



PROGRAMMA

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The View from 318

After a year in this office I can happily report that I am still seeing green. Even the apparent losses to this community give indications of new life and hopeful renewal for the individuals involved and communities other than or larger than this one. Professor Cronin's wife, Elaine, passed from us as the Spring semester came to a close. Students and faculty shared, as best they could, his constant support for her and prayerful vigil with her through most of the past academic year.

Shortly into the Spring term, William Frerking resigned his faculty position with the intention of joining the Benedictine community at the Priory School in St. Louis. Professor Frerking has been on leave throughout this year sharing and testing the life of that community. As one of my colleagues put it, the Benedictines simply "outprayed us." Steven Crockett who has taught with us these past two years also resigned and is headed along with at least one recent graduate of the Program into this autumn's first-year class of the Yale Law School. Both Professors Frerking and Crockett will be especially remembered for that rare combination of great intellectual power and a humble, friendly and equanimous spirit. Otto Bird, founding director of the Program, retired from teaching a few years ago; this Spring he was officially named an emeritus professor in the University and so honored at the annual President's dinner for faculty.

Recently members of our faculty were very successful in securing support for their continuing education, research and writing. Professor Michael Crowe received additional support from the National Science Foundation for completion of his already substantial manuscript on the history of the idea of extra-terrestrial intelligent life. Many of you read of his research on this topic in an article he did in an earlier issue of Programma. Professor Phillip Sloan also received NSF support for continuing his study of the origins of Darwin's concept of organic species, and Professor Linda Ferguson is the beneficiary of a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship to allow her to participate in a seminar on "Music and Technology" during the forthcoming summer at Dartmouth College.

During the past academic year faculty, students and friends of the Program have gathered nearly each month (usually on the third Thursday) for a formal lecture followed by a discussion. One of Professor Rogers' two lectures in this series appears in this issue. Other faculty of the Program who addressed the monthly assembly were Professor Sloan on "Science As A Liberal Art" and

Father Carroll on "The Beauty of the Good Life: Aesthetic Aspects of Revelation." Interesting visitors to the Program during the year included former Dean Robert Neidorf of St. John's (Sante Fe), Milton Mayer of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions and Frederick Wilhelmsen of the University of Dallas. We had some enriching and stimulating faculty seminars among ourselves. They ranged from one on Beethoven's Third Symphony to one on several of the stories from Joyce's Dubliners.

Much of the above really amounts to a partial account of the life of the Program this past year with a clear slant to the life of the faculty. This faculty was toasted and roasted nearly "to a crisp" by a lively, imaginative and extremely talented group of seniors at the annual senior-faculty dinner. It was a beautiful and fun-filled evening. Early in the evening, I was allowed a few words and included in them a reminder that the only true education is a continuing education. I had occasion then to share with the graduates as I do now with you a favorite quotation of the late Cardinal John Wright. He attributed it to Coventry Patmore.

To one who knows how to wait, all things are sooner or later revealed, on the condition that he has the courage never to deny in times of darkness the things which he himself witnessed in times of light.

The significance of good memories or memories of good was, I trust, not lost on students who, just a week before, had read the Speech at the Stone in The Brothers Karamazov.

With a nod to Thoreau, I wish you a restful and wakeful summer with many good memories to nourish good aspirations.

Walter Nicgorski
Chairman

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POETRY AND THE KINDS OF TRUTH

(On February 21, 1980, Professor Stephen Rogers of the General Program Faculty addressed the department in one of our customary assemblies in the library lounge. His topic was "Poetry and the Kinds of Truth." His words were lucid, good-humored, and provocative on that winter's night, and now, in the wake of commencement weekend, they seem even more so. They so gracefully articulate and illustrate the mode of thought and the respect for the possibilities of language which generate much of the spirit of the department. And so, for alumni who have studied value and beauty in language with Professor Rogers, and for those who had not the opportunity to do so, we offer the following complete transcript of his lecture from that occasion; a sequel lecture, entitled "What if Education were like Poetry?" was delivered in March.)

L. F.

I come before you tonight to raise a vexed and serious question, which I will try to answer. That question is this: In what ways, if any, does poetry lead to the possession of truth? The question is serious because the implications are larger than we are apt to think. If poetry is a way to the possession of truth, and if the possession of truth is knowledge, then poetry is a way of knowing. It follows that poets and teachers of this art have a place at the modern university, though the investigators of knowledge have shifted their attention away from those fields of the imaginative reason where the Psalmist was the voice of God, and Homer was the educator of Hellas.

