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## THE AFFECTIVE FALLACY

BY W. K. WIMSATT, JR., AND  
M. C. BEARDSLEY

*We might as well study the properties of wine by getting drunk—Eduard Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*.*

AS the title of this essay invites comparison with that of an earlier and parallel essay of ours, "The Intentional Fallacy" (THE SEWANEE REVIEW, Summer, 1946), it may be relevant to assert at this point that we believe ourselves to be exploring two roads which have seemed to offer convenient detours around the acknowledged and usually feared obstacles to objective criticism, both of which, however, have actually led away from criticism and from poetry. The Intentional Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its origins, a special case of what is known to philosophers as the Genetic Fallacy. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological *causes* of the poem and ends in biography and relativism. The Affective Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*), a special case of epistemological skepticism, though usually advanced as if it had far stronger claims than the overall forms of skepticism. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome of either Fallacy, the Intentional or the Affective, is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear.

"Most of our criticism in literature and the arts," complains Mr. René Wellek in one of his English Institute essays, "is still purely emotive: it judges works of art in terms of their emo-

tional effect . . . and describes this effect by exclamations, suggested moods.”<sup>1</sup> We are perhaps not so pessimistic as Mr. Wellek about the pervasiveness of the critical method which he describes, but we believe there can be no doubt that his mistrust of the method is well-founded. Mr. C. S. Lewis in three lectures entitled *The Abolition of Man* has recently turned what we should judge to be a discomfiting scrutiny on the doctrine of emotive relativism as it appears in textbooks of English composition for use in schools. Mr. John Crowe Ransom in a chapter of his *New Criticism*, “I. A. Richards: the Psychological Critic,” has done the like for some of the more sophisticated claims of neuro-psychological poetics. In the present essay, we would discuss briefly the history and fruits of affective criticism, some of its correlatives in cognitive criticism, and hence certain cognitive characteristics of poetry which have made affective criticism plausible. We would observe also the premises of affective criticism, as they appear today, in certain philosophic and pseudo-philosophic disciplines of wide influence. And first and mainly that of “semantics.”

## I

The separation of emotive from referential meaning was urged very persuasively, it will be remembered, about twenty years ago in the earlier works of Mr. I. A. Richards. The types of meaning which were defined in his *Practical Criticism* and in the *Meaning of Meaning* of Messrs. Ogden and Richards created, partly by suggestion, partly with the aid of direct statement, a clean “antithesis” between “symbolic and emotive use of language.” In his *Practical Criticism* Mr. Richards spoke of “aesthetic” or “projectile” words—adjectives by which we project feelings at objects themselves altogether innocent of these feelings or of any qualities corresponding to them. And in his succinct *Science and Poetry*, science is statement, poetry is pseudo-statement which plays the important role of making us

feel better about things than statements would. After Mr. Richards—and under the influence too of Count Korzybski's non-Aristotelian *Science and Sanity*—came the semantic school of Messrs. Chase, Hayakawa, Walpole, and Lee. Most recently Mr. C. L. Stevenson in his *Ethics and Language* has given an account which, as it is more careful and explicit than the others, may be taken as most clearly pleading their cause—and best revealing its weakness.

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

words which he believes to have no descriptive meaning, yet a decided emotive "meaning": these are expletives of various sorts.

But a certain further distinction, and an important one, which does not appear in Mr. Stevenson's system—nor in those of his forerunners—is invited by his persistent use of the word "meaning" for both cognitive and emotive language functions and by the absence from the emotive of his careful distinction between "meaning" and "suggestion." It is a fact worth insisting upon that the term "emotive meaning," as used by Mr. Stevenson, and the more cautious term "feeling," as used by Mr. Richards to refer to one of his four types of "meaning," do not refer to any such cognitive meaning as that conveyed by the name of an emotion—"anger" or "love." Rather, these key terms refer to the *expression* of emotive states which Messrs. Stevenson and Richards believe to be effected by certain words—for instance, "license," "liberty," "pleasant," "beautiful," "ugly"—and hence also to the emotive *response* which these words may evoke in a hearer. As the term "meaning" has been traditionally and usefully assigned to the cognitive, or descriptive, functions of language, it would have been well if these writers had employed, in such contexts, some less pre-empted term. "Import" might have been a happy choice. Such differentiation in vocabulary would have had the merit of reflecting a profound difference in linguistic function—all the difference between grounds of emotion and emotions themselves, between what is immediately meant by words and what is evoked by the meaning of words, or what more briefly might be said to be the "import" of the words themselves.

