is in doubt. In that romantic poetry which best sustains oracular pretensions and creates accordingly the impression of deep

[38] See Hugo Friedrich, *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik von Baudelaire bis zur Gegenwart*, Hamburg, 1956, p. 38.

wisdom, it is fair to say that form is sense; and figuration, both of the part and of the whole, provides the only practical formulating alternative to the logical order which romanticism generally eschewed. These circumstances perhaps explain Valéry's unelaborated acknowledgment, "What is 'form' for anyone else is 'content' for me."[39] While the brain, as Anton Ehrenzweig maintains with the *Gestalttheoretiker*, "projects that definite configuration into the chaos which we perceive as the forms and shapes around us,"[40] verbal conglomerates achieve *Prägnanz* (and hence affective success) only as the forms of expression confirm the forms of experience. If perception can discover in a verbal system only what it has placed there, "il faut," as Maurice Merleau-Ponty remarked, "que l'objet perçu renferme déjà la structure intelligible qu'elle dégage."[41] Whatever the claims of the romantics to vision, it is apparent that their oracular performances best succeeded when figuring the familiar perplexities of human experience. In an important sense they made truth visible, although the paralogical order defined by their figures offered no means of resolving the perplexities which the truth consisted in.

IV

The successful oracular poems of the romantics cannot in reason be discriminated from or, indeed, preferred over, their poetic expositions of metaphysical and psychological theory if what purports to be revelation is presumed to rule art. Considered as testimonials to transcendent vision, Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and "Immortality Ode" are not qualitatively different; and their value derives less from the artful manipulation of language than from supposed philosophical insights. By maintaining a philosophical focus, critics have directed attention to a considerable body of discursive verse which may be said to rationalize rather than to demonstrate oracular speaking. Poems

[39] *The Art of Poetry*, trans. Denise Folliot. Bollingen Series, XLV. 7, New York, 1958, p. 183.

[40] *The Psycho-Analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing*, 2d ed., New York, 1965, p. 22.

[41] *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

which illustrate the affective potentialities of the oracular attitude, while scarcely neglected, have been studied more often than not as ideological contents documenting systems of thought. The circumstance that the "Tyger," for example, is most apparently a formal achievement is considerably obscured if the dark antinomy lurking therein is explicated by reference to Blake's hermetic or political lucubrations. If, however, the autonomy of the poem is granted, the mystery turns out to be a commonplace perplexity which has been wonderfully energized through the ordering of affective elements. The terms of the relation are good, evil, and a benevolent Creator; and the relation is both paradoxical and ironical. The symbol of the tiger rules the poem, though in consequence of investment as well as of intrinsic affective value. The succession of incantatory questions invests the symbol with sinister connotations which set Creator and creature in an equivocal relationship. The function of these questions is not precisely described by any of the interrogative figures of the rhetorics; for the oracular voice is not persuasive or demonstrative but ostensibly revelatory. Northrop Frye has defined the attitude and granted the romantic presumption: "He [the poet] is a priest of a mystery; he turns his back on his hearers, and invokes, chanting in a hieratic tongue, the real presence of the Word which reveals the mystery."[42] To reveal the mystery is not, however, to resolve it. The oracular poets succeeds by exhibiting perplexity and precluding resolution, not by devising happy equations to reconcile the jarring oppositions and incongruities of experience. The "Tyger" no more calls for answers than Villon's poem of similar construction, the "Ballade des dames du temps jadis"; both are verbalizations of forms of experience which can only be intellectualized (and hence falsified) by philosophical inquiry.

Rhetorically considered, the symbol is a verbal sign which, much like the analogical figures, posits more or less arbitrary relations between disparate entities of the material and immaterial orders; by contrast, the symbol in some romantic theory is the fruit and proof of transcendent vision, at once the means of discovering remote truth and its inviolable embodiment. While it was evident after the example of Keats that an irrational

[42] "Three Meanings of Symbolism," *YFS*, No. 9 (1912), 14.

