IMPRESSIONISM IN ENGLISH CRITICISM

THE HISTORY OF IMPRESSIONISM IN ENGLISH CRITICISM UP TO THE YEAR 1900

by

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CHAPTER I

ADDISON, YOUNG AND MORGANN.

Impressionism in criticism has been subjected to much vague thinking and, in consequence, to vaguer utterance. It is too often assumed by critics who ought to know better, that impressionistic criticism, an orchidaceous bloom of the decadence, was transplanted to England from the cafés of Montmartre and Montparnasse during the Eighteen Eighties; that for a time, it poured out its pale and exotic life in the aesthetic hot-house known as the "Beardsley Period;" and that it drooped and withered in the year 1895 in the harsh blast of Philistinism that followed the trial of Oscar Wilde.

We may seek an explanation of this attitude in the fact that the movement has never been subjected to cold, scientific thinking and analysis. It is a phenomenon worthy of remark that most of the writers on the movement were themselves impressionists of the Eighteen Nineties, afflicted with the perverted sentimentality that sought death and decay in all movements of art and of life. The intense self-consciousness of the Nineties fostered literary introspection to no small degree; moreover, the attitude of the writer of the "Beardsley Period" towards himself was a singular one. He was one with the decadence; he would disappear when the decadence disappeared; in the meantime he was extracting a melancholy joy from the

contemplation of his own corruption, and from the arrangement of the details of his own funeral.

Mr. William Butler Yeats was not unaware of the moribund charm of the period, when, watching the gray twilight descend upon his gods, he wrote, " I see indeed in the arts of every country, those faint lights and faint colours and faint outlines and faint energies, which many call "the decadence," and which I, because I believe that the arts lie dreaming of things to come, prefer to call the autumn of the body. An Irish poet whose rhythms are like the cry of a sea-bird in autumn twilight has told us its meaning in the line, "The very sunlight's weary, and it's time to quit the plough."

Even the robust Max Beerbohm, witnessing the triumph of the forces of reaction, published "The Works of Max Beerbohm," and announced with a certain, macabre satisfaction, "I am of the Beardsley Period."

Mr. Arthur Symons, who unlike many of the writers of his school was able to stand apart from his period to examine its art forms, was afflicted with the passion for decay. It is to the inevitable confusion of causes and effects that resulted from this emotional temper, that we owe the popularization of two fallacies. In the first place, he confuses impressionism and the decadence. For Mr. Symons impressionism <u>is</u> the decadence a view which he has expressed with clarity in his essay "The Decadent Movement in European Literature."

1. Yeats, W.B., Ideas of Good and Evil. Shakespeare Head Press, Stratford-Upon-Avon, 1914, p.209.

"The latest movement in European literature has been called by many names none of them quite exact or comprehensive, Decadence, Symbolism, Impressionism, for instance. It is easy to dispute over words, and we shall find that Verlaine objects to being called decadent, Maeterlinck to being called a symbolist, Huysmans to being called an impressionist. These terms, as it happens, have been adopted as the badge of the little, separate cliques, noisy, brainsick, young people who haunt the brasseries of the Boulevard St. Michel, and exhaust their ingenuities in theorizing over the words they cannot write. But taken frankly as epithets, both impressionism and symbolism convey some notion of that new kind of literature which is perhaps more broadly characterized by the word decadence."[1]

The second fallacy of which Mr. Symons has undertaken the promotion is, perhaps, less a fallacy than a half-truth. It lies in the fact that in "The Symbolist Movement in Literature," he attributes the appearance of impressionism in English criticism, to the influence of French criticism of the impressionist school. This view has been taken up by Mr. J.E. Spingarn, who, in an essay entitled "The New Criticism," makes vague and haphazard mention of a few figures of French literature who might have been suspected of impressionist sympathies.

The opposite view, equally narrow, has been expressed in the critical writings of Mr. T.S. Eliot. In his essays "The Perfect Critic," and "The Imperfect Critic" he assumes, or rather, we may assume that he assumes, that impressionism

1. Symons, A., Dramatis Personae, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1923, pp.96-97.

flowered from something within the English temperament itself, from some mysterious chemistry of emotion and imagination.

Unfortunately he carries his research no further back into the history of English criticism than the writings of Swinburne, which leaves the student startled with the idea that impressionism "just growed" in Mr. Swinburne in much the same way that "Topsy" came to be a force with which to be reckoned.

But we must go further back in the history of English criticism than the lilies and langours of Swinburne if we are to know the truth about the origin of impressionistic criticism. We shall be well on our way to a solution of our problem if we consider impressionism as a manifestation of introvert romanticism in the field of criticism.

It is not a related movement. It is not even a parallel movement. It is the appearance of the spirit of romanticism in the realm of aesthetics. It arose within romanticism; it flourished within romanticism; it fell into decay within romanticism.

It sounds its first, sweet, single notes above the precise and rather tinny minutes of the eighteenth century. It flows on, an ever-deepening stream of music and emotion through the nineteenth century. Finally in the nineties, it becomes, as Wilde wrote so effectively and erroneously of the music of Dvorak, "passionate and curiously coloured."[1]

1. Wilde, Oscar, Intentions (Modern Library, London, 1925) p.61.

It arose first not only in reaction to the dry neo-classicism of the eighteenth century, but as an expression of some undefined yearning within the English temperament, some "passionate dedication of oneself to unpathed waters, undreamed shores." It corresponds to an awakening individualism, to a new-found self-consciousness within the critical writer.

The impressionistic critic is distinguished by a curiously whimsical and intense individualism. Ezra Pound would call his mind a "Sargasso Sea," enriched by an exotic, strangely assorted, treasure of scholarship. He reads widely but at random, for he is the taster of books, the amateur of art, rather than the conscientious student. He is the hedonist among critics, reading only at sources that can make some rich and strange contribution to that vicarious existence of mind and emotion that is so much more important to him than mere physical being. George Moore is the type of the impressionist critic of the maturity of the movement, George Moore who wrote of himself, "Never could I interest myself in a book if it were not the exact diet my mind required at the time, or in the very immediate future. The mind asked, received, and digested. So much was assimilated, so much expelled; then, after a season, similar demands were made, the same processes were repeated out of sight, below consciousness, as in the case of a well-ordered stomach. Shelley, who fired my youth with passion, and purified and upbore it for so long, is now to me as nothing: not a dead or faded thing, but a thing out of which I personally have drawn all the sustenance I may draw from him, and, therefore,

it (that part which I did not absorb) concerns me no more."[1]

Hazlitt, himself of that company, pictured the impressionistic quality in Lamb, when he wrote of him,

"Mr. Lamb has succeeded not by conforming to the spirit of the age, but in opposition to it. He does not march boldly along with the crowd, but steals off the pavement to pick his way in the contrary direction. He prefers byways to highways. When the full tide of human life pours along to some festive show, to some pageant of a day, Elia would stand on one side to look over an old book-stall, or stroll down some deserted pathway in search of a pensive description over a tottering doorway, or some quaint device in architecture illustrative of embryo art and ancient manners."[2]

Such a man, too, was Maurice Morgann, whose defence of Falstaff brings a poignant note into the ponderous orchestration of the Shakespeare criticism of the day. And again, Morgann himself finds a distinguished predecessor in Joseph Addison, who continued to write neo-classical criticism even while he was learning to inquire into the nature of the rebel imagination, and to question the rights of the understanding as the sole arbiter of literary excellence or mediocrity.

But as neither Addison nor Morgann were possessed of what George Meredith has called "the rapture of the forward view," they could not have been conscious of themselves as the

1. Moore, George, Confessions of a Young Man, (Modern Library, London) p.23.

2. Hazlitt, W., Works, Volume V (Derby & Jackson, London, 1859, p.92.

predecessors of the new romanticism in criticism. But we, who stand well removed from them in time, recognize in their literary experiments the nucleus of a new school of aesthetics.

Inquiry into the origin of a movement is a dreary business. Especially so is this inquiry in the field of romanticism, in which the various theories of origin have been many times stated and restated. But in regard to the new system of aesthetics that was to arise within the romantic movement, Mr. J.G. Robertson, in his "Genesis of the Romantic Theory," has pointed out that it had its source, in a great part, in the degree in which Shakespeare had saturated the English consciousness, and in the impossibility of judging this great natural genius by the neo-classical standard.

Shakespeare was fettered by no unities, Shakespeare was gorgeous with spectacle, Shakespeare's men and women were shaken by no mere "vegetable love," yet Shakespeare never failed to arouse those tragic emotions that can only come into play when the spectator feels himself caught up in the rhythm of life, when he senses the angry rising of the tide whose ebb is to sweep away the tragic hero and the work to which he has given his life.

Thus it became more and more the aim of certain highly sensitive critics to justify, to legalize and to understand the emotion which Shakespeare aroused in them.

It is something of this vague striving after aesthetic sanction and recognition that Addison has expressed in Spectator 592. He writes, "I have a great esteem for a true critic such

Aristotle and Longinus among the Greeks, Horace and Quintilian among the Romans, Boileau and Dacier among the French. But it is our misfortune, that some who set up for professed critics among us are so stupid, that they do not know how to put ten words together with elegance or common propriety, and withal so illiterate that they have no taste of the learned languages, and therefore criticize upon old authors only at second hand. They judge of them by what others have written and not by any notion they have of the authors themselves. The words unity, action, sentiment, and diction, pronounced with an air of authority, give them a figure among unlearned readers who are apt to believe they are very deep, because they are unintelligible. And again, "Our inimitable Shakespeare is a stumbling block to the whole tribe of these rigid critics (that is, those who do not see beauty in anything that does not observe the rules). Who would not rather read one of his plays, where there is not a single rule of the stage observed, than any production of a modern critic, where there is not one of them violated?"[1]

Addison was among the earliest of these early impressionistic critics. His writings contain the germ, the mere suggestion, of a new school of aesthetics.

In Spectator 160 we find an early attempt to define the great geniuses as "the natural geniuses" who "by the mere strength of natural parts, and without any assistance of art or learning, have produced works that were the delight of their

1. Addison, Joseph, Works, Vol.VI (Derby and Jackson, New York, 1850) p.669.

own times, and the wonder of posterity." Geniuses "in whom there appears something nobly wild and extravagant," which Addison considers "infinitely more beautiful than all the turn and polishing of what the French call a 'Bel Esprit.'"[1] He makes specific mention of Shakespeare in one paragraph, placing him on the heights with Homer and the great poets of the Old Testament.

"Our countryman Shakespeare was a remarkable instance of this first kind of great geniuses."[2]

It is evident here, as it is evident elsewhere in the criticism of the eighteenth century, that Shakespeare "dead the long year," was even in this field working his magic, urging men yet further along the way that he had come, forcing them to an emotional rather than an intellectual acceptance of his higher realities.

Yet other germs of a new theory of aesthetics are to be found in Addison's "Papers on the Pleasures of the Imagination," in which we can see the impression made on Addison's sensibility by the sensational philosophy of Hobbes, who influenced him through Locke. In paper 413 he makes a definite acknowledgment of his debt to Locke.

"I have here supposed that my reader is acquainted with that great modern discovery, which is at present universally acknowledged by all the inquirers into natural philosophy: namely, that light and colours, as apprehended by the imagination,

1. Addison, Joseph, Works, Vol.V, p.384.

2. Ibid., p.385

are only ideas in the mind, and not qualities that have any existence in matter. As this is a truth which has been proved incontestably by many modern philosophers, and is indeed one of the finest speculations in that science, if the English reader would see the notion explained at large, he may find it in the eighth chapter of the second book of Mr. Locke's "Essay on Human Understanding."[1]

That Addison should consider the imagination worthy of inquiry in an age in which distrust of that faculty was a marked characteristic, in itself set him apart from his contemporaries. He leaves us in no doubt of his championship of"the pleasures of the imagination," which "are not so gross as those of the sense, nor so refined as those of the understanding."

Again we note an interesting passage, probably inspired by Isaac Walton. "A man of polite imagination is let into a great many pleasures, that the vulgar are not capable of receiving . He can converse with a picture, and find an agreeable companion in a statue. He meets with a secret refreshment in a description, and often feels greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows, than another does in the possession. It gives him, indeed, a kind of property in everything he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated parts of nature administer to his pleasures: so that he looks upon the world, as it were in another light, and discovers in it a multitude of charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of mankind."[2]

1. Addison, Joseph, op.cit., Vol.VI, p.335.
2. Ibid., p.325.

Here, as nowhere else, we come in contact with an Addison in healthy revolt from the hedging traditions of his century. Especially do we delight in his conception of the imagination as a power giving him a "kind of property in everything he sees," recognizing as its origin that healthy individualism which looks upon aesthetic experience, not as an emotional adventure to be enjoyed for its own sake, but as something to be received, transmuted and particularized, something of which it has need for survival and growth.