Without pausing to examine Mr. Stevenson's belief that expletives have no descriptive meaning, we are content to observe in passing that these words at any rate have only the vaguest emotive *import*, something raw, unarticulated, imprecise. "Oh!" (surprise and related feelings), "Ah!" (regret), "Ugh!" (dis-

taste). It takes a more descriptive reference to specify the feeling. "In quiet she reposes. Ah! would that I did too." But a more central re-emphasis for Mr. Stevenson's position—and for that of his forerunners including Mr. Richards—seems required by a fact scarcely mentioned in semantic writings: namely, that a large and obvious area of emotive *import* depends directly upon descriptive meaning (either with or without words of explicit ethical valuation)—as when a person says and is believed: "General X ordered the execution of 50,000 civilian hostages," or "General X is guilty of the murder of 50,000 civilian hostages." And secondly, by the fact that a great deal of emotive *import* which does not depend thus directly on descriptive *meaning* does depend on descriptive *suggestion*. Here we have the "quasi-dependent emotive meaning" of Mr. Stevenson's system—a "meaning" to which surely he assigns too slight a role. This is the kind of emotive import, we should say, which appears when words change in descriptive *meaning* yet preserve a similar emotive "meaning"—when the Communists take over the term "democracy" and apply it to something else, preserving, however, the old descriptive *suggestion*, a government of, by, and for the people. It appears in pairs of words like "liberty" and "license," which even if they have the same descriptive meaning (as one may doubt), certainly carry very different descriptive suggestions. Or one might cite the word series in Bentham's classic "Catalogue of Motives":—"humanity, good-will, partiality," "frugality, pecuniary interest, avarice." Or the other standard examples of emotive insinuation: "Animals sweat, men perspire, women glow." "I am firm, thou art obstinate, he is pigheaded." Or the sentence, "There should be a revolution every twenty years," to which the experimenter in emotive responses attaches now the name Karl Marx (and arouses suspicion), now that of Thomas Jefferson (and provokes applause).

Political examples

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

it *means*, or if this connection is not apparent, at the most and with a little reflection, by what it *suggests*.

A question about the relation of language to objects of emotion is a shadow and index of another question, about the cognitive status of emotions themselves. It is an entirely consistent cultural phenomenon that within the same period as the *flourish* of semantics one kind of anthropology has delivered a parallel attack upon the relation of the objects themselves to emotions, or more specifically, upon the constancy of their relations through the times and places of human societies. In the classic treatise of Westermarck on *Ethical Relativity* we learn, for example, that the custom of eliminating the aged and unproductive has been practiced among certain primitive tribes and nomadic races. Other customs, that of exposing babies, that of suicide, that of showing hospitality to strangers—or the contrary custom of eating them, the reception of the Cyclops rather than that of Alcinous—seem to have enjoyed in some cultures a degree of approval unknown or at least unusual in our own. But even Westermarck<sup>2</sup> has noticed that difference of emotion “largely originates in different measures of knowledge, based on experience of the consequences of conduct, and in different beliefs.” That is to say, the different emotions, even though they are responses to similar objects or actions, may yet be responses to different qualities or functions—to the edibility of Odysseus rather than to his comeliness or manliness. A converse of this is the fact that for different objects in different cultures there may be on cognitive grounds emotions of similar quality—for the cunning of Odysseus and for the strategy of Montgomery at El Alamein. There may be a functional analogy for any alien object of emotion. Were it otherwise, indeed, there would be no way of understanding and describing alien emotions, no basis on which the science of the cultural relativist might proceed.

We shall not pretend to frame any formal discourse upon affective psychology, the laws of emotion. At this point, nevertheless, we venture to rehearse some generalities about objects, emotions, and words. Emotion, it is true, has a well-known capacity to fortify opinion, to inflame cognition, and to grow upon itself in surprising proportions to grains of reason. We have mob-psychology, psychosis, and neurosis. We have "free-floating anxiety" and all the vaguely understood and inchoate states of apprehension, depression, or elation, the prevailing complexions of melancholy or cheer. But it is well to remember that these states are indeed inchoate or vague and by that fact may even verge upon the unconscious.<sup>8</sup> They are the correlatives of very generalized objects, of general patterns of conception or misconception. At a less intensely affective level, we have "sensitivity" and on the other hand what has been called "affective stupidity." There is the well-known saying of Pascal: "Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas." But to consider these sensitivities and "raisons" as special areas of knowing and response makes better sense than to refer them to a special faculty of knowing. "Moral sentiments," we take it, are a part of eighteenth-century history. We have, again, the popular and self-vindicatory forms of confessing emotion. "He makes me boil." "It burns me up." Or in the novels of Evelyn Waugh a social event or a person is "sick-making." But these locutions involve an extension of the strict operational meaning of *make* or *effect*. A food or a poison causes pain or death, but for an emotion we have a reason or an object, not a cause. We have, as Mr. Ransom points out, not unspecified fear, but fear of something fearful, men with machine guns or the day of doom. If objects are ever connected by "emotional congruity," as in the association psychology of J. S. Mill, this can mean only that similar emotions attach to various objects because of similarity in the objects or in their relations. What