You all know the charges: At its best, they say, poetry is decoration, polish, refinement, a special grace in words, mere entertainment. But it lacks substance; it is effeminate; it is remote from the purposes of life and the world we live in. John Locke said plainly what many have thought: "... I know not what reason a father can have to desire his son a poet who does not desire to have him an idle, useless fellow ..."

And idleness and effeminacy are not the worst charges. Others say poetry corrupts the spirit, perverts the mind, panders to lust, poisons the public morality, because the maker of verbal fictions is an ignorant fellow, a pretender to knowledge he does not have, a liar himself, or a servant to the father of lies.

I will not put poetry on trial or dwell on these charges. I will explain, instead, what poetry really is and what is its relation to truth. I will argue that it is a special way of knowing, and that the "heart-ravishing knowledge" it affords is essential to our life as persons. This explanation is defense enough if it persuades you.

To start with, let us understand each other about one basic meaning of the word poetry. Poetry is not just the rhythmical jingle-jangle that our education somehow teaches us to despise. Poetry, in the full and natural sense of the word, is an important part of our everyday experience: our lives are shaped by it; our speech is laced with it.

Already I can hear somebody asking: "Are we now to be told that like

Molière's bourgeois gentleman, who learned with surprise that he had been speaking prose all his life, we are about to discover that we speak poetry all the time?"

Not quite! But even the ancients, whose serious thinking found its way into song more often than ours does, were quite aware that poetry did not have to be verse, any more than verse has to be poetry. But it behooves us to understand that we all do speak and think poetry sometimes--and hear it a great deal. We all live amid its atmospheres and its impressions. These impressions of things and moods come to us in prose as well as verse. Prose and verse are only superficial differences - matters of external form.

The question of truth in poetry is more complicated than it may seem at first. There are at least four ways in which any connected utterance can be true. Each of these ways is distinct. Each has its own tests or criteria. None of them by itself yields the whole truth. From the viewpoint of any one of them the others seem shadowy at best. Yet all four of these ways harmonize with the regular workings of our minds, and all four are perfectly reasonable.

A poem can be true, then: (1) when it represents sensible fact; (2) when it is formally coherent, being itself a system or belonging to one; (3) when it tells people how to act in a new situation; and (4) when it reflects matters of fact which lie beyond the range of sense or rationality narrowly conceived. We might name these four kinds of truth representation, coherence, adequacy in real life, and transcendence.

In fact, these classes of truth line up quite naturally with the basic tasks we ask language to perform most of the time. Representation is true when the mind finds language which catches the sense of a fact in a way that makes it intelligible. This is the first or primary movement of thought. True representation means a leap from impressions to propositions. Formal truth, on the other hand, is a valid movement within the realm of symbols--from subject to predicate within the little system of a single sentence; from hypothesis to conclusion; from argument to argument; from one term in an analogy to another; from innuendo to implication; from one connotative sphere to another--in short, the flashing of thought along the trajectories which symbols suggest. There is also the leap from the domain of symbols back to experience again; this is the landing in fact that tests the symbolic voyage; its truth is the truth of confirmation which is called verification. Language accomplishes all these tasks with a characteristic kind of truth as the measure of each accomplishment. But there is a fourth task, which is at least as important as the others. This is the communication of intention from mind to mind, from person to person. This communication is made by a leap which exceeds both logic and sense. It transcends them. Yet it also has its characteristic truth--a truth which is at once transcendent and interpersonal and which cannot be entirely denied unless one is willing to shut truth out from the most important, most ordinary use of language, the intimate sharings of our inner selves. But I leave these heights to be reached in due course and come now to poetry and the simplest kind of truth, the kind which I have called representational.