We realize to what extent Addison outdistanced his contemporaries in an understanding the imaginative element in art, when we discover in his "Essays on the Pleasures of the Imagination," a defence of the supernatural element in literature.

It is evident in the following paragraph on Shakespeare that he has grasped the essentials of the principle of illusion in art. "There is something so wild and yet so solemn in the speeches of his ghosts, fairies, witches, and the like imaginary persons, that we cannot forbear thinking them natural, though we have no rule by which to judge of them, and must confess if there are such beings in the world, it looks highly probable that they should talk and act as he has represented them."[1]

Although he thus expressed opinions foreign to the spirit of his age, Addison was not unaware of the perils of a too reckless indulgence of the rebel imagination. He takes refuge in a rather weak theology.

1. Addison, Joseph, op. cit., pp.364-5.

"The Supreme Author of our being has so formed the soul of man, that nothing but Himself can be its last, adequate, and proper happiness. Because, therefore, a great part of our happiness must arise from the contemplation of this Being, that he might give our souls a just relish of such a contemplation, he has made them naturally delight in the apprehension of what is great or unlimited. Our admiration, which is a very pleasing notion of the mind, immediately rises at the consideration of any object that takes up a great deal of room in the fancy, and, by consequence, will improve into the highest pitch of astonishment and devotion, when we contemplate His nature that is neither circumscribed by time, nor place, nor to be comprehended by the largest capacity of a created being."[1]

A study of Addison's criticism leaves us with the impression that he differed essentially from the critics of his day. His championship of the senses, his delight in the imaginative faculty, his connaisseur's choice of his literary fare, and finally his emotional as well as intellectual enjoyment of literature, all go to the forming of such an impression. More than that, his very manner of writing, with its trend to a concrete, imaginative, treatment of purely abstract, aesthetic ideas, etches this impression more vigorously upon our sensibilities. Does not this study of the classical, neo-classical and imaginative schools of Homer, Virgil and Ovid, hackneyed as it must inevitably seem to us now, point to a form of critical writing in which Walter Pater was perhaps

1. Addison, Joseph, op. cit., p.333.

the most successful experimenter.

"Reading the Iliad is like travelling through a country uninhabited, where the fancy is entertained with a thousand savage prospects of vast deserts, wide uncultivated marshes, huge forests, misshaped rocks and precipices. On the contrary, the Aeneid is like a well-ordered garden, where it is impossible to find out any part unadorned, or to cast our eyes upon a single spot, that does not produce some beautiful plant or flower. But when we are in the Metamorphosis we are walking on enchanted ground, and see nothing but scenes of magic lying around us."[1]

We who stand apart from the movement recognize here tendencies that in a process of synthetic development in the course of a century, are to become pure impressionism; or which, indeed, communicated through a personality less inhibited by tradition than that of Addison, might have developed into something very nearly approaching that impressionism.

However, we cannot abstract Addison from the eighteenth century and say that in happier days he might have become an impressionist. Indeed, it is probable that "the elements were too mixed" in Addison to permit of any such supposition. In his personality, which combined with singular felicity the emotional and rational, the typical and individual elements, the emotional and individual had slightly the edge on the rational and typical. On the other hand, he would certainly have been an exotic among the impressionistic critics of the

1. Addison, Joseph, op. cit., p.354.

nineteenth century, even as he was exotic among the neo-classical critics of the eighteenth century.

Edward Young, the melancholy poet of "Night Thoughts" is a disappointment to the student who seeks in his criticism an accentuation of impressionistic tendencies. His essay, "Conjectures on Original Composition", which exercised so great an influence on German literature of the eighteenth century is scarcely more than an able popularization of other people's ideas. Young, in this essay, merely gathers together the critical aspects of the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns passes judgement upon them, and gives his verdict definitely in favour of the Moderns.

We would not by any means disparage that very important adjunct of any new movement, whether of religion, of science or of art, a good popularizer; but in coming to the study of Edward Young's critical writing with some knowledge of his personality, his artistic achievements up to this time, and his relation to his period, we have reason to expect so much more of him, so much more vital an achievement in the field of aesthetics, so much closer an approach to that form of criticism which is now called "Creative."

In the first place, he was a poet, as were the later impressionists, Swinburne, Symons, Wilde, Poe and Symonds. As such, we might expect him not only to run the hazard which is always run by the poet when he enters the field of criticism, (that is, a tendency to project ~~subjectivity~~ himself and his poetics into his criticism) but to be freed of many of the

psychological inhibitions which shackle the ordinary critic. He had no need to work out his creative urge in criticism, to the inevitable abuse of the latter, since his poetry provided him with an adequate, emotional, safety-valve. Then too, he was a part of the as yet embryonic romantic movement, in that his melancholy falls like an indigo shadow upon the artifical glare of the eighteenth century; and finally, the heightened sensitivity of the poet was his, with the poet's peculiar ability to transmute his experience, and give it imaginative expression.

It is to Young's credit that he recognized the new movement and that he was successful in summing up its characteristics.

His deficiencies may be partially accounted for by the fact that his religious fervour acted as a fairly effective opiate to his critical sense.

The modern attitude that art is essentially unmoral would have been definitely antagonistic to Young's way of thinking. His condemnation of Swift on purely moral grounds is one of the most serious consequences of his misapplication of ethics. Again it is with a sensation half-amusement, half-annoyance, that we watch him destroy the unity of his essay, while he pauses, so to speak, beside the sick-bed of Addison.

Then too, Young had no very high conception of the function of the critic. To him, as to so many critics, art and art-criticism were things divorced from life. He could not see "through literature to life," as a modern appreciator

has expressed it.

The idea of the contemplation of art as a transcendent experience, an experience of the mind and spirit, rich with myrrh and sweet with frankincense, distinguished from tawdrier experiences of the body or of the mind, simply did not occur to him. He could not conceive of criticism as a creative work. He writes, "Genius, therefore, leaves but a second place among men of letters to the learned. It is their merit and ambition to fling light on the works of genius, and point out its charms."[1]

He announces himself definitely on the side of the originals among authors, the Shakespeares and the Pindars; and he cherishes an almost personal malevolence for the neo-classicists and all their artificial equipment of rules and of conventions. But he seems to accept as obvious and unworthy of development the fact that a movement of originality and individuality in art must necessarily be paralleled by corresponding movements in aesthetic criticism.

Exactly the opposite is true of Maurice Morgann, he of the curiously modern mind. His essay on Falstaff, which

1. Jones, Edmund, English Critical Essays, (Oxford Press, 1922) p.327.

constitutes practically all (and yet how much!) of what we know of him, fulfills the conditions of that highest criticism which Oscar Wilde cites as "a form of autobiography."[1]

He felt in italics; he thought in italics, he wrote in italics. His emotional reaction to a work of art was the foundation of his judgement of it. That is to say, he was an impressionist in just the same sense of the word in which Lamb and Hazlitt were impressionists. His dominant characteristic was ready, inventive power in which he had absolute confidence, supplemented by a keen analytical mind. Thus does he both conform to the temper of his age, and transcend it.

He recognizes that Shakespeare demands of us an emotional, rather than an intellectual appreciation of his art. He writes, "Him we may profess to feel, rather than to understand, and it is safer to say on many occasions that we are possessed by him than that we possess him."[2]

It is just such a surrender of himself that Maurice Morgann brings to his readings of Shakespeare. He loved Shakespeare as Amy Lowell loved Keats, as Humbert Wolfe loves Shelley; and of all the bright company of Shakespeare's men and women he is the most in sympathy with that rollicking knight, Sir John Falstaff. It is probably the individualism of Falstaff that makes its great appeal to Maurice Morgann, for just as Falstaff was a kind of military free-thinker, "who,"

1. Mason, Art and Morality (Frank Palmer, London, 1912) p.271.

2. Smith,Nichol18th Century Essays in Shakespeare (James MacLehose & Sons, Glasgow, 1903) p.221.

as Morgann remarks with one of those so frequent intrusions of himself, his personal experience and his bitterness,"[1] has accordingly incurred the obloquy of his condition," so Maurice Morgann was a critical free-thinker. He might well have taken for his text those words of Pascal "Il y a des raisons que vos raisons ne comprennent pas." For in the face of the most damaging evidence to the contrary, he is faithful to his impression that the old, delightful, rollicker could not be the despicable coward the stern critics would have us believe. His whole thesis is built up around this passionate conviction, the fruit of the impression that an encounter with Sir John never failed to make upon his sensibility.

A good part of his essay is dedicated to an attempt to distinguish between mental impressions of certain facts, and rational understanding of the same facts. He writes "The reader will perceive that I distinguish between mental impressions and the understanding. I wish to avoid everything that looks like subtlety and refinement; but this is a distinction which we all comprehend.'

There are none of us unconscious of certain feelings or sensations of mind which do not seem to have passed through the understanding, the effects, I suppose, of some secret influence from without, acting upon a certain mental sense, and producing feelings and passions in just correspondence to the force and variety of those influences on the one hand, and to

1. Smith, Nichol, Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare (James MacLehose and Sons, Glasgow, 1903) p.264.

the quickness of our sensibility on the other. Be the cause what it may, the fact is undoubtedly so, which is all I am concerned in."[1]

He fortifies this passionate plea for the impression by a minute and always ingenious argument intended for the consumption of the reason rather than the sensibility.

Where Oscar Wilde would have attempted merely to communicate the intensity of his experience rather than explain it, would have addressed himself to the imagination of his reader in a flamboyant prose poem, Maurice Morgann presents a carefully and closely-thought argument.

We do not dare to put forward the theory that Morgann himself would have preferred the creative method of aesthetic judgement. However, his distaste for criticism as it was practiced by the neo-classicists is evident not only in the whole spirit of his work but in his many scathing references to other critics. "That fellow Rimer," he calls one commentator on Shakespeare. His final estimate of the neo-classical critic would probably have corresponded to his judgement of Lancaster, "with sufficient courage and ability perhaps, but with too much of the knave in his composition and too little enthusiasm, ever to be a great and superior character."[2]

His healthy revolt against his century appears rather in the intellectual novelty of his criticism than in its form. He takes his stand without quibbling in defence of that novelty, in opposition to its detractors.

1. Smith, Nichol, op. cit., p.220.
2. Ibid., p.257.

"How many who, proud and pedantic, hate all novelty and damn it without mercy under one compendious word - "Paradox."[1]

For Maurice Morgann was equipped with a capacity for clear and strikingly original thought, which he enlists in the service of his emotional convictions.

He makes no appeal to laws and to accepted critical principles; he relies upon his own very excellent common-sense in building up his argument, with the result that his originality flashes upon our consciousness like lightning in a summer sky.

It would be hard, then, to over-praise the original quality of Maurice Morgann's criticism. It cannot, indeed, be said to be impressionistic in form, but it is splendidly impressionistic in its emotional colouring. We are considering here the critical writings of a man who approaches art with all his faculties awake, eager for the deepening and enriching of his experience.

The movement of impressionistic criticism was in its origin, its development, and its decay, subject to the laws that govern the universe. Nothing comes about suddenly - no movement of the mind or of the spirit comes into being matured, as certain critics would have us believe, was the manner in which impressionistic criticism made its appearance. It did, it is true, erupt thus into the public consciousness, "but that," as Mr. Kipling would say, "is another story." We have examined, then, the beginning of the change, that was to be the nature of literary criticism for the next century.

1. Smith, Nicol, op. cit., p.269.

CHAPTER II

DEQUINCEY, LAMB AND HAZLITT

In view of my hitherto chronological treatment of the history of impressionistic criticism I would seem to deviate from a fixed pattern in placing DeQuincey, who was writing as late as 1845, before Lamb and Hazlitt who completed their work within the first three decades of the nineteenth century. However, it is to be remembered that this treatment must also be organic, and that in placing these critics in any other order I would run the risk of conveying a false impression of a movement that was, in reality, moving and vital.

Lamb and Hazlitt were essential to the development of the movement. Not only did they represent a blossoming, a maturing, of what had gone before them, they were also creators. They made contributions to the movement which were in their turn to be absorbed and expanded by later critics. On the other hand, DeQuincey, although he is indubitably an interesting critic, and within certain limits an impressionistic critic, is also, to some extent, a reactionary within the romantic movement.