conception of the symbol was not crucial for the uses of poetry, romantic symbolism continued to manifest a pronounced affinity for occultism.[43] Yeats has left an eloquent testimonial to the inherent potency of the symbol which, it should be remarked, accords much better with his occultist speculations than with his verse: "I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist."[44] However agreeable to the archaic societies which venerated the Word and its manipulators, this supposition is wholly unnecessary. Indeed, the ancient superstition reflected by Yeats, that the sign can somehow contain the essence and therewith the potency of its reference, diminishes the role of art, for it entails acceptance of more or less fixed symbolic values which require nothing from artifice. To be sure, romantic symbolism is not usually fixed but rather fluid, and it succeeds, if at all, by artful investment. This is not to suggest that symbols are merely neutral receptacles which owe nothing to tradition and association. Blake's "forests of the night" recall the "selva oscura" of the *Divina Commedia* and ultimately the archetypal garden defiled through human error, and the tiger inhabits the same menagerie of large and fearsome carnivores as Dante's lion, leopard, and wolf, which are the one-dimensional instruments of allegory; but it is by the relations which figuration describes, not by magical properties or established usage, that the symbols of the "Tyger" are energized. Yeats provides no obvious exceptions to the generalization that successful romantic symbols are familiar objects of perception or conception which have been charged by rhetorical means with relations significant for human experience. To take a conspicuously artful instance, the focal "rough beast" of the "Second Coming" is not antecedently determined but becomes a relational content as a direct consequence of the paradox, irony, antithesis, and auxesis which shape and fit the road down which it "slouches." The parade of ill-defined and improbable symbols through Blake's prophetic poems

[43] Bertocci, p. 18; John Senior, *The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature*, Ithaca, N. Y., 1959, p. xxiii.

[44] *Essays and Introductions*, New York, 1961, p. 49. Cf. Herman Pongs, *Das Bild in der Dichtung*, Marburg, 1927-39, II, 3 f.; Jean Danielou, "The Problem of Symbolism," *Thought*, XXV (1950), 427-30.

underscores the plain fact that *Prägnanz* is a function of aptness in the percentual object and relational complexity. And aptness is not necessarily strangeness: Edwin Muir's "The Road" and Wallace Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar" demonstrate that the largely unregarded objects of common existence are as efficacious as unicorns or even fauns. It is perhaps superfluous to dwell on the self-evident function of symbols, but the Baudelairean "forêts de symboles" have been so shrouded in mystery as to obscure the technical accomplishment of oracular speaking.

To praise the romantics for having demonstrated the capacity of the symbol for focusing complex relations is to disturb the metaphysical grounds of their expressive warrant. What inspiration somehow discovers and revelation utters is not verbal artifice but the Word, and the Word is most conspicuously the symbol. While the symbolist achievement nowhere entails "Vergöttlichung der Worte," symbolist theory can tolerate no other formulating principle; beyond reason and the paralogical order of figuration there can be no conceivable order except that provided by language infused with spirit, that is, with divine form. From the temple of nature, according to Baudelaire's sonnet "Correspondances," issue "confuses paroles"; these are sacred words, which myteriously encompass the natural and the supernatural, the profane and the divine.[45] The symbolic titles gleaned by the poet from nature both signify the correspondences between two orders of the real and effect their union. Though, as *Geistersprache*, the language of symbolism is warranted against all suspicion of absurdity, the integrity of the symbol cannot be altogether safeguarded in an age given to dissipating mystery. It is perhaps significant of concern over the pervasive analytical habit that Goethe and Coleridge in approving the symbolist mode should have opposed it to allegory;[46] for allegoria, though close kin to the symbol, is an intellectualizing figure which dissolves the perceptual real into abstract values. While distinguishable,

[45] See the valuable discussion of Herman Güntert, *Von der Sprache der Götter und Geister*, Halle, 1921, pp. 3-50.

[46] Coleridge is supposed to have created the preference for symbolism and the prejudice against allegory in the *Statesman's Manual*, though earlier Goethe had expressed much the same opinions, according to René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Criticism*, 3d ed., New York, 1956, p. 300. Yeats repeatedly denigrated allegory, as opposed to symbolism—*Essays and Introductions*, pp. 116, 146-48, 160-61.

symbolism and allegory have a common origin and a marked affinity.[47] Behind the Swedenborgian doctrine of correspondences, as behind medieval allegory, lies the neoplatonic (and occultist) assumption that the visible world figures the invisible.[48] If determinable either from context or established usage, the symbol is readily convertible to allegory; and the only cogent objection is that conversion changes the modality and thus violates the integrity of the aesthetic object. Under the circumstances, it is ironic that Goethe's *Faust* should have developed in the second part a Platonic thinness characteristic of allegory and that Coleridge with his marginal notes and occasional platitude, should have tempted his readers to allegorize the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which is in most respects an exemplary oracular production. Allegory, it is sometimes forgotten, was first a method of interpretation and only later a principle of composition. If no longer habitual, as in the Middle Ages, allegory is always available to confirm the recurrent assumption that literature bodies forth divine truth. *Geistersprache* ineluctably evokes allegorizing. The claim of the romantics to the possession of magically infused language was entailed not by the actual requirements of expression but by their oracular pretensions. Although nothing was actually lost to poetry by this awkward circumstance, in mystifying the sources and instruments of poetic production, the romantics diverted attention from their manipulative powers and from the central truths which they proved against rationalism.