Our poets show places and phenomena. They have taught us how to perceive our cities - - with their "streets that follow like a tedious argument of insidious intent," peopled by spectres and moral mutes. They show us the morning,

"rosy-fingered" or "in russet mantle clad." They tell us of winds and barred clouds that "touch the stubble plains with rosy hue," of birds -- "the hurl and gliding rebuffed the big wind" -- and fields and villages after rain, of woman "lovely in her bones," of the first woman -- "not terrible, though terror be in love and beauty," of the first man, or a particular man no longer loved -- "That cursing alcoholic is the god I married . . . At night I spider up the wall to hide in crevices/ deeper than guilt. . . . Your father looked like you, his dying proportioned/ oddly to my breast. I boxed him in my plain pine/ arms and let him take his ease just for a minute." They have suggested and also varied our images of the sea -- bitter, "wine-dark," "scrotum tightening," "snoring" in its "murderous innocence" -- "the unreckonable laughter of its waves' making "toward the pebbled shore," their "sequent toils" becoming an image of time itself and the "main of light."

There is no definitive or best collection of examples. Looking for just the right ones made me feel like a fish trying to take water samples: they are everywhere around us. But perhaps this quite scanty selection gives you the idea I am trying to get across in this section on poetry as representative truth. The poet's phrases preserve keen observations of common facts like insects caught in amber. But the poetic specimens keep coming to life again. They are wonderful first-level "abductions," to use C.S. Peirce's precise term. They hang suspended in the mind waiting to assist in the working up of certain kinds of "facts" into propositions--only not just propositions: into phrases that "vibrate in the memory."

This power to represent impressions or to shape them is therefore one reason why poets quote one another, usually without acknowledging "whence they stole those sweets." For some it is an act of reverence, for others a duty--in any case it is a necessity--to hand on the crystals of living thought and bequeath to succeeding generations some significant meeting places of mind and experience.

And so it is that the schoolboy who learns some fragments of this tradition in his youth and stores them in his mind as so much surplus grain against a winter which he never expects to come, finds with the passage of years that his mind has been assimilating this material; it has grown together with his experiences of the world. "Then," as Cardinal Newman remarks, "he comes to understand why it is that lines, the birth of some chance morning or evening at an Ionian festival, or among the Sabine hills, have lasted generation after generation, for thousands of years, with a power over the mind and a charm . . ." And perhaps, Newman continues, "this is the reason of the medieval opinion about Vergil, as if a prophet or magician, his single words and phrases, his pathetic half-lines, giving utterance as the voice of nature herself to that pain and weariness, yet hope of better things, which is the experience of her children in every time."

This appeal to the usefulness of poetic language bears witness to its truthfulness. For what is truth in its simplest meaning? A human concept, St. Thomas says, is true "by reason of its being consonant with things." Such truth is the meeting of mind and event through the medium of symbols, especially sentences. This casting of fresh experience in the phrases of the poets is representation. It is the crossing of that first gap between sensation and thought. It happens again and again, as the efficacy of the

poet's words is reaffirmed in the thought of each new user of those words. In short, what we have established here is that the poets help us in a special way with the first task we expect of language, the successful symbolizing of what happens around us and also within us.

Let us realize: not all experience is of things external to ourselves. There is a rich inner world; and this world has its facts, too. These inner facts are feelings, emotions, the stirrings of impulse breaking into consciousness, as well as the whole, mostly hidden, class of internal bodily sensations such as hunger or the sense of our muscle motions and postures.

Each of us has a private stock of poetic quotations, half-remembered, which tell some truths about these inner facts. I find it hard to illustrate the language of this inner truth, not because examples are lacking, but because they are personal, individual. For some people, I suppose, the highest poetry of the inner impression is taken from TV ads and singing commercials. ("Double your pleasure, double your fun . . .") For some it is in hymns and liturgical poems -- "My soul and body crieth out, yea, for the living God." For some it is in the great lyric poetry.

One cannot quote too freely from his own private store of such representations. Tell me the songs and poems and fictional phrases a man quotes, and I'll tell you his desires and fears and point, perhaps, to the sore spots in his sensuous memory. But maybe I can risk a few examples without betraying too much.

I suppose mine is not the only ambition that has been soothed by Milton's lines: "But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,/ and think to burst out into sudden blaze,/ comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears,/ and slits the thin spun life. But not the praise . . ." Or in an hour of unhappiness I take comfort from the mere thought of a friend, as Shakespeare apparently did: "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,/ . . . Haply I think on thee, and then my state,/ Like to the lark at break of day arising/ From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate." And it may not be amiss to quote this caution from Ogden Nash, which may represent a situation familiar to married people: "To keep your marriage brimming/ With love in the loving cup,/ Whenever you're wrong, admit it; / Whenever you're right, shut up." I leave you to seek your own examples (I don't want to give away too much). The general point here is that I suppose each of you is enough like me to have his own set of quotations representing his own set of experiences, whatever these may be.