In that age of the glorification of individualism, De Quincey's characteristic trait was a certain eighteenth century quaintness of mind and expression.

His literary personality parades in the stiff, rich, brocades of the period of Addison and Steele. He makes little

or no contribution to the development of the new aesthetic movement.

We have long since learned to expect the emotional and imaginative approach to the study of literature, which was so novel and delightful when we discovered its first, faint manifestations in the works of Addison, Young and Morgann.

Since DeQuincey was a nineteenth century critic, and, as such, was conditioned by his age and by the society in which he moved, we are not surprised to find that the new theory of aesthetics has given his work direction and form. On the other hand, the fact that he makes no contribution to the theory, that he does not build upon it, that he is, in fine, closer to Maurice Morgann than to Lamb and Hazlitt, is distinctly disappointing to the investigator into impressionism. For instance, he has it in common with Maurice Morgann and all the impressionistic critics, that the whole elaborate architecture of his criticism of art, has for its foundation his personal impression rather than his understanding of that work. He presents his manifesto of criticism in his essay, "On the Knocking on the Gate in Macbeth." "Here I pause for one moment, to exhort the reader never to pay any attention to his understanding when it stands in opposition to any other faculty of his mind. The mere understanding, however useful and indispensable, is the meanest faculty in the human mind, and the most to be distrusted; and yet the great majority of people trust to nothing else, which may do for ordinary life, but not for philosophical purposes."[1]

1. DeQuincey, Thomas, Works, Vol.X (A & C Black, London, 1897) p.389.

But he follows Morgann, rather than the pure impressionists, in that, in his criticism, he does not rely altogether upon a recreation of that impression. Like Morgann he analyses his impression, tabulates its ingredients, transforms it into a formula for the aesthetic pleasure.

This method is employed in the essay quoted above, when he essays an analysis of his experience, an explanation of its focus point of emotion. He presents his impression thus. "The knocking at the gate which succeeds to the murder of Duncan produced to my feelings an effect for which I never could account. The effect was that it reflected back upon the murderer a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity; yet, however obstinately I endeavoured with my understanding to comprehend this, for many years I never could see why it should produce such an effect."[1]

There follows then, an analysis of this effect that is ingenious from the point of view of psychology, and bad from the point of view of impressionism. "Or, if the reader has ever been present in a vast metropolis on the day when some great national idol was carried in funeral pomp to his grave, and, chancing to walk near the course through which it passed, has felt powerfully in the silence and desertion of the streets, and in the stagnation of ordinary business, the deep interest which at that moment was possessing the heart of man, if all at once he should hear the death-like stillness broken up by the sound of wheels rattling away from the scene,

1. De Quincey, Thomas, op. cit.

and making known that the transitory vision was dissolved, he will be aware that at no moment was his sense of the complete suspension and pause in ordinary human concerns so full and affecting as at that moment when the suspension ceases, and the goings-on of human life are suddenly resumed. All action in any direction is best expounded, measured and made apprehensible, by reaction. Now apply this to the case in Macbeth. Here, as I have said, the retiring of the human heart and the entrance of the fiendish heart was to be expressed and made sensible. Another world has stept in, and the murderers, are taken out of the region of human things, human purposes, human desires. They are transfigured: Lady Macbeth is "unsexed;" Macbeth has forgot that he was born of woman; both are conformed to the image of devils; and the world of devils is suddenly revealed. But, how shall this be conveyed and made palpable?

In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear. The murderers and the murder must be isolated - cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs - locked up and sequestered in some deep recess; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested, laid asleep, tranced, racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated, relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is that, when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds; the knocking at the gate

is heard, and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that has suspended them."[1]

Thus through that moment of terrible stillness echoes, not the knocking at the gate, but the scratching of De Quincey's pen. For the passage, which, incidentally, has been much admired, is disappointing to the reader who seeks the impressionistic approach.

It is possible, however, to lay too much stress upon this tendency in De Quincey's criticism. He was essentially an impressionist, just as Morgann was an impressionist, in his approach to art. It is as if the artist had but supplied him with the stage and with the limp, inanimate, puppets. He himself must set them in action by sheer force of his emotion and imagination.

It is important to note here, that DeQuincey paid a certain pen-service to the function of impartial understanding, or rather, as he expresses it, of common sense, in literary criticism, which is not entirely supported by his practice. For instance, in his prejudiced article on Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister," he presents a very misleading manifesto of his critical principles. "We have extracted this passage, however, for the sake of pointing the reader's eye to one word in it:

1. DeQuincey, Thomas, op.cit., pp.392-3.

'many will judge it by the common rule.' What rule is that? The translator well knows that there is no rule, - no rule which can stand in the way of fair and impartial criticism - and that he is conjuring up a bugbear which has no existence. In the single cases of epic and dramatic poetry (but in these only as regards the mechanism of the fable) certain rules have undoubtedly obtained an authority which may prejudice the cause of a writer; not so much, however, by corrupting sound criticism, as by occupying its place. But with regard to a novel, there is no rule which has obtained any "prescription" (to speak the language of civil law) but the golden rule of good sense and just feeling and the translator well knows that in such a case, if a man were disposed to shelter his own want of argument under the authority of some"common rule," he can find no such rule to plead."[1]

The reader is here divided between gratification at this summary rejection of rule in favour of emotion, and the conviction that when DeQuincey's common sense and personal feeling were at war, as they were, not infrequently, his common sense had a very thin chance of survival. Elsewhere in the Goethe essay, when he drops his pose of impartiality, the personal element is seen to flaunt its banners in the very vanguard. Of "Theresa," he writes, in an engagingly naive confession of partisanship. "We are loath to part with this most amusing Theresa: she is a political economist and so are we; naturally therefore, we love her."[2]

1. DeQuincey, Thomas, op. cit., pp.227-8.
2. Ibid., p.243

Indeed the whole study of Wilhelm Meister is so coloured by prejudice, that, in the end, De Quincey makes a gesture of explanation in which he lays the whole burden of responsibility for his criticism upon Goethe himself. "Thus we have made Mr. von Goethe's novel speak for itself. And whatever impression (the italics are mine) it may leave upon the reader's mind, let it be charged on the composer."[1]

We have here, an instance of the deviations to which the impressionistic method is peculiarly liable. Not only does De Quincey deny formal acknowledgment of his method, he distorts and abuses it.

On the other hand, when his impressions were not deformed by irrelevant prejudices, when his naturally keen critical sense was allowed to operate unimpeded, he has given us some excellent criticism, impressionistic in conception, and often impressionistic and creative in form. His theory of Greek tragedy, for instance, is an application of the essential truths of impressionism to the Greek tragic theatre. It argues that Greek tragedy developed along lines parallel to the conditions surrounding theatrical production and presentation in ancient Greece, that its simple grandeur, its elevation and idealization, are but projections or crystallizations of the impression made by such production upon the sensibility of the audience. "It is not enough to say that naturally - we have a right to say that inevitably - out of this prodigous compass, exactly ten times the compass of the large Drury Lane

1. De Quincey, Thomas, op. cit., p.256.

burned down a generation ago, arose certain immediate results that moulded the Greek Tragedy in all its functions, purposes, and phenomena. The person must be aggrandized, the countenance must be idealized. For upon any stage corresponding in its scale to the colossal dimensions of such a house the unassisted human figure would have been lost; the unexaggerated human features would have been seen as in a remote perspective, and, besides, have had their expression lost; the unreverberated human voice would have been undistinguishable from the surrounding murmurs of the audience."[1]

In this essay too we note with what natural grace and ease De Quincey can make use of the impressionistic method. In reading his elaborate image of the painting within a painting, the play within a play, that is "rough and horrent with figures in strong relief like the embossed gold of an ancient vase,"[2] there is inexplicably induced within us, that mood of lofty awe which we experience when, in Greek tragedy, we witness the operation of the mysterious forces of catastrophe on the lives of men. Elsewhere, when his method cannot be said to be creative in this sense, where the appeal is rather to the intellect than to the senses and the imagination, it remains the personal expression of an intensely personal impression. His criticism is everywhere the autobiography of De Quincey, the revelation of his personal likes and dislikes,

1. De Quincey, Thomas, op. cit., p.346.
2. Ibid., p.345.

his extreme sensibility, his political enthusiasms, and, finally, his altogether delightful sense of the ridiculous.

Although, as we have seen, he would rank common sense above all other virtues, he never attempts to discredit the emotional element in the appreciation of literature. In his essay on "Antigone" he comes out boldly with the statement, "Let me be a Goth, but let me not dishonour myself by affecting an enthusiasm which my heart rejects."[1]

Often as we have seen, his common sense and just feeling wage an unequal war with his prejudices; still oftener the personal element in his criticism constitutes a serious intrusion of material foreign to the subject in hand. For instance, in his review of Wordsworth's "Excursion," he suddenly recalls the French Revolution, feels the mute reproach of those regiments of mislaid heads, loses his own, figuratively speaking, and waves a red flag for some two pages of ill-timed revolutionary zeal, ending thus, "Whereas, in fact, gentlemen blockheads it (the revolution) has succeeded; it is far beyond the reach of ruinous reactions; it is propagating its life; it is travelling on to new births - comquering, and yet to conquer."[2]

But De Quincey's essays at impressionistic criticism are chiefly remarkable in that they recall the stiff neo-classicism of the eighteenth century, even while they foreshadow something of the critical "libertinage" that is to come.

1. De Quincey, Thomas, op. cit., p.363.
2. Ibid., p. 312.

The explanation of this phenomenon is easy of access. Gifted with a pliant and original mind, De Quincey was at the same time hampered by a certain innate weakness that led him to take refuge in his opium fantasies and in that other world most easily accessible to him, the world of the eighteenth century classicists. He lives there vicariously and dreams troubled dreams. He is the sleeper who stirs uneasily in his sleep.

After having read widely in the literary criticism of Charles Lamb the reader finds himself suffused, emotionally, with a feeling which he does not understand, groping, intellectually, after a number of novel, yet scarce-defined ideas and theories. That is to say, he has apprehended Lamb's criticism emotionally, it has been impressed upon his sensibility, it has added its vivid strands to the warp and woof of his experience, but he cannot explain its nature as yet, nor can he assign it to any one category of critical writing. Yet upon further reflection he will realize that for the very quality of vivid indefinableness inherent in his criticism, Lamb takes his place in the ranks of the impressionistic critics.

Yet another clue to the understanding of Lamb's criticism is to be found in those passages in which Elia indulges the tendency of romanticism towards introspection. This tendency appears in its most healthy creative manifestations, which in the poets were to produce the purest lyrical expression. In the many delightful passages in which Elia talks about himself,

there is none of the cheap theatricalism which was to be characteristic of decadent romanticism. His dramatization of himself never descends to melodrama. It is a self-analysis rich in human understanding and in whimsical humour, and as such it is invaluable to our understanding of Lamb the literary critic.

In two such passages, especially, do we find the essential qualities of Lamb's criticism admirably set forth. "There is an order of imperfect intellects (under which mine must be content to rank) which in its constitution is essentially anti-caledonian.

The owners of the sort of faculties I allude to have minds rather suggestive than comprehensive. They have no pretence to much clearness or precision in their ideas or in their manner of expressing them. Their intellectual wardrobe, to confess fairly, has few whole pieces in it. They are content with fragments and scattered pieces of truth. He presents no full front to them, a feature or a side face at the most. Hints and glimpses, germs and crude essays at a system is the utmost they pretend to. They beat up a little game peradventure and leave it to knottier heads, more robust constitutions, to run it down. The light that lights them is not steady and polar, but mutable and shifting, waxing and waning. Their conversation is accordingly. They will throw out a random word in and out of season and be content to let it pass for what it is worth.

They cannot speak always as if they were upon their oath, but must be understood speaking or writing with some

abatement. They seldom wait to mature a proposition, but e'en bring it to the market in the green ear. They delight to impart their defective discoveries as they arise, without waiting for their full development. They are no systematizers and would but err more by attempting it. Their minds, as I said before, are suggestive merely."[1]

And again, "Crude they are I grant you, a sort of unlicked, incondite things, villainously pranked in an affected array of antique modes and phrases. They had not been his if they had been other than such; and better it is that a writer should be natural in a self-pleasing quaintness than affect a naturalness (so-called) that should be strange to him."[2]

All the qualities which distinguish Lamb as a critic are here in his own analysis, set down with the laughing, conscious exaggeration that is so characteristic of him; his so-called formlessness, his connoisseur's air of sipping the rare vintage of old books, his heady enthusiasms which scorn soberer criticism, his style - but what adjectives can shackle Lamb's style and bring it up for judgement? For just as "Ulysses," whom Tennyson has animated with the soul of the mad, English adventurer of the nineteenth century, was "a part of all that he had met," so Lamb himself, fired with the spirit of his age, was a part of all that he had read, and his style is but an expression of himself.