makes one angry is something painful, insulting, or unjust. One does not call it an angry thing. The feeling and its correlative, far from being the same, are almost opposites. And the distinction holds even when the name of the correlative quality is verbally cognate with that of the emotion,—as *lovable* to *loving*. Love, as Plato is at pains to make clear, loves that which it has not.

The tourist who said a waterfall was pretty provoked the silent disgust of Coleridge, while the other who said it was sublime won his approval. This, as Mr. C. S. Lewis so well observes,<sup>4</sup> was not the same as if the tourist had said, "I feel sick," and Coleridge had thought, "No, I feel quite well."

The doctrine of emotive meaning propounded recently by the semanticists has seemed to offer a scientific basis for one kind of affective relativism in poetics—the personal. That is, if a person can correctly say either "liberty" or "license" in a given context independently of the cognitive quality of the context, merely at will or from emotion, it follows that a reader may likely feel either "hot" or "cold" and report either "bad" or "good" on reading either "liberty" or license"—either an ode by Keats or a limerick. The sequence of licenses is endless. Similarly, the doctrines of one school of anthropology have gone far to fortify another kind of affective relativism, the cultural or historical, the measurement of poetic value by the degree of feeling felt by the readers of a given era. A different psychological criticism, that by author's intention, as we noted in our earlier essay, is consistent both with piety for the poet and with antiquarian curiosity and has been heavily supported by the historical scholar and biographer. So affective criticism, though in its personal or impressionistic form it meets with strong dislike from scholars, yet in its theoretical or scientific form finds strong support from the same quarter. The historical scholar, if not much interested in his own personal responses or in those of his

students, is intensely interested in whatever can be discovered about those of any member of Shakespeare's audience.

## II

Plato's feeding and watering of the passions<sup>5</sup> was an early example of affective theory, and Aristotle's counter-theory of catharsis was another (with modern intentionalistic analogues in theories of "relief" and "sublimation"). There was also the "transport" of the audience in the *Peri Hupsous* (matching the great soul of the poet), and this had echoes of passion or enthusiasm among eighteenth-century Longinians. We have had more recently the contagion theory of Tolstoy (with its intentionalistic analogue in the emotive expressionism of Veron), the *Einfühlung* or empathy of Lipps and related pleasure theories, either more or less tending to the "objectification" of Santayana: "Beauty is pleasure regarded as the quality of a thing." An affinity for these theories is seen in certain theories of the comic during the same era, the relaxation theory of Penjon, the laughter theory of Mr. Max Eastman. In their *Foundations of Aesthetics* Messrs. Ogden, Richards, and Wood listed sixteen types of aesthetic theory, of which at least seven may be described as affective. Among these the theory of Synaesthesia (Beauty is what produces an equilibrium of appetencies) was the one they themselves espoused. This was developed at length by Mr. Richards in his *Principles of Literary Criticism*.

The theories just mentioned may be considered as belonging to one branch of affective criticism, and that the main one, the emotive—unless the theory of empathy, with its transport of the self into the object, its vital meaning and enrichment of experience, belongs rather with a parallel and equally ancient affective theory, the imaginative. This is represented by the figure of vividness so often mentioned in the rhetorics—*efficacia*, *enargeia*, or the *phantasiai* in Chapter XV of *Peri Hupsous*.

This if we mistake not is the imagination the "Pleasures" of which are celebrated by Addison in his series of *Spectators*. It is an imagination implicit in the theories of Leibniz and Baumgarten, that beauty lies in clear but confused, or sensuous, ideas; in the statement of Warton in his *Essay on Pope* that the selection of "lively pictures . . . chiefly constitutes true poetry." In our time, as the emotive form of psychologistic or affective theory has found its most impressive champion in Mr. I. A. Richards, so the imaginative form has in Mr. Max Eastman, whose *Literary Mind* and *Enjoyment of Poetry* have much to say about vivid realizations or heightened consciousness.