And of this much I am sure: if you do have such a treasure of poetic language, whatever its contents, you will recognize that the intimate aptness of this language -- its intimate truth -- has a clearness which matches the clearness of Cartesian intuition, and it has a force or indefeasibility which surpasses any analytical distinctness.

The special thing that poets know is how to represent personality, and how to represent other things as they relate to persons. Their language presents things, not merely as they are, but things the way they are to beings like us. The poets know the conditions of their art by an instinct that goes with their talent. They know that in some degree or other they are all storytellers. Therefore, working with words, they represent personality acting and suffering or being acted upon. This is a necessary condition of all poetry.

The world, the universe they talk about, is related to persons. Milton describes our universe "hanging from heaven: And fast by hanging in a golden Chain/ This pendant world, in bigness as a Star/ Of smallest Magnitude close by the Moon." Gerard Manley Hopkins says that "The Holy Ghost broods over the bent world with warm breast and with, ah! bright wings." Wallace Stevens, in accord with a more modern cosmology, tells us that "we live in an old chaos of the sun." Which of these statements would you deny, provided that you allow it its full intended meaning? Anyone who calls any of these passages merely false is making a stupid mistake, or a deliberate one. We all know as well as the philosophers do that there is no such golden chain; Milton knew it too. We know that the Holy Ghost has neither breast nor wings. But the poetic statements represent ways of feeling about our earth or about the whole universe in relation to some consciousness like yours and mine.

Even Lucretius, a poet, not a philosopher, couldn't forget this central fact of his art. In a poem which tried to say that all things are matter, that spirit does not exist, that men would be better off if they could forget their delusive superstitions and confront the existential universe on its own bleak terms -- even the brave and pathetic, the splendid Lucretius began this grim poem with an invocation to the goddess of love - "hominum divumque voluptas,/ Alma Venus." He ended it grieving over a plague-stricken city, which he had tried clinically to describe. The world which poetry represents, then, is a world where story is possible, even when its facts seem separated from the life of people. Consciousness is always potentially present: "and the bird called in response to/ the unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,/ and the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses/ had the look of flowers that are looked at."

As Wordsworth believed, the poet will go to the farthest reaches of the universe with the scientist. If verse writers have not yet fulfilled Wordsworth's prophecy, some poets who write in prose certainly have. I mean the writers of science fiction, who have carried the poetic imagination to the barren vastnesses discovered or invented by the theoretic imagination and have peopled that "lone universe" with possible stories. These modern writers are, in this respect, like their ancient predecessors, who humanized the pattern of the seasons, tracing through the life of a god or a hero the springtime birth, the summer flourishing, the autumnal struggles for survival, and the winter death, following the cycles of natural growth and decay.

Poets of the modern era have adopted myths that concentrate directly on patterns in human behavior. I shall not try in this paper to say what a myth is, or where such things come from.

Some of my students know what I think about those subjects. But there is a myth in the modern world which I call the myth of the self-centered man, using a phrase I borrowed from Walter Lippmann. This collective and habitual story describes how people behave once they have stopped believing that they are the object of God's attention. The individual is, by nature, supreme, this myth says. Social life is therefore an unstable compromise by which we determine who will take God's place. But at any moment the individual may declare the social order to be his enemy, in which case he resumes his supposed supremacy and, for that matter, his isolation. If you would have examples, look to King Lear--Lear's folly and the heartlessness of his children bring him from the protection of the old order into the "state of nature," where all social relations and moral principles are to be reconstituted as fictions.

Look at Hobbes' Leviathan, at Locke's Second Treatise, at the Declaration of Independence, at the struggles among the competing powers within the American system (which is an image of the supposed natural condition). Or look at the popular literature. Turn on the television any evening and watch the reruns of westerns as well as the detective stories. In all these places you see yourself walking the ways of the solitary man, sovereign at least over himself--the man for whom social ties are a matter of free, if reluctant, choice, who enters into brief agreements to extend the right which he carries in his heart, a right which is ultimately above all law. This myth, I say, represents both the attitudes and behavior of many people we know, including, I suspect, ourselves.