1. Tillyard, Lamb's Criticism (University of Cambridge Press, 1923) p.105.

2. Ibid.

It is a fact worthy of remark that much of Lamb's criticism is contained in his personal letters; and if the student of personal letters experiences, rather, the satisfaction of curiosity satisfied than a purely aesthetic emotion, this satisfaction is at least accompanied by a sense of more intimate contact with the author in question.

This vivid experience is ours in reading Lamb's criticism. His letters to Coleridge, to Wordsworth, to Southey, to Manning, to Walter Wilson, to Charles Lloyd the Elder, are many of them dashed off in the "first fine, careless, rapture" of a new literary enthusiasm. Thus they are essentially the first fruits of his reading - attempts to communicate to his friends some freshly received impression. The words "I have been reading," "have you read?" and like phrases so familiar to booklovers, ring through his criticism like bells. In a letter to Robert Lloyd, dated February 1, 1801, we read, "I shall expect you to bring me a brimful account of the pleasure which Walton has given you when you come to town. It must square with your mind."[1] Again, in a letter to C.A. Elton, he writes, "I have just finished Chapman's "Homer." Did you ever read it? It has the continuous power of interesting you all along."[2]

And finally in a letter to Coleridge, of December 5, 1796 we find this Elia - like ultimatum, "I have been reading "The Task" with fresh delight. I am glad that you love Cowper.

1. Tillyard, op. cit., p.17.

2. Ibid., p.33.

I could forgive a man for not enjoying Milton; but would not call that man friend who should be offended with the divine chit-chat of Cowper."[1]

Whatever may be the faults of Lamb's criticism, and we cannot deny that they are many, there is inherent in his work that which Tolstoy states should be the aim of all art, the communication of emotional experience.

It is to be noted further that as an essayist and a critic, Lamb never quite loses the familiar quality of the letter-writer. His is indeed a "gentle art," and in his critical writing he weaves into a many-coloured tapestry, the small experiences of his day-by-day existence, the exoticisms of his imaginative wanderings, and the great adventures of his mind and spirit.

It was never easy for him to lend his "imperfect intellect" his "merely suggestive" mind, to the creation of formal, objective, well-constructed criticism. On the few occasions on which he attempted this form, he himself no less than his critics, was ill-satisfied with the result. For instance in 1814, at Wordsworth's request, he produced with much painstaking labour a review of the "Excursion." The result, finished and published in the Quarterly after many delays, is so lifeless that it is almost impossible to recognize it as the work of Lamb.

Lamb, "the frolic and the gentle," Lamb of the warm emotions and vivid enthusiasms, is absent from it. The affronted

1. Tillyard, op. cit., p.83.

author attributed this chilling quality to the work of revision carried out by the editor, and protested vigourously that he substituted for every "warm, living expression," "a nasty cold one." However it is probable that the truth of the matter is, rather, that Lamb's genius, disciplined even by himself, could produce nothing but stunted creations, like the little, dwarfed trees that are made to grow in Japanese gardens.

For the very life force of Lamb's criticism is emotion. He felt literature with a passion which moves lesser men only in moments of great love and grief. He writes of Coleridge "I never so deeply felt the pathetic as in that part 'A spring of love gushed from my heart.' It stung me into high pleasure through suffering."[1] A cry of pure emotion comparable surely to Stevenson's prayer -

"Lord they most pointed pleasure take
And stab my spirit broad awake."

It was not merely that he interested himself in pleasant, scholarly fashion in literature. His day-to-day existence was rich with poetry, with its creation, and with the translation of its emotional content into the form of criticism he had made so peculiarly his own. Often his artistic experiences harken back in the spirit to some sweet, silver echo of words read long ago. Of Keat's "Eve of St. Agnes" he writes, "We have scarcely anything like it in modern description.

1. Tillyard, op. cit., p.92

It takes us back to ancient days, and "Beauty making beautiful old rhymes."[1] To read the "Pot of Basil," which he knew in Boccaccio's original, was but to "weep again a long-forgotten woe."[2]

Thus was Lamb's whole existence a weaving and interweaving of actual and imaginative experience, of real and vicarious emotion. We cannot but think how good must have been "the mere living" of a life that drew its vital elixir from so many sources.

In this regard, we must understand that the welling-up of emotion in Lamb's criticism represents the romantic emotionalism in its healthiest manifestation. Lamb is distinguished from those writers of the decadence who practiced the form of critical writing that was largely his creation, by the quality of his emotion. There is in Lamb none of that yearning after "the sensation after the next" which Mr. Holbrock Jackson[3] finds in the faces of Burne Jones' women. Lamb knew, as we know through his creative criticism, a wholesome joy in the present and normal experiences. So great is his desire to communicate these experiences to his readers that his pen literally skips forward, its progress punctuated now and then by little, dancing steps. Is there anywhere in all literature a more charming example of creative criticism than his letter to Robert Lloyd concerning Isaac Walton "I shall expect you to bring me a brimful account of the pleasure which Walton has

1. Tillyard, op. cit., p.108.
2. Ibid., p.109.
3. Jackson, Holbrook, The Eighteen Nineties (A.A. Knopf, New York, 1927)

given you when you come to town. It must square with your mind. The delightful innocence and healthfulness of the Angler's mind will have blown upon yours like a zephyr. Don't you already feel your spirits filled with the scenes, the banks of rivers, the cowslip beds, the pastoral scenes, the neat ale-houses and hostesses and milkmaids as far exceeding Virgil and Pope as the "Holy Living" is beyond Thomas a Kempis. Are not the eating and drinking joys painted to the life? Do they not inspire you with an immortal hunger? Are not you ambitious of being made an Angler?"[1]

On the other hand too, it is to his emotional apprehension of literature that we must attribute Lamb's faults as a critic, his frequent personal prejudices and consequent literary blindnesses. We note, for instance, his absolute inability to appreciate the work of Byron and Shelley. Of the former he writes.

"I can never make out his great power which his admirers talk of. Why, a line of Wordsworth is a lever to lift the immortal spirit. Byron's can only move the spleen. He was at best a Satyrist - in any other way he was mean enough."[2]

In the case of Byron, it is easy to understand that Lamb would be quick to feel and resent the boyish melodrama of his life and art. Lamb had little patience with cheap theatricalism. He never mistakes mere force for strength. On the other hand, the following attack on Shelley is harder to explain.

1. Tillyard, op. cit., p.67.
2. Ibid., p.106.

"I can no more understand Shelley than you can. His poetry is thin-sown with profit or delight."[1]

It is conceivable also, that at least one extraordinary fallacy in his Shakespeare criticism may be attributed to his emotional impressionability. He literally tries to interpret Shakespeare's theatre as a kind of closet drama, and builds up an intricate argument to prove that the tragedies are more suited for reading than for stage representation. In his essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare" he writes, "It may seem a paradox, but I cannot help being of the opinion that the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage than those of almost any other dramatist whatever. Their distinguished excellence is a reason that they should be so; there is so much in them which comes not under the province of acting, with which eye, and tone, and gesture, have nothing to do."

Consciously or unconsciously Lamb conforms with the Platonic idea of recitation as a type of creative and impressionistic criticism, that is, as a communication of the actor's impression of a certain character. It is not surprising, therefore, that Lamb's personal impression of Shakespeare's men and women should often be at variance with that of the actor who is interpreting the role. His antagonism to Mr. C's "gross representation" of Shakespeare's Richard III is expressed in a spirited passage.

1. Tillyard, op. cit., p.106

"Not one of the spectators who have witnessed Mr. C's exertions in that part, but has come away with a proper conviction that Richard is a very wicked man, and kills little children in their beds, with something like the pleasure which the giants and ogres in children's books are represented to have taken in that practice; moreover, that he is very close and shrewd, and devilish cunning, for you could see that by his eye.

But is, in fact, this the impression we have in reading the Richard of Shakespeare? Do we feel anything like disgust, as we do at that butcher-like representation of him that passes for him on the stage? A horror at his crimes blends with the effect which we feel; but how is it qualified, how is it carried off, by the rich intellect which he displays, his resources, his wit, his buoyant spirits, his vast knowledge and insight into characters, the poetry of his part, not an atom of all which is made perceivable in Mr. C's way of acting it. Nothing but his crimes, his actions is visible; they are prominent and staring; the murderer stands out; but where is the lofty genius, the man of vast capacity, the profound, the witty, accomplished Richard."[1]

We are confronted here with one of the fundamental limitations of impressionistic criticism. It is a fact recognized by psychologists that no two human experiences can be exactly alike. Thus even were it possible to perfect the

1. Tillyard, A Selection from the Criticism of Charles Lamb, (University Press, Cambridge, 1923) p.37.

medium of communication, our sharing of an artist's experience must necessarily be incomplete. Therefore when we encounter this difficulty in Lamb's criticism we can only say that rarely does he deviate from the highest, the most ideal, apprehension of the creation in question.

It is unfortunate, however, that Lamb's hyper-sensitivity, in itself a virtue, should have led him to commit certain critical crimes. In choosing to ignore the fact that Shakespeare's plays were designed for immediate representation by a busy actor-manager, who was well versed in the tricks of his trade, he loses sight of the dramatist in the poet. Consequently, his essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," is but another manifestation of the truth that the critic treads dangerous ground when he attempts to read into Shakespeare's work more than Shakespeare intended that he should find there.

It is too often assumed by his critics that Lamb was a mere literary antiquarian, that his love of the antique tended to overbalance his critical sense. It is true that especially in the field of Elizabethan literature he did valuable work as an antiquarian. But what Lamb sought above all else in literature was the life force, or as one nineteenth century essayist has expressed it, "the rhythm of life." Lamb like all artist temperaments was intensely aware of rhythm; and especially, was he conscious of the rhythm of life, of the rising of the "rude sea of passion," and of its sad, gray ebb. For this reason he preferred dramatic literature, the most perfect representation of this rhythm, to all other forms.

And it was above all in the work of the Elizabethan dramatists contemporary with Shakespeare, those lusty spirits of that golden age, that he encountered the splendid vivifying shock of the passion for which men had died and were glorious in their death. This was the consideration which governed his selection in the anthology "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets." He has made clear his purpose in the preface to this anthology. "When I selected for publication, in 1808 Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the time of Shakespeare, the kind of extracts which I was anxious to give were not so much passages of wit and humour, though the old plays are rich in such, as scenes of passion, sometimes of the deepest quality, interesting situations, serious descriptions, that which is more nearly allied to poetry than to wit, and to tragic rather than to comic poetry. The plays which I made choice of were, with few exceptions, such as treat of human life and manners, rather than masques and arcadian pastorals, with their train of abstractions, unimpassioned deities, passionate mortals, claims, and medorus, and amintas, and amaryllis. My leading design was to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors; to show in what manner they felt, where they placed themselves by the power of imagination in trying circumstances, in the conflicts of duty and passion, or the strife of contending duties; what sort of loves and enmities theirs were; how their griefs were tempered, and their fullswoln joys abated; how much of Shakespeare shines in the great men

his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind."[1]

This preference is emphasized again and again in his notes to the plays. He writes of Ford, "Ford was of the first order of poets. He sought for sublimity, not by parcels in metaphors or visible images, but directly where she has her full residence, in the heart of man; in the actions and sufferings of the greatest minds."[2]

Mr. E.M.W. Tillyard in his essay on Lamb's criticism, has I think, distilled its quintessence, the quintessence, indeed, of all impressionistic or creative criticism, when he says, "Now it is the first and greatest glory of Lamb's criticism that not a little of it has got just this quality of indespensableness. The Lear passage has grown to be almost inseparable from the play; we simply cannot do without the smatch of Tartarus and the souls in bale," and the rest of that great passage to enrich our appreciation of "The Duchess of Malfi;" nor is this quality confined to a few famous places, it meets us again and again. Take a single sentence about Sidney's exuberant language; "The images which lie before our feet, (though by some accounted the only natural) are least natural for the high Sydnean love to express its fancies by." This I consider indispensable criticism of Sydney, something quite irreplaceable.