The strategies employed by the *symbolistes* to create an impression of oracular speaking and at the same time to thwart allegorization resulted in a number of instructive confusions. Whereas English poets tended, at whatever risk from reductionism, to invest their symbols very fully and precisely, the French were inclined to float theirs, relatively undefined, in a sea of suggestion and musical effects. The consequence of this practice is readily apparent in Valéry's clever admission, "Mes vers ont le sens qu'on leur prête."[49] Yet the French neither early nor late renounced the old romantic obligation to make a special truth

[47] Cf. A. G. Lehmann, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France 1885-1896*, Oxford, 1950, pp. 282-86.

[48] See Edgar de Bruyne, *Etudes d'esthétique médiévale*, Bruges, 1946, II, 368-70.

[49] "Préface à un Commentaire," *NRF*, XXXIV (Jan.-June, 1930), 218.

visible. But if committed as voyants to revelation, they were committed as mages to mystification; and this difficulty embarrasses Jean Moréas' exposition of the relation of idea to image: "la poésie symbolique cherche à vêtir l'Idée d'une forme sensible qui, néanmoins, ne serait pas son but à elle-même, mais qui, tout en servant à exprimer l'Idée, demeurerait sujette. L'Idée, à son tour, ne doit point se laisser voir privée des somptueuses simarres des analogies extérieures; car le caractère essentiel de l'art symbolique consiste à ne jamais aller jusqu'à la concentration [conception?] de l'Idée en soi."[50] The result is necessarily obscurity, which is tolerable—indeed, congenial—so long as its source and thrust can be discerned. The symbolists, however, placed excessive reliance on sound and suggestion, following the dubious example of Poe; and focus, accordingly, is very often problematic—even in such brilliant exhibitions of verbal virtuosity as the "Après-midi d'un faune" and the "Cimetière marin," Unusually sensitive to acoustical values, the French have frequently testified to the pitch and cadence of experience; but Mallarmé surely exaggerated the power of verbal music, "L'air ou chant sous le texte, conduisant la divination d'ici là, y applique son motif en fleuron et coul-de-lampe invisibles."[51] He succeeded in subordinating the intelligible to the poetic sense—to employ a distinction made by Jacques Maritain[52]—but at the price of perceptual confusion. And yet obscurity could afford the hermetic secrets of the French symbolists no lasting security,[53] for allegory as explication or interpretation has always fed on obscure relations. Eliot provides an instructive contrast to the French: while cultivating their subtle harmonies and illustrating the most efficient uses of the symbol, he yet respected the allegorical mode[54] and made no apparent effort to prevent abstractions from surfacing. Perhaps the explanation is that Eliot's poetry verges on allegory

[50] Quoted from Guy Michaud, *La doctrine symboliste*, (*Documents*), Paris, 1947, p. 25.

[51] *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry, *Paris*, 1945, p. 387.

[52] *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Bollingen Series, XXXV.1, New York, 1953, p. 259.

[53] Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal*, New York, 1967, p. 164.

[54] *Selected Essays 1917-1932*, New York, 1932, pp. 204 f.

in quite obvious ways but at the same time little rewards search for obscure values. Tiresias, the seer of the "Wate Land," achieves an authentic oracular voice not so much by hinting at hermetic secrets as by reiterating what all the world knows too well. While the language is suggestive and often suggestively musical, the symbol of the wasteland is invested by a procession of paradoxes, ironies, and antitheses, that is, by the forms of widespread, if not universal, experience. Since the obscurities of the "Waste Land" are local rather than general and the figured perplexities commonplace, converting the poem to a set of unremarkable cultural propositions serves neither understanding nor aesthetic purposes.