There is nothing really unorthodox in what I am saying about poetry as representation. It was all anticipated by Aristotle, in a way, when he said in the Poetics that tragedy is an imitation of action and that action did not mean just the external deeds which could be noted by the historian. Action, he said, meant moral action, the things that make men happy or miserable. Drama makes action intelligible, Aristotle suggests, by showing it in a context of cause and significance. He implies that epics do the same thing: he is interested in the plausibility with which Homer brings about the crucial moments of discovery in the Odyssey. It is no distortion of Aristotle's seminal doctrine to say that a certain kind of intelligibility is the aim of all poetry; for what the poets teach us is not military strategy but the actions of soldiers, not medical know-how but the behavior of physicians, not political theory but the choices of statesmen and the grounds of such choices, not philosophy or the economy of desire but the philosopher, the saint, the sinner, the person of any sort together with the hypothetical experience, the sense as it were, of such a person's life. The burden of my argument so far has been that personal life has its truths, and the representation of such truths is the special business of the poet.

This brings me to the subject of truth in form, which is the second kind of truth poetry can have; and this is my main concern. (Representation and form are inseparable in fact, though we pull them apart for the sake of analysis.) Consider, for example, how Shakespeare represents himself in these four lines:

That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

He never really names what it is he is representing. But we know it is his old age, the aging of a poet, in fact. We perceive it through a triple metaphor. The season, standing for the poet's stage in life, is itself represented metonymously by the denuded trees (how flat and unpleasant my language sounds next to his!), and the trees in turn are equated by apposition with "bare ruined choirs," the remains, as it were, of a cathedral. One might spend some moments reflecting on what these lines mean--what they refer to--what thoughts steeped in emotion they stimulate or create. Those thoughts, whatever they might be in each of us, have one common object, the aging poet. Those thoughts arise from one common form, the subtle lacework of those metaphorical equivalents. These metaphors ring harmonically together, with a truth or rightness (the two are the same here) which is mutually determined within the system these metaphors produce.

In this respect, a poem has the purity, the unactualness, of a mathematical formula. For the mathematical formula also detaches itself from the intentions of the mathematician who invented it. It enters a world where its formal relations are the important thing. There is this difference, though, between the formula and the poem: the formula moves away from the storied actuality of the man into the realm of theoretical forms. It abstracts itself from story altogether. The poem, on the contrary, in detaching itself from the mind that composed it, enters a world of form where the concern with intention, that is to say, with personality, becomes more intense. We almost cease to care how old Shakespeare was, how many gray hairs he had, how weary he may have been or how sad. Our minds walk about in a world of pure intention, in a "temple of living pillars," a forest of words that seem almost to think back at us; if I may paraphrase Baudelaire this way.

Some literary genres appear to be distorting representational truth, when in fact they are simply elevating factual truths into the special realm of poetic intention. I think, for instance, of Gulliver's Travels, when it refers to the political squabbles in England or the follies of the European academies. Clearly there is not a direct match-up between the Swiftian representations and the facts which the historian has reported. And if we were going to Gulliver for history, we would be sadly deceived. But we are not deceived. Instead, we are amused and possibly edified; for Gulliver is a perfect example of how form infused with intention absorbs the facts, passes judgment on them, and displays them under the aspect of that judgment. "Foolery . . . does walk about the orb like the sun, it shines everywhere"; and it is healthy experience, which poetry gives us, to perceive the follies of the world from the angle of plain sense and unflinching reasonableness. All those figures of speech which seem to distort-- I mean figures of exaggeration, personification, metaphor, irony, understatement, and all the changes of name which we can metonymy--in poetry these are not falsifications; they clarify, for although they appear to distort the thing as it is, they show it for what it amounts to in the world of intention into which the poet is introducing it.