1. Tillyard, op. cit., p.15.
2. Ibid., p.25.

If asked for my reasons, I could only say that Sidney did not find a homely poetic image the most natural for expressing the kind of passion he felt; although giving the same thought as Lamb's sentence, is not in the least indispensable, to quote Professor Saintsbury to the effect that, "in no critic, perhaps, not even in Mr. Pater, does style count for so much as in Lamb."[1]

Oscar Wilde, in quoting Pater's criticism of La Giconda, notes identically the same quality of indispensability. His experiences of the two works of art are linked together in a Gordian knot. Just as Pater's jewelled, word-mosaics reveal to him the secret of Lady Lisa's smile, without making her one whit less strange and alluring, so do those quiet hands, that still face, maddening in its remote mystery, set Pater's prose rhythms eddying in his consciousness. Thus in the "Critic as Artist" he writes,

"Who, again, cares whether Mr. Pater has put into the portrait of Mona Lisa something that Leonardo never dreamed of. The painter may have been merely the slave of an archaic smile, as some have fancied, but whenever I pass into the cool galleries of the Palace of the Louvre, and stand before that strange figure 'set in its marble chair in that cirque of fantastic rocks as in some faint light under sea,' I murmur to myself, 'She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their

1. Tillyard, op. cit., p.XI.

fallen day about her.'"[1]

This, I think, is the true, the <u>great</u> virtue of impressionistic criticism. The very nature of this art form wills that it must be so. As the communication of an intense imaginative experience, it will, if it achieves its artistic end, become a part of the experience of the reader - one, inevitably, through an associative process, with his experience of the original object of criticism.

To say then, that Lamb's criticism stands this ultimate test is the equal of saying that Lamb was a poet in emotional impressionability and in power of expression, and that his critical writings foreshadow the prose poetry of William Hazlitt and Walter Pater.

We come at length to Hazlitt, who is undoubtedly the best of the impressionistic critics. It is with some surprise that we note what seems to be the premature flowering of a movement that had but put forth its first tender green shoots. It would seem that impressionism had indeed garnered autumn's grain in spring. However, a further analysis reveals the significance of this manifestation. Criticism at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth failed to keep pace with the literary Renaissance.

The early romantic poets were thundering out their impassioned manifestos, finding lyric echoes in the hearts of men, while the critics were still parroting neo-classical maxims.

1. Wilde, Oscar, Intentions (Modern Library, New York) pp.137-38.

Therefore it is inevitable that in the final stage of the literary revolution, criticism should develop at almost incredible speed.

Moreover, Hazlitt was by his very nature his whole philosophical outlook, peculiarly susceptible to whatever germs of impressionism might come his way. His sensitivity, his interest in human nature, his conception of poetry as the communication of emotional experience through the medium of the imagination, and of criticism as a creation of the impression made by that communication upon the critic, all these are qualities which would have ranked him with the impressionists, even in that final period of their development, when the aesthetcs of the Nineties, were issuing the manifesto of impressionism.

Hazlitt had, first of all, the highly developed consciousness, the heightened sensitivity of the great artist temperament. His spirit was like a violin, which having known the touch of the "great musicianer" is disciplined to vibrate only to the purest harmonies.[1] So sure were his impressions that his consequent judgements are usually sound, and forecast often, the seasoned criticism of modern writers. Among the poets of his own day, he was able to distinguish those who were enjoying merely a temporal popularity, from those whose universality would ensure their survival.

1. Wolfe, Humbert, The Unknown Goddess (McMien & Company, London, 1927) p.30.

The names "Mrs. Barbauld," "Mrs. Hannah More," "Miss Baillie," "Mr. Rogers," "Mr. Campbell," evoke as little recognition in our consciousness as they evoked sympathy in that of Hazlitt.[1] He was charmed momentarily by the poetry of Tom Moore, although he knew well that "its gorgeous colours brighten and fade like the rainbow's. Its sweetness evaporates like the effluvia exhaled from beds of flowers."[2]

He sees Moore as "an airy voyageus on life's stream," whose "mind inhales the fragrances of a thousand shores and drinks of endless pleasures under halcyon skies."[3] He is willing enough to yield, momentarily, to the enchantment of that Ariel personality.

He senses both Byron's power and his weakness, his dark passion, and the introvert tendency of that passion, that will in the end work its own destruction. He knows Coleridge, Scott and Wordsworth to be truly great. Thus in relying primarily upon his impression in the formation of his critical opinions, Hazlitt has chosen a guide that rarely leads him astray.

If the reader were asked to point out the essential in which Hazlitt differed from, or, rather, excelled his predecessors, he could but name his humanism. Hazlitt never makes the mistake of divorcing art from life, and in this attitude lies the source of his impressionism. He is vitally

1. Hazlitt, William, Lectures on the English Poets, Collected Works, (J.M.Dent & Sons, New York, 1902) pp.147-149.

2. Ibid., p.151

3. "

interested in the poets whose work he regards as a revelation of character, and of the experience that went to the formation of that character. He is dazzled by what he calls "the splendid vision that in youth haunts our idea of the poetical character."[1] For for this reason, actual contacts with artists often prove disappointing to him. "Poets are not ideal beings; but have their prose-sides like the commonest of people. We often hear persons say, What they would have given to have seen Shakespeare! For my part, I would give a great deal not to have seen him; at least, if he was at all like anybody else I have seen. But why should he; for his works are not!"[2]

It was inevitable that one who was so conscious of the personality of the poet should also regard and practice criticism as an intensely personal thing. Thus, Hazlitt's criticism makes no pretence of being anything but the expression of Hazlitt's own opinion; and if, as we have remarked, he wrote excellent criticism, this excellence is attributable merely to the accident of his being possessed of a sound critical sense.

For Hazlitt lives in his criticism, Hazlitt with his vast enthusiasms, with his petty prejudices, and, above all, with his humour. He is keenly aware, for instance of the joke of Lord Byron, and chuckles in print to the Byronic discomfor-ture, "There is one subject on which Lord Byron is fond of writing, on which I wish he would not write - Buonaparte.

1. Hazlitt, William, op. cit., p.146

2. Ibid.

Not that I quarrel with his writing for him, or against him, but with his writing both for him and against him. What right has he to do this? Buonaparte's character, be it what else it may, does not change every hour according to his Lordship's varying humour. He is not a pipe for Fortune's finger or for his Lordship's Muse to play what stop she pleases on."[1]

However, the personal quality of Hazlitt's criticism lies deeper than these, its mere external manifestations. It is one with his whole conception of life and of art. Poetry was life itself to Hazlitt, life lived by some intense personality, supremely capable of the ultimacies of emotion, and, finally, impressed upon various receptive sensibilities through the medium of the imagination. In his essay "On Poetry in General" he writes, "History treats, for the most part, of the cumbrous and unwieldy masses of things, the empty cases in which the affairs of the world are packed, under the heads of intrigue or war, in different states, and from century to century: but there is no thought or feeling that can have entered into the mind of man, which he would be eager to communicate to others, or which they would listen to with delight, that is not fit subject for poetry. It is not a branch of authorship: it is 'the stuff of which our life is made.' The rest is 'mere oblivion,' a dead letter: for all that is worth remembering in life, is the poetry of it. Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration,

1. Hazlitt, William, op. cit., pp.153-54.

wonder, pity or madness, are all poetry."[1]

Thus far Hazlitt's life is not merely a capacity for sleeping and waking, walking and eating, it is essentially the power to feel. Rhythm and poetry are to him the forms in which emotion finds its most complete and concrete expression. "There is a near connection between music and deep rooted passion. Mad people sing. As often as articulation passes naturally into intonation, there poetry begins."[2]

And again, "It has been well observed, that every one who declaims warmly, or grows intent upon a subject, rises into a sort of blank verse or measured prose."[3]

But to regard poetry as mere expressionism would have, in Hazlitt's opinion constituted a betrayal of its aim. It is evident everywhere in his criticism that Hazlitt regarded the end of poetry as communication. For him the poet was an actor in the "theatre of the soul," a protagonist having confidants in proportion to his power, his relation to his age, and his universality. In a passage quoted above, the words most important to our understanding of Hazlitt's aesthetics are, "no thought or feeling that can have entered the mind of man, which he would be eager to <u>communicate</u> to others."

Thus, for Hazlitt, as for the later impressionists, art must effect a communication of experience, a sharing as complete as is psychologically possible, of the experience of

1. Hazlitt, William, op. cit., p.2.
2. Ibid., p.12.
3. " p.13.

one consciousness by others, to their inevitable enriching and deepening. It is on the ground that he does not achieve this communication that he condemns Walter Scott. "In a word, I conceive that he is to the great poet, what an excellent mimic is to a great actor. There is no determinate impression left on the mind by reading his poetry. It has no results. The reader rises up from the perusal with new images and associations, but he remains the same man that he was before. A great mind is one that moulds the mind of others."[1] Moreover, he does not regard this communication as merely an idealized, universalized, abstract process. It is particularized, rendered concrete, through its relation to the highly individual personalities, first of the poet, and, finally, of his communicants, who bring to the process their individual resources. He writes, "Those arts which depend on individual genius and incommunicable powers, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after."[2]

It is in regard to this communication that Hazlitt's impressionism first becomes self-conscious. We find him using the word "impression," in exactly the same sense in which it was used by the later self-confessed impressionists to describe, first, the change affected in the poetic temperament by some adventure of the mind or spirit, and, ultimately, the printing off of that experience upon some alien but sympathetic sensibility.

1. Hazlitt, William, op. cit., p.155.

2. Ibid., p.45.

He defines the impression both in its relation to the poet and to the reader "The poetical impression of any object is that uneasy exquisite sense of beauty or power that cannot be contained within itself; that is impatient of all limit;" that (as flame bends to flame) strives to link itself to some other image of kindred beauty or grandeur; to enshrine itself, as it were, in the highest forms of fancy, and to relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner, and by the most striking examples of the same quality in other instances."[1]

Again, in a discussion of poetry as the "language of the imagination," he writes, "This language is not the less true to nature because it is false in point of fact; but so much the more true and natural, if it conveys the impression which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind."[2]

He elaborates his discussion of the nature of the impression, taking the stand that impressionism is fundamental to art. "Objects must strike differently upon the mind independently of what they are in themselves."[3]

Again and again he makes the point that art represents things, not as they are, but as they appear to be; that is to say, as they "impress" the artist.

The whole of Hazlitt's somewhat airy and diffuse theory of aesthetics is co-ordinated by his conception of the

1. Hazlitt, William, op. cit., p.3.
2. Ibid., p.4.
3. Schneider, Elizabeth, The Aesthetics of Hazlitt, (University of Pennsylvannia Press, 1933) p.100

imagination in art. In his essay "On the Principles of Human Action," he defines imagination as "the faculty of multiplying, varying, extending, combining and comparing our original, passive impression."[1]

This would appear to be the inevitable definition in view of Hazlitt's conception of the artistic experience as a sort of spiritual chemistry, taking place within the sensibilities of the artist and his critic in turn. However, it has been noted by Miss Elizabeth Schneider in her study of Hazlitt's aesthetics, that he did not, as did Coleridge and Wordsworth, have any rigid theory of the imagination, but that he is apt to invent a new definition whenever he has occasion to use the word.

These interpolated revelations are interesting in their range. In his essay "On Shakespeare and Milton," Hazlitt defines imagination as, "the power of feigning things according to nature."[2]

Elsewhere it is, "that faculty which represents objects not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by other thoughts and feelings into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power."[3]

It will be seen that all these definitions have a common denominator. They accept the impression as fundamental to the creation of poetry and of criticism, which, as Hazlitt used it, is essentially creative.

1. Schneider, Elizabeth, op. cit., p.100.
2. Hazlitt, William, op. cit., p.46.
3. Schneider, Elizabeth, op. cit., p.88.

This criticism, like all other art forms, is unconsciously selective. The soul of the poet spoke directly to that of Hazlitt in the language they both knew so well - the language of the imagination, and in that high communion all irrelevancies and inessentials were swept away.

From the work of each of the poets whom he criticized, Hazlitt received some shadowed or shining, faerie or fantastic impression. Hazlitt had that essential quality of the poet, a feeling for atmosphere; and because he was a poet who used the prose form, he was able to recreate this atmosphere, to place each writer in his proper emotional setting.