But an important distinction can be made between those who have coolly investigated what poetry does to others and those who have testified what it does to themselves. The theory of intention or author-psychology, as we noted in our earlier essay, has been the intense conviction of poets themselves, Wordsworth, Keats, Housman, and since the Romantic era, of young persons interested in poetry, the introspective amateurs and soul-cultivators. In a parallel way, affective theory has often been less a scientific view of literature than a prerogative—that of the soul adventuring among masterpieces, the contagious teacher, the poetic radiator—a magnetic rhapsodic Ion, a Saintsbury, a Quiller-Couch, a William Lyon Phelps. Criticism on this theory has approximated the tone of the Buchmanite confession, the revival meeting. "To be quite frank," says Anatole France, "the critic ought to say: 'Gentlemen, I am going to speak about myself apropos of Shakespeare, apropos of Racine. . . .'"<sup>6</sup> The sincerity of the critic becomes an issue, as for the intentionalist the sincerity of the poet.

"The mysterious entity called the Grand Style," says Saintsbury. . . . "My definition . . . [of it] would . . . come nearer to the Longinian Sublime."

Whenever this perfection of expression acquires such force

that it transmutes the subject and transports the hearer or reader, then and there the Grand Style exists, for so long, and in such degree, as the transmutation of the one and the transportation of the other lasts.

And if we follow him further in his three essays on the subject (the Grand Style in Shakespeare, in Milton, in Dante), we discover that "It is nearly as impossible to describe, meticulously, the constituents of its grandeur as to describe that of the majesty of the sun itself."

The fact is . . . that this Grand Style is not easily tracked or discovered by observation, unless you give yourself up primarily to the *feeling* of it.

With Dante, "It is pure magic: the white magic of style and of grand style." This is the grand style, the emotive style, of nineteenth-century affective criticism. A somewhat less resonant style which has been heard in our columns of Saturday and Sunday reviewing and from our literary explorers is more closely connected with imagism and the kind of vividness sponsored by Mr. Eastman. In the *Book-of-the-Month Club News* Dorothy Canfield testifies to the power of a new novel: "To read this book is like living through an experience rather than just reading about it." "And so a poem," says Hans Zinsser,

means nothing to me unless it can carry me away with the gentle or passionate pace of its emotion, over obstacles of reality into meadows and covers of illusion. . . . The sole criterion for me is whether it can sweep me with it into emotion or illusion of beauty, terror, tranquillity, or even disgust.<sup>8</sup>

It is but a short step to what we may call the physiological form of affective criticism. Beauty, said Burke in the Eighteenth Century, is small and curved and smooth, clean and fair and

mild; it "acts by relaxing the solids of the whole system." More recently, on the side of personal testimony, we have the oft-quoted goose-flesh experience in a letter of Emily Dickinson, and the top of her head taken off; the bristling of the skin while Housman was shaving, the "shiver down the spine," the sensation in "the pit of the stomach." And if poetry has been discerned by these tests, truth also. "All scientists," said D. H. Lawrence to Aldous Huxley, "are liars. . . . I don't care about evidence. Evidence doesn't mean anything to me. I don't feel it *here*." And, reports Huxley, "he pressed his two hands on his solar plexus."<sup>9</sup>

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

in particular one from a lady who said that she had reported him to General MacArthur.<sup>10</sup>

### III

As the systematic affective critic professes to deal not merely, if at all, with his own experiences, but with those of persons in general, his most resolute search for evidence will lead him into the dreary and antiseptic laboratory, to testing with Fechner the effects of triangles and rectangles, to inquiring what kinds of colors are suggested by a line of Keats, or to measuring the motor discharges attendant upon reading it.<sup>11</sup> If animals could read poetry, the affective critic might make discoveries analogous to those of W. B. Cannon about *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear and Rage*—the increased liberation of sugar from the liver, the secretion of adrenin from the adrenal gland. The affective critic is today actually able, if he wishes, to measure the “psycho-galvanic reflex” of persons subjected to a given moving picture.<sup>12</sup> But, as a recent writer on *Science and Criticism* points out: “Students have sincerely reported an ‘emotion’ at the mention of the word ‘mother,’ although a galvanometer indicated no bodily change whatever. They have also reported no emotion at the mention of ‘prostitute,’ although the galvanometer gave a definite kick.”<sup>13</sup> Thomas Mann and a friend came out of a movie weeping copiously—but Mann narrates the incident in support of his view that movies are not Art. “Art is a *cold* sphere.”<sup>14</sup> The gap between various levels of physiological experience and the perception of value remains wide, whether in the laboratory or not.