Emphasis on form is the second necessary condition of poetry. (You remember that the first necessary condition was the verbal representation of personality.) I am not going to make an analytic definition of form - though I think it appears always in the mind's apprehension of relations. Instead, I shall show you some of its stripes by pointing to some things that are form. System is form. Structure is form. Rules and laws are also forms. Harmony and order belong to the class of form, too. But above all, for our purposes here, personality is form, perhaps the form of forms; and character, the literary imitation of personality, is form as well. This last remark means that all the representations of character are referring to form when they occur in literature. We know the great and memorable characters of novels and plays because we have apprehended their forms. We have an intuition of the relationships among their choices and the supposed "facts" of their imaginary lives. Their actions engage our sympathies and aversions because we recognize them in a context of antecedents, circumstances, causes; we know enough events in their hypothetical histories to sense some inevitabilities in their lives. And there is a kind of internal truth in this knowledge. To take a farfetched example, it would be unthinkable, or rather, it would be false for Oedipus to walk off quietly to a retirement condominium for ex-tyrants of Thebes.

This internal truth of poetic form is both logical and emotional. Let me

illustrate with an apparently whimsical example. I take it that an imaginative story begins with a premise and the question, "Then what happens?" The premise is like a formula. It seems to be neither true nor false by itself. It is almost like a questionnaire with none of the blanks filled in. (Alfred Tarski says the same thing about logical formulas or sentence functions.) Now I will give you an example of such a story formula or premise.

My example is the famous and all too familiar love triangle. I could express the premise in perfectly abstract fashion, speaking of certain relations among A, and B, and C; but I shall fill in some of the blanks in the questionnaire in order to make the premise sound like a story.

Formula: Abigail loved Ben, and she was married to Cadwallader. I take it that this statement is neither true nor false in any sense we know of. Woman, love, man, husband--as soon as I begin to fill in these blanks, I have begun to invite the imagination to enter the premise and try to fill it up. The imagination to enter the premise and try to fill it up. The imagination wants to ask a lot of questions: Did Ben love her? Did her husband love her? Let's answer some of them. No, her husband didn't exactly love her; they were what you could call friends before Ben came along. And yes, Ben did love her. Now there are more questions. We'd have to fill in scenes: Where did they live? What did they do? We would want to know, whose side should we be on? Does Abby remain faithful? Should she? Do she and Ben go off together and . . . well, do the deed? What does Cad do?

Answer all these, and you have at least the sketch of a story. Each choice you make places tighter and tighter constraints. And this state of affairs involves at least a negative truth: part of the pressure on your choices is that you can't contradict one answer with another, unless you have a good reason which eliminates the contradiction in fact. But you can go pretty far in the direction of contradiction. You can have lovers, for instance, who are also enemies--"Prodigious birth of love it is to me, that I should love a loathed enemy." Truth here means a consistency among the decisions or a faithfulness to the system as it unfolds.

Of course it must be obvious that the premise or questionnaire we have been toying with is the premise of the great love story of the Western world, for which we have thousands of versions. If I may put my point a bit grandly here, the internal truths are valid relationships among sets of possibilities; which simply means that it makes sense to speak of this kind of internal truth when we are speaking of poetry. Indeed, in our reading of any given poem--medieval romance, Romeo and Juliet, or a play of Chekhov that uses the same premise, we must discover the esthetic choices that are implied by the language of the poem in question, and when we have made this discovery, we have done all we can to realize the poem's intention.

To enlarge this point about form and stress its emotional truth, let me turn for a moment to the epics. The fact is, they all put their heroes into a special sort of situation which we know to be impossible for human beings. Let me remind you of some epic premises: Gilgamesh visits Utnapishtim in the world of the blessed immortals. Odysseus has a chance of immortality itself on Calypso's island. Achilles must decide whether this life will be long or glorious--a choice which no man in history has been known to have had. Dante travels among all the kinds of spirit lives, and with the advantage of this impossibility privileged

knowledge he can make his choice about the meaning and direction of his own spiritual life. Aware of this formal fact about the epic, Milton, augmenting the Genesis story, holds Adam on the edge of immortality in a perfect dilemma, making him realize with clarity and anguish that, still immortal, he must choose between God and the already fallen yet beloved Eve.

All these heroes go through a man-making (or should I say a human-life-affirming?) choice, and this choice is possible only from some imaginary point outside the human condition.

The form of the epic creates its truth for the feelings. Death and suffering are facts of the world we live in. No theory by itself can make us at home in such a world: no theory by itself can meet all the needs we have as persons. What we need is a context for these facts which are among the basic conditions of our life. What each of the epics gives us, then, is the kind of context which enables us, sometimes, for a while, to adjust to these irremovable facts. What they show us is that if a person were (contrary to any fact in our experience) placed in a position from which he could choose to be free of these facts or to have them and even embrace them, what then? What would he do? And the epics show us the heroic answer; for in each of the cases I have mentioned the hero does not just accept these facts; he wills them, brings them on himself as it were.