Thus it is that Hazlitt's criticism is superbly right, emotionally and imaginatively. When he writes of Coleridge, "His voice is like the echo of the congregated roar of the "dark rearward and abyss" of thought. He who has seen a mouldering tower by the side of a chrystal lake, hid by mist, but glittering in the wave below, may conceive the dim, gleaming, uncertain intelligence of his eye: he who has marked the evening clouds uprolled (a world of vapours) has seen the picture of his mind, unearthly, unsubstantial, with gorgeous tints and ever-varying forms."[1] Our first impulsive, scarce articulate reaction is, "Why this <u>is</u> Coleridge! This is exactly what I have felt about Christabel and Kubla Khan!" Similarly, Hazlitt's criticism of Byron who "is seated on a lofty eminence, 'cloud-capt,' or reflecting the last rays of suns; and in his poetical moods reminds us of the fabled

1. Hazlitt, W., Works Volume IV (J.M. Dent London, 1902) p.213.

Titans, retired to a ridgy steep, playing on their Pan's-pipes, and taking up ordinary men and things in their hands with haughty indifference,"[1] is significant for just this ability to conjure up a thrill of recognition, of familiarity with something which has been intensified and lifted out of the sphere of actual experience.

Thus Hazlitt's method of criticism is the poet's method, constituting an emotional rendering of experience through the medium of the senses, and, ultimately, of the imagination.

1. Hazlitt, W., op. cit., p.253.

CHAPTER III

SWINBURNE AND PATER

In any attempt to fix the colour of the critical writings of Algernon Swinburne and Walter Pater, one is led inevitably to a study of their emotional content. Their approach to art, like that of all the impressionistic and creative critics, was an emotional approach. Moreover it is in Swinburne's criticism, that we first note that subtle taint or perversion of feeling which was to become so much more powerful a force in that of Pater, and which led finally to the emotional crisis of the eighteen nineties.

Mr. T.S. Eliot in an essay entitled "The Place of Pater" traces the evolution of this perversion in one of its manifestations, the apprehension of religion throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century. He draws a direct line of influence from Matthew Arnold to Pater. "When religion is in a flourishing state, when the whole mind of society is moderately healthy and in order, there is an easy and natural association between religion and art. Only when religion has been partly retired and confined, when an Arnold can sternly remind us that Culture is wider than Religion, do we get 'religious art,' and, in due course, 'aesthetic religion.' Pater undoubtedly had from childhood a religious bent, naturally, to all that was liturgical and ceremonious. Certainly this is a real and important part of religion; and

Pater cannot thereby be accused of insincerity and aestheticism. His attitude must be considered both in relation to his own mental powers and to his moment of time. There were other men like him, but without his gift of style, and such men were among his friends. In the pages of Thomas Wright, Pater, more than most of his devout friends, appears a little absurd. His High Churchmanship is undoubtedly very different from that of Newman, Pusey, and the Tractarians, who, passionate about dogmatic essentials, were singularly indifferent to the sensuous expressions of orthodoxy. It was also dissimilar to that of the priest working in a slum parish. He was 'naturally Christian' - but within very narrow limitations. The rest of him was just the cultivated Oxford don and disciple of Arnold, for whom religion was a matter of feeling, and metaphysics not much more. Being incapable of sustained reasoning, he could not take philosophy or theology seriously; just as being primarily a moralist, he was incapable of seeing any work of art simply as it is."[1]

Although the point is cleverly taken, it seems to me far too simple an explanation of a very tenuous analogy. Is not the truth of the matter merely that Arnold and Pater were no more closely psychologically akin than were the others of their circle showing decadent romantic characteristics; that the particular perversion of emotion manifested, for instance, in Swinburne's criticism is identical in origin with that of Arnold's theology and Pater's aesthetics. It is merely one

1. Symons, Arthur, Dramatic Personae (Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis, 1923)

tendency of a certain weak type of mind that evolved out of the social conditions of the mid-Nineteenth century.

In a former chapter I have stressed the fact that impressionism was not a French importation, but that it represented the inscrutable flowering of something within the English temperament itself; that it was, in brief, a manifestation of romanticism in criticism. It has been noted further that the view of Mr. Arthur Symons, that impressionism was one with the decadence is essentially incorrect and misleading. There was a decadent impressionism just as there was a decadent romanticism, or rather, because there was a decadent romanticism. There were present in the later Victorian era certain elements which brought about decadence in reaction to themselves, and because he was, through his environment and the psychological abnormalities produced by this environment, peculiarly susceptible to an atmosphere heavy with decay, it is especially in the prose writings of Swinburne, that the decadence in criticism first appears.

It is evident in the quality of emotional stimulation sought by this critic. It was a form of sensationalism, perverse because it had no root in reality. His delight in certain of Victor Hugo's works strengthens this judgment. For it is to Hugo's "L'Homme qui Rit," with its subtlety of exotic pleasures and of strange sins, that he responds with all the intensity of his artist temperament. Of Hugo's heroine he writes, "Among the fields and gardens, the mountain heights and the hollows of Victor Hugo's vast poetic kingdom, there are strange, superb

inmates, bird and beast of various fur and feather; but as yet there was nothing like this. Balzac, working with other means, might have given us by dint of anxious anatomy some picture of the virgin harlot. A marvellous study we should have had, one to burn into the brain and brand the memory for ever; but rather a thing to admire than desire. The magnetism of beauty, the effluence of attraction, he would not have given us. But now we have her from the hand of a poet as well as student, new-blown and actual as a gathered flower, in warm bloom of blood and breath, clothed with live colour, fair with significant flesh, passionately palpable. This we see first and feel, and after this the spirit. It is a strange beast that hides in this den of roses. Such have been, however, and must be. 'We are all a little mad, beginning with Venus.' Her maker's definition is complete: 'a possible Astarte latent in an actual Diana.' She is not merely spotless in body; she is perverse, not unclean; there is nothing of foulness in the mystic rage of her desire. She is indeed 'stainless and shameless;' to be unclean is common, and her 'divine depravity' will touch nothing common or unclean. She has seven devils in her, and upon her not a fleck of filth. She has no more in common with the lewd low hirelings of the baser school of realism than a creature of the brothel and the street has in common with the Maenads who rent in sunder the living limbs of Orpheus. We seem to hear about her the beat and clash of the terrible timbrels, the music that Aeschylus set to verse, the music that made mad, the upper notes of the psalm shrill and strong as a sea-wind, the 'bull-voiced'

bellowing under-song of those dread choristers from somewhere out of sight, the tempest of tambourines giving back thunder to the thunder, the fury of divine lust that thickened with human blood the hill-streams of Cithaeron.[1]

"Virgin harlot" - "rather a thing to admire than desire" - "perverse not unclean" - "the mystic rage of her desire" - "creature" - "divine lust" - what exotic emotion is this, that feeds upon itself and speaks the language of perverse sins and strange passions. Swinburne is not, and never will be, so enamoured of the perverse that he can see beauty in nothing else, but it is evident that the contemplation of perversity in art worked for him a Merlin's magic equalled by none other. He broods over it, bringing to its praise all the resources of his fertile mind and imagination, illuminating it with a many-coloured effluence of lovely words. "Perversity" he says, "is the fruit of weariness as weariness is the fruit of pleasure. Charles Baudelaire has often set that theme to mystic music, but in a minor key: his sweet and subtle lyrics were the prelude to this grand chorus of the master's."[2]

We have not far to seek for an explanation of this element of Swinburne's criticism. There is I believe somewhere in William James'; essay "Habit" a discussion of the vitiating influence of the artistic experience, engendering as it does, a kind of emotional crisis which does not work itself out in

1. Swinburne, A., Essays and Studies (Chatto and Windus, London, 1911) pp.8-9.

2. Ibid., p.16

motor activity, but which turns in upon itself. In the end, either all emotion dies self-slain or is forced to seek stimulation and satisfaction at sources remote from reality. James advocates for the legitimizing of this emotion; its expression in motor activity. For instance, on returning home from a concert we might, on the impetus of the artistic experience rise in the street-car to give our seat to a lady, or we might speak kindly to our aunt. However forced and absurd may seem this contention to the layman, science has proved it to contain more than a grain of truth.

In this case it might be argued that Swinburne achieves adequate expression of his emotion in criticism. Mr. T.S. Eliot for instance calls him "the perfect critic,"[1] and bases his thesis upon the fact that, because of Swinburne's capacity for poetical expression, the processes of stimulation and communication are complete. This seems to me an extraordinary fallacy in a writer of Mr. Eliot's critical perspicacity. Again and again in Swinburne's criticism we come upon passages where the emotion is certainly not "recollected in tranquillity;" where, to the contrary, the critic screams hysterically in print. His "three literary apostasies,"[2] as Mr. Harold Nicolson calls his repudiations of Whistler, Baudelaire and Whitman offer numerous examples of the manner in which he could work himself up to a veritable passion of verbal invictive. Never are we sure that we are not to be dragged suddenly from the

1. Eliot, T.S., The Sacred Wood (Methuen & Co., London, 1920)

2. Nicolson, Harold, Swinburne (MacMillan & Co., London, 1926) p.192.

deep-flowing, harmonious current of his best manner into the weirs of his utterly inconsistent rages.

Mr. Nicholson quotes one such instance. "But it is quite useless to insist on such simple and palpable truths, for ignorance will never understand that knowledge is attainable, and impotence will never admit that ability may be competent. 'Do you suppose it is as easy to write a song as to write an epic?' said Beranger to Lucien Bonaparte. Nor would it be as easy for a most magnanimous mouse of a calibanic poeticule to write a ballad, a roundel or a virelai after the noble fashion of Chaucer, as to gabble at any length like a thing most brutish in the blank and blatant jargon of epic or idyllic stultiloquence."[1]

This tendency to literary hysteria, seems to the merely casual reader to dominate Swinburne in his last years. To such a reader there is no difference between the passage quoted above and the following, extracted from the terrible essay on Greene, Peele and Lodge, his last prose work before his death.

"The riviler of Shakespeare can be no other than a scurrilous buffoon, 'a decent priest where monkeys are the gods' and where Ibsen is the idol. The anatomist of Shakespeare - the superior person who knows all about the weakness of that inferior nature, who can expound the qualities and define the influences which made him the man he was, and precluded him from the dubious chance of showing himself a greater and a stronger man than the soft, flaccid weaklings in whom his pitiful and unmanly ideal of heroic or philosophic manhood is so degradingly

1. Nicolson, Harold, op. cit., pp.193-4.

revealed - the thinker whose masculine intelligence can fathom Shakespeare's at a glance and dismiss it with a smile - is worthy to be classed and remembered as a representative man after the order of Archquack Emerson. Collier the cleric and Rymer the railer are dead, and damned to something less, let us hope, than everlasting fame; pity may surely be allowed to believe in a briefer term of expiatory survival, a milder infliction of purgatorial remembrance, for their successors in the inheritance of contempt. 'Zoile aussi éternel qu'Homère' - what hardest of all hearts would not pity the case of Zoilus, eternally alive (or, in Browning's characteristically audacious phrase 'immortally immerded') in 'the eternal cesspools' to which, when a living soul he contributed all the irrepressible exuberance of effusive or explosive malignity which tortured what served him for a brain, and corroded what sufficed him for a heart? No other creature, alive or dead, can be quite so utterly and so hopelessly pitiable.

A much less incongruous and fessiparous trinity or triunity of pre-Shakespearean playwrights would be revealed in the reunion of three associated names much less inharmonious than the calculation of Greene's and Peele's with Marlowe's. Greene, Peele, and Lodge hang very well together; three really good poets at their best, who can only have been whipped and spurred into scribbling for the stage by insanity of ambition or stimulation of hunger. The dullness of 'The Wounds of Civil War' is so dense and malarious that it is difficult for a suffering reader to remember the existence of 'Rosalynde.' Nothing more perfectly and absolutely worthless, or more

difficult for patient application to dig through, has ever been re-issued in the various re-issues of Dodsley's 'Old Plays:' stupendous as is the stupidity or perversity which has always ignored James Howard's really excellent comedy of 'The English Monsieur,' and selected for infliction on modern readers a piece of noisome nonsense which must make his name a stench in the nostrils of the nauseated reader."[1]

But to the student of Swinburne this verbosity presents, rather, a picture of an arid nullity of emotion, the "cold inhuman absence of all surprise"[2] which is the last stage of the malady that eventually overtakes the sensationalist. The "no emotion, none" acceptance of things, which Matthew Arnold belied in his anguished contemplation of it, had laid its blight upon Swinburne's life and art. There is in this and like passages, something which recalls the colourless wordiness of the bad poet. Words which had once meant so much to Swinburne, words which had burned themselves into his heart and wrought their magic upon his brain, animating his powerful visual imagination, words which were at once the source and the medium of his impressionism, had become mere dictionary-matter to the old poet.