In a similar way, general affective theory at the literary level has, by the very implications of its program, produced very little actual criticism. The author of the ancient *Peri Hupsous* is weakest at the points where he explains that passion and sublimity are the palliatives or excuses (*alexipharmaka*) of bold

metaphors, and that passions which verge on transport are the lenitives or remedies (*panakeia*) of such audacities in speech as hyperbole. The literature of catharsis has dealt with the historical and theoretical question whether Aristotle meant a medical or a lustratory metaphor, whether the genitive which follows *katharsis* is of the thing purged or of the object purified. Even the early critical practice of Mr. I. A. Richards had little to do with his theory of synaesthesia. His *Practical Criticism* depended mainly on two important constructive principles of criticism which Mr. Richards has realized and insisted upon—(1) that rhythm (the vague, if direct, expression of emotion) and poetic form in general are intimately connected with and interpreted by other and more precise parts of poetic meaning, (2) that poetic meaning is inclusive or multiple and hence sophisticated. The latter quality of poetry may perhaps be the objective correlative of the affective state synaesthesia, but in applied criticism there would seem to be not much room for synaesthesia or for the touchy little attitudes of which it is composed.

The report of some readers, on the other hand, that a poem or story induces in them vivid images, intense feelings, or heightened consciousness, is neither anything which can be refuted nor anything which it is possible for the objective critic to take into account. The purely affective report is either too physiological or it is too vague. Feelings, as Hegel has conveniently put it, “remain purely subjective affections of myself, in which the concrete matter vanishes, as though narrowed into a circle of the utmost abstraction.” And the only constant or predictable thing about the vivid images which more eidetic readers experience is precisely their vividness—as may be seen by requiring a class of average pupils to draw illustrations of a short story or by consulting the newest Christmas edition of a childhood classic which one knew with the illustrations of Howard Pyle or N. C. Wyeth. Vividness is not the thing in the

work by which the work may be identified, but the result of a cognitive structure, which *is* the thing. "The story is good," as the student so often says in his papers, "because it leaves so much to the imagination." The opaque accumulation of physical detail in some realistic novels has been an absurd reduction of plastic or graphic theory aptly dubbed by Mr. Middleton Murry "the pictorial fallacy."

Certain theorists, notably Mr. Richards, have anticipated some difficulties of affective criticism by saying that it is not intensity of emotion that characterizes poetry (murder, robbery, fornication, horse-racing, war—perhaps even chess—take care of that better), but the subtle quality of patterned emotions which play at the subdued level of disposition or attitude. We have psychological theories of aesthetic distance, detachment, or disinterestedness. A criticism on these principles has already taken important steps toward objectivity. If Mr. Eastman's theory of imaginative vividness appears today chiefly in the excited puffs of the newspaper Book Sections, the campaign of the semanticists and the balanced emotions of Mr. Richards, instead of producing their own school of affective criticism, have contributed much to recent schools of cognitive analysis, of paradox, ambiguity, irony, and symbol. It is not always true that the emotive and cognitive forms of criticism will sound far different. If the affective critic (avoiding both the physiological and the abstractly psychological form of report) ventures to state with any precision what a line of poetry *does*—as "it fills us with a mixture of melancholy and reverence for antiquity"—either the statement will be patently abnormal or false, or it will be a description of what the meaning of the line *is*: "the spectacle of massive antiquity in ruins." Tennyson's "Tears, idle tears," as it deals with an emotion which the speaker at first seems not to understand, might be thought to be a specially emotive poem. "The last stanza," says Mr. Brooks in his recent analysis,

“evokes an intense emotional response from the reader.” But this statement is not really a part of Mr. Brooks’s criticism of the poem—rather a witness of his fondness for it. “The second stanza,”—Mr. Brooks might have said at an earlier point in his analysis—“gives us a momentary vivid realization of past happy experiences, then makes us sad at their loss.” But he says actually: “The conjunction of the qualities of sadness and freshness is reinforced by the fact that the same basic symbol—the light on the sails of a ship hull down—has been employed to suggest both qualities.” The distinction between these formulations may seem trivial, and in the first example which we furnished may be practically unimportant. Yet the difference between translatable emotive formulas and more physiological and psychologically vague ones—cognitively untranslatable—is theoretically of the greatest import. The distinction even when it is a very faint one is at the dividing point between paths which lead to polar opposites in criticism, to classical objectivity and to romantic reader psychology.