If by some mysterious change the romantics occasionally recovered the original oracular voice—the voice of Orpheus before poetry entered on what Mallarmé considered "la grande déviation homérique"[55]—they obviously could not resurrect the audience susceptible to magical language and mantic exhibitionism. Romantic theorizing and posturing doubtless created an audience fairly tolerant of the poet in the role of seer or mage, but there is no reason to suppose that the response to the poetry owed a great deal to faith in the poet's transcendent powers. In a whimsical moment Eliot declared, "I myself should like an audience which could neither read nor write";[56] but his success with skeptical intellectuals suggests that education is no real bar to the effects peculiar to poetry. His usual strategy, though often obscured by learned allusiveness, is as simple as—and not so different from—that of the brief Middle English song, "Earth upon Earth," which by means of incantatory repetition, paronomasia, and paradox figures the reciprocal relation of man and common clay. Without occultist props, Eliot confirmed the basic romantic discovery—the continuing receptivity of mind, even in an age of science, to language which departs radically from logical order and opposes skewed perspectives to simple appearance. In the "Four Ages of Poetry" Thomas Love Peacock could dismiss poetry as an anachronism on the assumption that mind had advanced very nearly to the final Comtean stage, but the romantics

[55] See Georges Cattaui, *Orphisme et prophétie chez les poètes français 1850-1950*, Paris, 1965, p. 111.

[56] *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, London, 1933, p. 152.

proved mind as prone as ever to project irrational patterns on the phenomenal world. Against all probability, they succeeded in engaging the interest of a considerable audience by refiguring a small store of ancient and banal perplexities, such as the coincidence of opposites, unity in diversity, irrecoverable time and eternal recurrence, mutability and discontinuity, permanence and decay. For science these are not real problems and not therefore solvable, but it is doubtful if the prospect of solution affects the perception of poetry which exploits perplexity. Nor should the oracular poems which actually pretend to prophecy be thought exceptions, for poetic prophets are ordinarily cyclical theorists and accordingly project the perverse (and familiar) forms of past events into the future. Far from dissipating the mystery of the unknown, the oracular poet intones the forms of expression which appear to be the forms of experience and thus confirms the reality which unreflecting perception creates. To insist on the primacy of figuration as form is to appear to discount the independent affective value of the Baudelairean symbol and the Jungian archetype as well. If the archetype, which, of course, materializes as symbol, is a recurrent feature of (and, indeed, colors all) experience, it is necessarily commonplace and not demonstrably evocative except as a term in a significant relation. The archetype may be a necessary, but hardly a sufficient, condition of audience response. If figuration as significant relation is the essential instrument of oracular speaking (and perhaps the true measure of art), the romantics succeeded by the same and not so strange means that the *priscus poeta* used to stir the primeval throng.

The romantics confirmed the worst fears of the ancients—and more: for man, if a victim of beguiling speech, appears to cooperate enthusiastically in his own deception. It cannot be that the seers and mages succeeded in restoring the magical power attributed to language before the advent of literacy;[57] more likely, by freeing figuration of obligation to reason they were enabled to enchant man with the crooked perspectives of his own psychic history. To be sure, their achievement sometimes outrages common sense, for expression which eschews logical references cannot

[57] See J. C. Carothers, "Culture, Psychiatry, and the Written Word," *Psychiatry*, XXII (1959), 311.

in principle be distinguished from hallucination. The poets have been examined repeatedly for symptoms of dissociation—Rimbaud's "dérèglement de tous les sens"—though the consequences for art of this old shamanistic ploy are probably slight.[58] Of signal importance is the circumstance that the romantic audience—to judge from its agreeable response—could be implicated in seeming mental aberrations. There is no occasion to concur in the conjecture offered by T. B. Macaulay in "Milton," "Perhaps no person can be a poet, or can even enjoy poetry, without a certain unsoundness of mind. . ."; but there is no reason to doubt that much of the time experience runs in the eccentric patterns of the figures. To take a passage from Rilke's *Die Sonette an Orpheus* (Pt. I, No. xii) out of context: "wir leben wahrhaft in Figuren." Not only have the implications of this insight been largely ignored, but romantic poetry has often been denatured through unreflecting interpretation. To lift ideas out of their figured relations and to refer them to metaphysical systems is to change their modality and to expose poetic truths to such analysis as ordinary-language philosophers perform.[59] Yet romantic poetry is perhaps the less problematic and disturbing in consequence of the usual critical transformations, for a world structured by irony and paradox, synecdoche and metaphor is frighteningly at odds with the world located by science through empirically verifiable identifications and predications. While logical models of the external real are pragmatically superior to the relations described by the figures, figuration may be a better index to the quality of perception and thus of experience. So much accepted, the romantics may be said to have revealed the secrets not of the universe but of the inner reality, and this considerable achievement entailed as much artful contriving as ever the Sophists used.

[58] N. K. Chadwick, *Poetry & Prophecy*, Cambridge 1952, pp. 20, 61.

[59] See R. W. Hepburn, "Literary and Logical Analysis," *PhQ*, VIII (1958), 342-56.