There is something here too, of the distinctive verbosity of the automatic writer - of the taint of hypnosis which is invariably produced when the writer is tired, or when

1. Swinburne, A., Contemporaries of Shakespeare (W. Heinemann, London, 1919) pp.10-11-12.

2. Wolfe, Humbert, The Uncelestial City (Victor Gollancz, London, 1930) p.75.

his attention is distracted. This, perhaps comes nearer to the truth of the matter than does any other explanation. Swinburne had lived long; within the bounds of his curiously-coloured world he had lived deeply. He was indeed tired. But whatever may be the reason, we know that Swinburne's criticism, after its first lush blossoming, was gradually drained of the colour that was its glory and the emotion that was its life force. Swinburne had lost command of even that strange, disintegrated impressionism that had once been his.

It is necessary thus to qualify Swinburne's impressionism, because we recognize even in its beautiful and gracious maturity, germs of the disease with which it was to be stricken.

In the first place, Swinburne was not the pure impressionist. His criticism takes its place, as Mr. Harold Nicolson has noted, half-way between the doctrinaire criticism of Matthew Arnold, and the aesthetic criticism of Walter Pater.[1] It cannot be denied, moreover, that, at the period of his maturity, the theoretical content of his criticism is of considerable merit. This, in itself, would have added to, rather than detracted from his force as a critic, had we not also to reckon with the fact that this impure impressionism is united to an extraordinary insensitivity to any but cerebral sensations. Those critics who call him a fleshly writer, are guilty of a stupid and incomprehensible distortion of his essential quality. He was definitely not a man for whom "le monde extérieur existe." The only external force which

1. Nicolson, Harold, op. cit., pp.183-4.

succeeded in invading the fastness of the dream which was his natural habitat, was the mighty force of the sea. Thus, it is to images of the sea, to recreations of the sea in all its moods, that he turns most often in his attempts to purge his soul of the emotion that had welled up within it. The sea-image, which is, I think, the truest to experience, or rather, that in which the two experiences, the artistic and the actual, are most closely inter-related is that in which Swinburne describes the impression made upon him by Victor Hugo's genius. "Crossing over when a boy from Ostend, I had the fortune to be caught in mid-channel by a thunderstorm strong enough to delay the packet some three good hours over the due time. About midnight the thundercloud was right overhead, full of incessant sound and fire, lightening and darkening so rapidly that it seemed to have life, and a delight in its life. At the same time the sky was clear to the west, and all along the sea-line there sprang and sank as to music a restless dance or chase of summer lightenings across the lower sky: a race and riot of lights beautiful and rapid as a course of shining Oceanides along the tremulous floor of the sea. Eastward at the same moment the space of clear sky was higher and wider, a splendid semi-circle of too intense purity to be called blue; it was of no colour nameable by man; and mid-way in it between the storm and the sea hung the motionless full moon; Artemis watching with a serene splendour of scorn the battle of the Titans and the revel of nymphs, from her stainless and Olympian summit of divine indifferent light. Underneath and about us the sea was paved with flame; the whole

water trembled and hissed with phosphoric fire; even through the wind and thunder I could hear the crackling and sputtering of the water-sparks. In the same heaven and in the same hour, there shone at once the three contrasted glories, golden and fiery and white, of moonlight and of the double lightenings, forked and sheet, and under all this miraculous heaven lay a flaming floor of water.

That, in a most close and exact symbol, is the best possible definition I can give of Victor Hugo's genius. And the impression of that hour was upon me the impression of his mind; physical, as it touched the nerves with a more vivid passion of pleasure than music or wine; spiritual, as it exalted the spirit with the senses and above them the very summit of vision and delight. It is no fantastic similitude, but an accurate likeness of two causes working to the same effect. There is nothing but that delight like the delight given by some of his work. And it is because his recent book has not seldom given it to me again that I have anything here to say of it."[1]

In the same essay we find the following beautiful interpretation of the demon of perversity in art. "We have seen the soft, fierce play of the incessant summer lightnings, between the deep sky full of passing lights and dreams, and the deep sea full of the salt seed of life; and among them Venus arising, the final and fatal flower of the mystic heaven and the ravenous sea. Looking now from west to east, we may see the moon rise,

1. Swinburne, A., Essays and Studies (Chatto & Windus, London, 1911) pp.1-2.

a tender, tear-blinded moon, worn thin and pure, ardent and transparent."[1]

Thus Swinburne's critical work abounds in images of the sea, breath-taking in the beauty of their prose. But in certain of these images we are confronted with an element which inclines us to doubt that his cult of the sea was really fundamental to Swinburne's consciousness, since he was ordinarily unable to translate his experiences of life and art into the symbolism of its liturgy. In this regard, there comes always to my mind the passage in which he defines the difference between Byron's "Childe Harold" and "Don Juan," as the difference between lake and sea water. "The one is fluent, yielding, invariable; the other has in it a life and pulse, a sting and a swell which touch and excite the nerves like fire or music. Across the stanzas of "Don Juan" we swim forward as over 'the broad backs of the sea;' they break and glitter, hiss and laugh, murmur and move, like waves that sound or that subside. There is in them a delicious resistance, an elastic motion, which salt water has and fresh water has not. There is about them a wide wholesome air, full of vivid light and constant wind, which is only felt at sea. Life undulates and death palpitates in the splendid verse which resume the evidence of a brave and clear-sighted man concerning life and death. Here, as at sea, there is enough and too much of fluctuation and intermission; the ripple flags and falls in loose and lazy lines: and the breakers

1. Swinburne, A., op. cit., p.16.

collapse here and there in sudden ruin and violent failure. But the violence and weakness of the sea are preferable to the smooth sound and equable security of a lake: its buoyant and progressive impulse sustains and propels those who would sink through weariness in the flat and placid shallows. There are others whom it sickens, and others whom it chills; these will do well to steer in shore."[1] The imagery here appears artifical and forced. It would seem that Swinburne was merely using Byron as an excuse to embark upon his favourable theme. There is, in other words, a lack of inner integrity in the sea-image and the experience of which the poet alleges it to be a re-creation. The two impressions do not flow together, as they ought, in one deep and powerful effluence of emotion. This passage and like passages constitute a subtle, artistic insincerity.

It was because of this extraordinary unimpressionability that Swinburne has been charged with deriving his inspiration from literature rather than from life. Moreover the inevitable conclusion to be drawn from this premise is that Swinburne was unable to fulfill the function of the good critic, that is, to interpret literature in its relation to life, by the impressionistic or any other method. Swinburne's weakness as an impressionistic critic lay in the fact that he seemed to read by moonlight, rather than sunlight, so silvered with a lunar irrealty in his criticism. His images are drawn from some far-away place of the spirit. Hazlitt we remember, had a very

1. Swinburne, A., op. cit., p.243.

special feeling for the atmosphere of the poems which he criticized. Swinburne on the other hand, transforms this atmosphere, lends to it an air of fantasy. He makes pale sea-flowers from Greek waters to grow in Matthew Arnold's Oxford gardens when he writes, "Thyrsis," like "Lycidas" has a quiet and undertone which gives it something of sacred. Shelley brings fire from heaven, but these bring also 'the meed of some melodious tear.' There is a grace ineffable, a sweet sound and sweet savour of things past, in the old, beautiful use of the language of shepherds, of flocks and pipes: the spirit is none the less sad and sincere, because the body of the poem has put on this dear familiar raiment of romance; because the crude and naked sorrow is veiled and chastened with soft shadows and sounds of a 'land that is very far off;' because the verse remembers and retains an echo of Grecian flutes and flowers,

> 'Renews the golden world and holds through all
> The holy laws of homely pastoral,
> Where flowers and founts, and nymphs and semi-gods,
> And all the Graces find their old abodes.'"(1)

And again, in his criticism of Rossetti's La Pia, he writes, "She is seen looking forward from the ramparts of her lord's castle, over the fatal lands without; her pallid, splendid face hangs a little forward, wan and white against the mass of deep, dark hair; under her hands is a work of embroidery, hanging still on the frame un-finished; just touched by the weak, weary hands, it trails forward across the

1. Swinburne, A., op. cit., pp.155-6.

lap of her pale green raiment, into the foreground of the picture. In her eyes is a strange look of wonder and sorrow and fatigue, without fear and without pain, as though she were even now looking beyond earth into the soft and sad air of purgatory: she presses the deadly marriage-ring into the flesh of her finger, so deep that the soft skin is bloodless and blanched from the intense imprint of it."[1]

These surely are colours seen by moonlight, and this tragic, wreck of a woman, the genius of Swinburne's wan realities. For just as Goethe when he was dying was said to have whispered, "Light, light!," so, I think, Swinburne must always have shuddered away from the light. He lived, as it were, in a dim world under sea, and its green dusk falls upon every thing he created or criticized.

Here we have the essential difference between the classic and the decadent-romantic mind. Here we have creative and impressionistic criticism robbed of its great virtue - illumination, or rather, to use the phrase of Mr. Tillyard, of "its quality of indispensibility." Swinburne's aesthetic doctrine, which is found scattered through his critical writings is but a moderate interpretation of the "art for art's sake" theory which he got from Theophile Gautier; united to his practice, it is vitiating enough, in that it contains the elements that will make for its abuse in the Beardsley period.

Swinburne acknowledges his debt to Gautier in his criticism of Rossetti's "Lilith." "For this serene and sublime

1. Swinburne, A., op. cit., p.378.

sorceress there is no life but of the body; with spirit (if spirit there be) she can dispense, were it worth her while for any word to divide those terrible, tender lips, she too might say with the hero of the most perfect and exquisite book of modern times - "Mademoiselle de Maupin" - 'Je trouve la terre aussi belle que le ciel, et je pense que la correction de la forme est la vertu.'"[1]

We have here one of the first foreshadowings of the worship of form that is to be the cult of the Nineties. However, later on in the essay we find evidence that the tree of art is, as yet, firmly rooted in the ground, and not, as Mr. Gilbert Chesterton has so neatly put it, "standing on its head, waving its roots in the air." Theoretically at least, Swinburne is seeking truth in beauty, truth, vague and scarce - defined, but, nevertheless, truth. "Wide and far apart as lie their provinces of work, their tones of thought and emotion, the two illustrious artists of whom I have just said a short and inadequate word have in common one supreme quality of spirit and of work, coloured and moulded in each by his individual and inborn force of nature; the love of beauty for the very beauty's sake, the faith and trust in it as in a god indeed, this gift of love and faith, now rare enough, has been and should be ever the common apanage of artists, 'Rien n'est vrai que le beau;' this should be the beginning and ending of their belief, held in no small or narrow sense, but in the largest and most liberal scope of meaning. Beauty may be strange,

1. Swinburne, A., op. cit., p.375.

quaint, terrible, may play with pain as with pleasure, handle a horrow till she leave it a delight; she forsakes not such among her servants as Webster or as Goya.

No good art is unbeautiful; but much able and effective work may be, and is. Mere skill, mere thought and trouble, mere feeling or mere dexterity, will never on earth make a man painter or poet or artist in any kind. Hundreds of English pictures just now have but these to boast of; and with that art is no more a matter of mere brain-work than of mere handicraft. The worship of beauty, though beauty be itself transformed and incarnate in shapes diverse without end, must be simple and absolute; hence only must the believer expect profit or reward. Over every building made sacred to art of any sort, upon the hearts of all who strive after it to serve it, there should be written these words of the greatest master now living among us: -

'La beaute est parfaite,
La beaute peut toute chose,
La beaute est la seule chose au monde qui
n'existe pas a demi'" (1)

Finally, in Swinburne's critical writings there is even less testimony as to his doctrine of criticism. But in the essay on Coleridge we find one very significant statement which reveals him as the impressionistic and creative critic in theory as well as practice. "Of his flight and his song, when in the fit element, it is hard to speak at all, hopeless to speak adequately. It is natural that there should be nothing like them discoverable in any human work; natural that his poetry at its highest should be, as it is, beyond all praise and all

1. Swinburne, A., Works, Volume V (Heinemann, London, 1926) p.216.

words of men. He who can define it could 'unweave a rainbow;' he who could praise it aright would be such another as the poet."