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

The more specific the account of the emotion induced by a poem, the more nearly it will be an account of the reasons for emotion, the poem itself, and the more reliable it will be as an account of what the poem is likely to induce in other—sufficiently informed—readers. It will in fact supply the kind of information which will enable readers to respond to the poem. It will talk not of tears, prickles, or other physiological symptoms, of feeling angry, joyful, hot, cold, or intense, or of vaguer states of emotional disturbance, but of shades of distinction and relation between objects of emotion. It is precisely here that the discerning literary critic has his insuperable advantage over the subject of the laboratory experiment and

over the tabulator of the subject's responses. The critic is not a contributor to statistically countable reports about the poem, but a teacher or explicator of meanings. His readers, if they are alert, will not be content to take what he says as testimony, but will scrutinize it as teaching. The critic's report will speak of emotions which are not only complex and dependent upon a precise object but also, and for these reasons, stable. This paradox, if it is one, is the analogue in emotive terms of the antique formula of the metaphysical critic, that poetry is both individual and universal—a concrete universal. It may well be that the contemplation of this object, or pattern of emotive knowledge, which is the poem, is the ground for some ultimate emotional state which may be termed the aesthetic (some empathy, some synaesthesia, some objectified feeling of pleasure). It may well be. The belief is attractive; it may exalt our view of poetry. But it is no concern of criticism, no part of criteria.

#### IV

Poetry, as Matthew Arnold believed, "attaches the emotion to the idea; the idea *is* the fact." The objective critic, however, must admit that it is not easy to explain how this is done, how poetry makes ideas thick and complicated enough to attach emotions. In his essay on "Hamlet and His Problems" Mr. T. S. Eliot finds Hamlet's state of emotion unsatisfactory because it lacks an "objective correlative," a "chain of events" which are the "formula of that *particular* emotion." The emotion is "in *excess* of the facts as they appear." It is "inexpressible." Yet Hamlet's emotion must be expressible, we submit, and actually expressed too (by something) in the play; otherwise Mr. Eliot would not know it is there—in excess of the facts. That Hamlet himself or Shakespeare may be baffled by the emotion is beside the point. The second chapter of Mr. Yvor Winters' *Primitivism and Decadence* has gone much further

in clarifying a distinction adumbrated by Mr. Eliot. Without embracing the extreme doctrine of Mr. Winters, that if a poem cannot be paraphrased it is a poor poem, we may yet with profit reiterate his main thesis: that there is a difference between the motive, as he calls it, or logic of an emotion, and the surface or texture of a poem constructed to describe the emotion, and that both are important to a poem. Mr. Winters has shown, we think, how there can be in effect "fine poems" about nothing. There is rational progression and there is "qualitative progression,"<sup>35</sup> the latter, with several subtly related modes, a characteristic of decadent poetry. Qualitative progression is the succession, the dream float, of images, not substantiated by a plot. "Moister than an oyster in its clammy cloister, I'm bluer than a wooer who has slipped in a sewer," says Mr. Morris Bishop in a recent comic poem:

Chiller than a killer in a cinema thriller,  
Queerer than a leerer at his leer in a mirror,  
Madder than an adder with a stone in the bladder.  
If you want to know why, I cannot but reply:  
It is really no affair of yours.<sup>36</sup>

The term "pseudo-statement" was for Mr. Richards a patronizing term by which he indicated the attractive nullity of poems. For Mr. Winters, the kindred term "pseudo-reference" is a name for the more disguised kinds of qualitative progression and is a term of reproach. It seems to us highly significant that for another psychological critic, Mr. Max Eastman, so important a part of poetry as metaphor is in effect too pseudo-statement. The vivid realization of metaphor comes from its being in some way an obstruction to practical knowledge (like a torn coat sleeve to the act of dressing). Metaphor operates by being abnormal or inept, the wrong way of saying something.<sup>37</sup> Without pressing the point, we should say that an uncomfortable resem-

blance to this doctrine appears in Mr. Ransom's logical structure and local texture of irrelevance.

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

- I. X feels as angry as a hornet.
- II. X whose lunch has been stolen feels as angry as a hornet.

No. I is, we take it, the qualitative poem, the vehicle of a metaphor, an objective correlative—for nothing. No. II adds the tenor of the metaphor, the motive for feeling angry, and hence makes the feeling itself more specific. The total statement has a more complex and testable structure. The element of aptitude, or ineptitude, is more susceptible of discussion. "Light thickens, and the crow makes wing to the rooky wood" might be a line from a poem about nothing, but initially owed much of its power, and we daresay still does, to the fact that it is

spoken by a tormented murderer who, as night draws on, has sent his agents out to perform a further "deed of dreadful note."