If I have represented the matter correctly, what we have found is that the epics bring us from false hypotheses to conclude familiar facts. Yet, how are we persuaded of these luminous falsehoods which may become the underpinnings of our emotional security? Some of the pieces in this poetic reasoning are pure hypotheses; some are postulates; some are principles which seem like universal truths, even if they are not; some are poetic conventions or technical postulates as I might call them. And it would be useful to sort some of these out, and the epic is a good place to look at them, because they stand out clearly there and are familiar. I shall take only two examples of the instruments of epic form: they are what I might call postulates and conventions regarding time and space.

All the great epics are in verse. And although there is no way to figure out a priori how things should be in art, there is a kind of reasoning by hindsight in criticism, just as there is in art itself. What I mean is that it is right that epics should be in verse, and this remains true, even if next year some great poet of our own time comes out with a prose epic which is the rival of Paradise Lost. The rightness derives from the fact that verse exercises control over our perception of time. The subtler rhythms of fictional prose control perception of time also, but it is a looser perception. Novels imitate, though they do not exactly reflect, the time of everyday life. Epic verse creates the illusion of an order that leaves the clutter of everyday life behind --- or below.

The epics I have been mentioning all divide physical space according to three moral planes. The way to describe these in each case may have to vary slightly, but the basic idea is constant in all the great epics. One place, of course, is the domain of the gods, "the world above the world," as one Indian legend describes it. Another plane is the place of the evil or the ineffectual dead, the Underworld. The third plane, of course, is a replica of our earthly life. Here on this earthly plane the action ensues. Here the influences of all three levels intersect and even collide. In the epics all three planes are distinct, in spite of interactions among them. And if you want to measure

the effect of this arrangement or classification of the world, you might consider what happens in The Wasteland, where Eliot collapses the three levels into one, and we move among pasteboard men. The three planes, then, are a poetic postulate drawn from principles which believers have taken for facts. These planes make the hypothesis of the epic choice possible.

I suppose to many people the truth of form seems shadowy at best. Examined by itself, it seems as arbitrary as the inner truth of games. And yet there is an inner truth in games, as there is in poetry; and it comes to life when we appeal to it in moments of emotional intensity. Was the crucial pass complete? In truth it was or was not, and that depends on conditions laid down by the rules. How should Adam and Eve feel as they leave paradise? If they have felt the justification of the ways of God to men--that is, if they have understood with the reason of the heart a whole complex network of conditions established by the poem, then it follows that

Some natural tears they dropp'd, but wip'd them soon;
The World was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitary way.

In the realm of form, beauty may be truth. And beauty, as Proust observed, "is a sequence of hypotheses, . . . the route that opened upon the unknown."

But the truth of poetry is not confined to the world of form, or to casual representation. Poems essentially are stories, as I have already suggested. But stories can be models addressed to that vast and delicate instrument, the imagination, which registers the subtlest impressions of moral and emotional atmosphere. Such models for the affections imply attitudes; and attitudes tell us how to act. And so it is that poetry, which begins by representing facts in a special way, re-enters the actual world and touches fact again when it makes its way into our systems of belief and suggests how we ought to behave. (This ability to insinuate itself among our moral convictions is one of the main charges against it.)

Fiction based on the myth of individualism (which I described earlier) turns up everywhere, and so does evidence of its influence on the way people think and act. We find it all around us, and inside most of us. It is the moral atmosphere, the air we breathe. We find it especially in the conviction that any authority may infringe the natural right to unlimited freedom.

Or again, who has not been enchanted, not to say tempted, by the literature of erotic love--the literature based on the story whose logic I sketched a moment ago?

Such poetry shows us moral maps. It lends the look of the familiar to what may be unknown. It implies systems of value or reference points, by which we orient ourselves, choose our directions, pass judgment on what is going on around us and within.

Events do not prove a belief. At most they confirm it. As long as things turn out the way the story says they should, we may continue believing that the story is true. It is the negative instance--the time things don't work out--that is especially interesting.

Suppose I think like the self-centered heroes I have imagined all my life. I say, like Captain Ahab, "if the sun smites me, I will smite it back." So, when my enemies challenge me, I smash them with all my might. I ought to be happy when I succeed. But suppose I am appalled by the human damage I have done, in the name of the justice I have arrogated to myself . . .

Or suppose I have allowed eros to separate me from wife and children and friends (estrangement is one of the consequences implicit in that general story), and I wake up one morning to find that the tide of passion has carried my new beloved to someone else. And I am left alone.

Experiences like these shake the entire structure of belief. Serious failures amount to crises. I may hold on to the old belief and keep trying to make it come true, or I may abandon it and seek some other story that promises to be a better guide.

Poetry provides alternatives. It also provides what I may call a moral laboratory--a world of hypothetical worlds, where we may experiment, even play, with the motives and systems of belief that people live by; we may feel the consequences of actions such as might be our own and yet suffer nothing.

This experimental side of poetry will be part of my subject a month from now, so I leave it here as a mere suggestion as to how poetry can be tested for its adequacy in experience, and I hasten on now to say a few concluding words about poetry as a mirror or truths that lie beyond narrow rationality and sense.

Since an important part of my argument says that poetry teaches personal and transcendent knowledge, let me filter out some logical static. First of all, I do not say that personal and transcendent truth are identical categories. I do not know that. There may be metaphysical truths that are purely theoretic and come as close to impersonality as mathematics does. What I do know is that personal knowledge and transcendence intersect. This conjunction may be a strangely shaped class, for personal and transcendent knowledge is sometimes mythic, sometimes religious, sometimes even mystical (the Gospels or the Prayer of St. Francis). They belong to the class called reasons of the heart. And no matter how severely we limit this class of truths, we cannot say that it is empty.

But who would seriously say this class is empty? If a man should say to his wife of many years, "I love you," he can speak truly and the woman can understand in his words a portion of their life--a part of their story together. The words recall it as signs; they intend it as symbols. There is no logic by which he can prove it; there is no single experience that can confirm its truth. Yet people who have known such facts affirm that they are as certain as the sun.

Virginia Woolf supplies a perfect example of what I mean. In a passage from To the Lighthouse we see the efficacy of this kind of transcendence in a double perspective, as it were. We recognize its failure because Mr. Ramsey, the second-rate intellectual for whom everything must be put in dried up philosophical terms, failed to grasp the fullness of the message his wife was communicating to him. You remember the passage: he insisted that his wife tell him she loved him; he wanted to have it in words. One is tempted to say he wanted the words instead of the rich, transforming fact of her love itself. And Mrs. Ramsey refused. Critics and students have misunderstood his point. She did not refuse him her love.

But she could not do it; she could not say it. Then, knowing that he was watching her, instead of saying anything she turned, holding her stocking, and looked at him. And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him. He could not deny it. And smiling she looked out of the window and said (thinking to herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness) - -

"Yes, you were right. It's going to be wet tomorrow. You won't be able to go." And she looked at him smiling. For she had triumphed again. She had not said it: yet he knew.

One of the ironies - - indeed, the terrible pathos of the book - - is that in the end, when Mr. Ramsey finally makes his journey to the lighthouse, that is, to the mark, as it were, of understanding toward which the book has been pointing from the outset, he at least opens himself, at least a little, to the kind of personal exchange toward which his wife had been trying to lead him all along. But of course his knowledge comes too late; his wife is dead. And it is left for us to understand the silent, diffused, gentle, transforming and at the same time accepting power of this extraordinary feminine character. The transcendent meaning which Mr. Ramsey is incapable of is granted to us by the power of poetry.

--Stephen Rogers

LINES OF COMMUNICATION

This issue, like previous ones, invites alumni response. In the past year, the following persons indicated they would like old friends and teachers to know where they are and what they are doing these days.

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F. Peter Foy, Materials Manager, Xerox Corp., 36 Webster Manor Drive, Webster, New York. 14580.

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My apologies if I've missed someone. I'm still not receiving complete reports on funds given designated for the needs of the Program. We've made progress on this matter, but I suggest that those of you with intentions of helping the Program directly either route donations through the Program's office or otherwise notify the office that you have given to Notre Dame with such an intention.

W.N.

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