These distinctions bear a close relation to the difference between historical statement which may be a reason for emotion because it is believed (Macbeth has killed the king) and fictitious or poetic statement, where a large component of suggestion (and hence metaphor) has usually appeared. The first of course seldom occurs pure, at least not for the public eye. The coroner or the intelligence officer may content himself with it. Not the chronicler, the bard, or the newspaper man. To these we owe more or less direct words of value and emotion (the murder, the atrocity, the wholesale butchery) and all the repertoire of suggestive meanings which here and there in history—with somewhat to start upon—an Achilles, a Beowulf, a Macbeth—have created out of a mere case of factual reason for intense emotion a specified, figuratively fortified, and permanent object of less intense but far richer emotion. With the decline of heroes and of faith in objects as important, we have had within the last century a great flowering of poetry which has tried the utmost to do without any hero or action or fiction of these—the qualitative poetry of Mr. Winters' analysis. It is true that any hero and action when they become fictitious take the first step toward the simply qualitative, and all poetry, so far as separate from history, tends to be formula of emotion. The hero and action are taken as symbolic. A graded series from fact to quality might include: (1) the historic Macbeth, (2) Macbeth as Renaissance tragic protagonist, (3) a *Macbeth* written by Mr. Eliot, (4) a *Macbeth* written by Mr. Pound. As Mr. Winters has explained, "the prince is briefly introduced in the footnotes" of *The Waste Land*; "it is to be doubted that Mr. Pound could manage such an introduction." Yet in no one of these four stages has anything like a pure emotive poetry

been produced. The semantic analysis which we have offered in our first section would say that even in the last stages a poetry of pure emotion is an illusion. What we have is a poetry where kings are only symbols or even a poetry of hornets and crows, rather than of human deeds. Yet a poetry about things. How these things are joined in patterns and with what names of emotion, remains always the critical question. "*The Romance of the Rose* could not, without loss," observes Mr. Lewis, "be rewritten as the *Romance of the Onion*."

Poetry is characteristically a discourse about both emotions and objects, or about the emotive quality of objects, and this through its preoccupation with symbol and metaphor. An emotion felt for one object is identified by reference to its analogue felt for another—a fact which is the basis for the expressionist doctrine of "objectification" or the giving to emotion a solid and outside objectivity of its own. The emotions correlative to the objects of poetry become a part of the matter dealt with—not communicated to the reader like an infection or disease, not inflicted mechanically like a bullet or knife wound, not administered like a poison, not simply expressed as by expletives or grimaces or rhythms, but presented in their objects and contemplated as a pattern of knowledge. Poetry is a way of fixing emotions or making them more permanently perceptible when objects have undergone a functional change from culture to culture, or when as simple facts of history they have lost emotive value with loss of immediacy. Though the reasons for emotion in poetry may not be so simple as Ruskin's "noble grounds for the noble emotions," yet a great deal of constancy for poetic objects of emotion—if we will look for constancy—may be traced through the drift of human history. The murder of Duncan by Macbeth, whether as history of the Eleventh Century or chronicle of the Sixteenth, has not tended to become the subject of a Christmas carol. In Shakespeare's play it is an act difficult to duplicate in

all its immediate adjuncts of treachery, deliberation, and horror of conscience. Set in its galaxy of symbols—the hoarse raven, the thickening light, and the crow making wing, the babe plucked from the breast, the dagger in the air, the ghost, the bloody hands—this ancient murder has become an object of strongly fixed emotive value. The corpse of Polynices, a far more ancient object and partially concealed from us by the difficulties of the Greek, shows a similar pertinacity in remaining among the understandable motives of higher duty. Funeral customs have changed, but not the web of issues, religious, political, and private, woven about the corpse “unburied, unhonoured, all unhallowed.” Again, certain objects partly obscured in one age wax into appreciation in another, and partly through the efforts of the poet. It is not true that they suddenly arrive out of nothing. The pathos of Shylock, for example, is not a creation of our time, though a smugly modern humanitarianism, because it has slogans, may suppose that this was not felt by Shakespeare or Southampton—and may not perceive its own debt to Shakespeare. “Poets,” says Shelley, “are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” And it may be granted at least that poets have been leading expositors of the laws of feeling.<sup>18</sup>

To the relativist historian of literature falls the uncomfortable task of establishing as discrete cultural moments the past when the poem was written and first appreciated, and the present into which the poem with its clear and nicely interrelated meanings, its completeness, balance, and tension has survived. A structure of emotive objects so complex and so reliable as to have been taken for great poetry by any past age will never, it seems safe to say, so wane with the waning of human culture as not to be recoverable at least by a willing student. And on the same grounds a confidence seems indicated for the objective discrimination of all future poetic phenomena, though the premises

or materials of which such poems will be constructed cannot be prescribed or foreseen. If the exegesis of some poems depends upon the understanding of obsolete or exotic customs, the poems themselves are the most precise emotive evaluation of the customs. In the poet's finely contrived objects of emotion and in other works of art the historian finds his most reliable evidence about the emotions of antiquity—and the anthropologist, about those of contemporary primitivism. To appreciate courtly love we turn to Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France. Certain attitudes of late fourteenth-century England, toward knight-hood, toward monasticism, toward the bourgeoisie, are nowhere more precisely illustrated than in the prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The field worker among the Zunis or the Navahos finds no informant so informative as the poet or the member of the tribe who can quote its myths.<sup>19</sup> In short, though cultures have changed and will change, poems remain and explain; and there is no legitimate reason why criticism, losing sight of its durable and peculiar objects, poems themselves, should become a dependent of social history or of anthropology.

## NOTES

<sup>19</sup>"The Parallelism between Literature and the Arts." *English Institute Annual*, 1941 (New York, 1942), p. 50.

<sup>20</sup>More recent researches and more precise analysis have tended to reveal a greater universality in the emotive experience of cultures than Westermarck admits. As an example of this trend, see C. S. Ford, "Society, Culture, and the Human Organism," *The Journal of General Psychology*, XX (1939), pp. 135-179.

<sup>21</sup>"If feeling be regarded as conscious, it is unquestionable that it involves in some measure an intellectual process" (F. Paulhan, *The Laws of Feeling*, trans. C. K. Ogden, London, 1930, p. 153).

<sup>22</sup>The anecdote as cited by Mr. Lewis (*Abolition of Man*, Oxford, 1944, pp. 3, 9) differs, though not in a way relevant to our argument, from the version known to us in the *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* (ed. E. de Selincourt, London, 1941, I, 223-224). Cf. E. De Selincourt, *Wordsworthian and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1947), p. 185.

<sup>23</sup>Strictly, a theory not of poetry, but of morals, as, to take a curious modern instance, Lucie Guillet's *La Poéticothérapie, Efficacités du Fluide Poétique*, Paris, 1946, is a theory not of poetry but of healing. Aristotle's catharsis is a true theory of poetry, i.e. part of a definition of poetry.

<sup>6</sup>*On Life and Letters*, First Series, trans. A. W. Evans (London, 1911), Preface, p. viii.

<sup>7</sup>*New York Times Book Review*, April 13, 1947, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup>*As I Remember Him*, quoted by J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books," *New York Times Book Review*, April 20, 1947, p. 2. Mr. Adams' weekly department has been a happy hunting ground for such specimens.

<sup>9</sup>*The Olive Tree* (New York, 1937), p. 212.

<sup>10</sup>*The New Yorker*, XIX (Dec. 11, 1943), p. 28.

<sup>11</sup>"The final averages showed that the combined finger movements for the Byron experiments were eighteen metres longer than they were for Keats" (R. C. Givler, *The Psycho-Physiological Effect of the Elements of Speech in Relation to Poetry*, Princeton, 1915, p. 62, quoted by Thomas C. Pollock, *The Nature of Literature*, Princeton, 1942, p. 110).

<sup>12</sup>Wendell S. Dysinger and Christian A. Ruckmick, *The Emotional Responses of Children to the Motion Picture Situation*, New York, 1933.

<sup>13</sup>Herbert J. Muller, *Science and Criticism* (New Haven, 1943), p. 137.

<sup>14</sup>"Ueber den Film," in *Die Forderung des Tages* (Berlin, 1930), p. 387.

<sup>15</sup>The term, as Mr. Winters indicates, is borrowed from Mr. Kenneth Burke's *Counter-Statement*.

<sup>16</sup>*The New Yorker*, XXIII (May 31, 1947), p. 33.

<sup>17</sup>On pp. 183-4 of his *Literary Mind*, Mr. Eastman notices the possibility of inept metaphor and seems about to explain why this would not be, on his hypothesis, even better than apt metaphor. But he never does. On p. 188, "Poetic metaphor is the employment of words to suggest impractical identifications." On p. 185 he alludes to the value of synecdoche as focussing attention on qualities of objects. It would seem to escape his attention that metaphor does the same.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Paulhan, *The Laws of Feeling*, pp. 105, 110.

<sup>19</sup>See, for example, Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton, *The Navaho* (Cambridge, 1946), pp. 134-8; Ruth Benedict, *Zuni Mythology* (New York, 1935), Introduction. The emphasis of Bronislaw Malinowski's *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (New York, 1926) is upon the need of cultural context to interpret myth. Nevertheless the myth is the main point of the book. "The anthropologist," says Malinowski, "has the myth-maker at his elbow" (p. 17).