We may deduce from this statement that Swinburne was, within the limits already noted, the conscious and avowed impressionistic critic, his approach to art, the emotional approach, his method, the creative method that has for its aim the communication of an artistic experience.

To analyse Pater as an impressionistic critic we must first grasp his essential quality as a personality, the circumstances which went to the forming of that personality, and the terms in which life was impressed upon his sensibility. The image, which, I think most adequately translates Pater's life, is that of the Oxford he loved so well, Oxford in the dusk, when the towers are gray against the evening sky, and the quiet breaks in silver ripples of bell-sound. His life, measured by our standards, may well seem a retreat from reality. But if we are to measure it as Pater measured it in terms of sensation, emotion and imagination, we realize that it was intense, with the intensity of a white flame. Marius is his biographer, and to him as to Marius, all experience (the term is here used in its widest possible sense to denote all experiences, actual or imagined, that impress themselves upon the consciousness) was of the very stuff of which life was made. His contemplation of poetry or of painting, for instance, was more intense than any actuality, because of the concentrated selective nature of art. But the most diffuse experiences were valued according to their power to produce pleasurable sensations

in a greater or less degree.

Pater cherished the ideal of that "shifting and many-shaded" thing the human consciousness or "soul," as he prefers to call it, as a projection of this experience, fully-matured only at moment when the senses fail. For the medium of communication is, of course, the body, "that dear sister and companion of the soul."[1] It is this realization of himself which Marius achieves as he lies all but dead in body, (so little of their carefully cultivated impressionability do his senses retain.) "Throughout that elaborate and lifelong education of his receptive powers, he had ever kept in view the purpose of preparing himself towards possible further revelation some day:- towards some ampler vision which should take up into itself and explain this world's delightful shows as the scattered fragments of a poetry, till then but half-understood; might be taken up into the text of a lost epic, recovered at last. At this moment his unclouded receptivity of soul, grown so steadily through all those years, from experience to experience, was at its height; the house ready for the possible guest; the tablet of the mind white and smooth for whatsoever divine fingers might choose to write there. And was not this precisely the condition, the attitude of mind to which something higher than he, yet akin to him, would be likely to reveal itself; to which that influence he had felt now and again, like a friendly hand upon his shoulder, amid the actual obscurities of the world,

1. Pater, W., Marius the Epicurean (The MacMillan Company, London, 1927) p.349.

would be likely to make a further explanation? Surely, the aim of a true philosophy must lie, not in the futile efforts towards the complete accomodation of man to the circumstances in which he chances to find himself, but in the maintenance of a kind of candid discontent, in the face of the very highest achievement; the unclouded and receptive soul quitting the world finally, with the same fesh wonder with which it had entered the world unimpaired, and going on its blind way at last with the consciousness of some profound enigma in things, as but a pledge of something further to come. Marius seemed to understand how one might come to look back upon life here, and its excellent visions, as but the portion of a race course left behind him, by a runner still swift of foot; for a moment, he experienced a singular curiosity, almost an ardent desire to enter upon a future, the possibilities of which seemed so large."[1]

The reader may well be seduced by the beauty and subtlety of the expression into believing that this is a constructive creed. The forming of character by experience is a commonplace of the psychological jargon of the uninformed. Mr. Herbert Reid's essay, "Form in Modern Poetry"[2] offers an interesting corrective to this view. Mr. Reid contends that the mad seeking for subtle, complex, almost formless form in modern poetry, (and it is to be remembered that the literature of our era is a natural development of the impressionism of the late nineteenth century) is an expression, not of character, but of personality.

1. Pater, W., op. cit., p.347-8.

2. Reid, Herbert, Form in Modern Poetry (Sheed & Ward, London, 1932) Chapter II.

Character he believes to be built up through a rigid resistance to experience, a disciplining of the hyper-affectivity of the artist temperament. He quotes in defence of his thesis the definition of character to be found in Dr. Roback's "Problems of Personality." "Character is the result of an enduring psycho-physical disposition to inhibit instinctive impulses in accordance with a regulative principle."[1]

This definition is adequate in that it allows the self-determinative element in the character that maintains its integrity in the midst of the herd, and finds its artistic expression in classicism. The personality, on the other hand, is a projection of the experience of an organism that takes its colour from actuality rather than reality, and which finds its most adequate artistic expression in impressionism. This art becomes increasingly flexible in form in proportion as the as the artist is forced by circumstances or by abnormality of temperament to yield to actuality, or to seek to widen the range of his experience by the study of his own ego.

Let us then examine Walter Pater's work in the terms of this analysis. There was in that gracious existence little that might be termed "event." It was nurtured in the lovely English countryside near Enfield. Its most formative years, those of preparatory school and university were distinguished merely by the slavish devotion to a set of values which have lost all vital significance, which is required of the "Greats" student. Finally the career as an Oxford don, the tempered

1. Reid, Herbert, op. cit., p.17.

aestheticism of those rooms at Brasenose, with their sea-coloured walls and their Michael Angelo reproductions, the gentlemanly excursions abroad, the scholarly companions, all tended to heighten the calm delights of Pater's retreat from reality. Life brought him little of the rude material of passion that his artist's vision might ennoble. A lesser man might have become a monster of "splendidly null" pedantry. Pater took the alternative course, that of sensationalism, of decadent sentimentality if you will.

Like Marius he cultivated his natural affectivity, until the whole of his quiet existence became as the prolonged ecstasy of the mystic. And, indeed, it was a kind of distorted mysticism, this intense contemplation which had no end but the joy of awareness. Pater was himself saved from the fate of his disciples by the fact that, to his capacity for emotional perversion, was added a calm and lovely mind. His emotionalism was thus elevated into a philosophy, rendered the more seductive by the dignity of its presentation. Eternalities and the "inward world of thought and feeling" became one for him, fused in the white flame of his emotional apprehension of life.

Moreover, because he was intensely aware of the life animating every cell of all organism it was inevitable that he should be intensely conscious of the terrible mortality of physical things, and that it should come by sheer force of his contemplation of it to have a certain decadent charm. He was, in other words, afflicted with the passion for putrescense of the French naturaliste school, in a new and seductive form.

In the light of this philosophy of the flesh, the words of the dying Flavian have a very poignant significance. You remember that Marius, bending over his friend, murmured in pity and grief, "Is it a comfort that I shall often come and weep over you?" The answer sums up Pater's creed "Not unless I be aware, and hear you weeping."[1]

Because the inward world of emotion is so linked with the flesh, it is lighted by the same flaming, flickering and dying life force. "And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidarity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed around for each one of us by that thick wall of personality, through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world. Analysis goes a step further still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is

1. Pater, W., op. cit., p.88.

infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. To such a tremulous wisp, constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down."[1]

This reasoning can of course come to but one conclusion, which Pater states in the lines that were to prove so ruinous to his disciples. "The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us, - for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits; for after all,

1. Pater, W., The Renaissance (The MacMillan Company, London, 1925) pp.248-49.

habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations seem alike. While all melts under our feet we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, ar any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours and curious odours, or the work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend."[1]

That Pater was not unaware of the dangers of his creed is borne out by the fact that this conclusion was omitted in the second edition of "The Renaissance," lest "it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall,"[2] and was only included in subsequent editions after it had been revised. Could Pater have foreseen "De Profundis," and its direct accusation of himself and his creed, he might have undertaken a more thorough work of expurgation.

Individuality, hyper-sensitivity, a bitter sense of the flux of things, just what did these qualities of the man Pater inply in his aesthetic theory, and what concrete translation were they given in his work? Pater himself answers the first part of the question in his preface to "The Renaissance," his manifesto of impressionistic criticism. In this preface he expresses his abhorrence of rules as the criterion of aesthetic value, and lays the onus of judgement upon the sensibility of the critic. He must first ask himself "What

1. Pater, W., op. cit., pp.249-50.

2. Ibid., pp. 246.

impression does this painting, this poem, this quaint old tale, make upon me? Do I experience pleasure in the contemplation of it?"

Finally, when an exact realization of his impression has been achieved by the critic, he may proceed to the valuation of the work of art according to the quality and intensity of the pleasurable impression it made upon his sensibility. "To him, (that is, to the critic) the picture, the landscape, the engaging personality in life or in a book, "La Gioconda," the hills of Carrara, Pico of Mirandola, are valuable for their virtues, as we may say, in speaking of a herb, a wine a gem; for the property each has of affecting one with a special, a unique, impression of pleasure. Our education becomes complete in proportion as our susceptivility to these impressions increases in depth and variety."[1]

Thus does Pater foresee and forestall our contention that the critic might conceivably be a man of limited sensibility. For Pater, such a man would be unworthy of the name of critic, in just the same way that he whose sensibility had been fanned to the whitest heat, would be, in his judgement, the ablest critic.

Therefore if we can conceive of a critic in whom impressionability has been so cultivated that the abstract ideal of beauty is constantly translated for him into concrete form, then we may allow that impressionistic criticism is the perfect criticism; but this conception is as intangible and elusive as beauty itself.

1. Pater, W., op. cit., p. XI.

Nor does Pater entirely ignore the commonplace of criticism, truth to the ideal or higher reality. But like everything else he touched, it bears the stamp of "Paterism." He is, as ever, the deviationist, unwilling to surrender his individualistic sense of things. "In the highest as in the lowliest literature, then, the one indespensable beauty is after all truth to bare fact in the latter, as to some personal sense of fact, diverted somewhat from men's ordinary sense of it in the former."[1]

Thus have the last citadels of aesthetics fallen before the charge of impressionistic ego.

But we can best study Pater's aesthetic philosophy in those various-coloured, various-patterned, mosaics which translate into concrete form, his impressions of art and of life.

He had what was denied to his disciples, a breathe of vision that enabled him to relate works of art to their respective periods, or rather, to his conception of their periods. Thus we find him constantly seeking to recreate the period and its peculiar emotional content, through his interpretations of its art. But we realize how far short he fell of his ideal critic, sensitive to beauty in all its manifestations, when we realize that his interest centered most naturally on periods of decay and of mob-hysteria. Dying civilizations, the last stand of the old pagan gods, have at all times a certain romantic appeal for even the most vigorous mind. Perhaps no more bitter a nihilist ever

1. Pater, W., op. cit., p. 53

existed than the French poet, Leconte de Lisle. Yet even for this grim old agnostic, the Druids' defiance of the bright-haired St. Patrick was the very stuff of which poetry was made. For Walter Pater there was added to this appeal the fascination that the contemplation of decadence never ceased to have for him. Thus, in Marius, we have a representation of the period when the old pagan religion and culture were giving way before the powerful but crude forces of Christianity. "The Renaissance" is a jewel with many facets, a flawed jewel, we may say, summing up as it does that transitional period when the old had not yet become the new. There is in the emotional content of all Pater's work, a dominant element of nostalgia.

Similar tendencies may be observed in unrelated fragments selected at random in his criticism. Themes of decadence, of artificiality, of abnormality, of hysteria are the rule rather than the exception. In "Imagininary Portraits" the story of Antony Watteau is a delicate Dresden-coloured thing, with dark undertones that render it complex and interesting. But the example that leaps to mind, is, of course "Denys L'Auxerrois," his story of the building of the mediaeval cathedral, of the Christian spirit that, for all its discipline and its hair-shirt, hearkens back to some wild sweet Bacchic past.

Where the decay does not exist Pater is nothing loath to super-imposing it upon his subject. His Lady Lisa was conceived in the sins of the saints, her loveliness is the strange imperfect loveliness that is the beauty of the devil. She is irresistible because she is a composite of good and evil.

The proceeding thus illustrated was the rule rather than the exception with Pater. He fell headlong into the trap that lies before every impressionistic and creative critic. His criticism was subjective to a point where it constituted a genuine, if unconscious, critical insincerity. His representation of Plato is an instance of his reaction to all that was presented for his judgement. Here his abhorrence of theory, and his passion for the translation of the abstract into the concrete, led him into an incredible distortion of Plato's dialectic, or process of proceeding from particulars to generals. In "Plato and Platonism" he writes, "Generalization, whatever Platonists or Plato himself at mistaken moments may have to say about it is a method, not of obliterating the concrete phenomenon, but of enriching it with the joint perspective, the significance the expressiveness, of all other things beside what broad cast light he enjoys! - that scholar, confronted with the sea shell, for instance, or with some enigma of heredity in himself or another, with some condition of a particular soul, in circumstances which may never precisely so occur again; in the contemplation of that single phenomenom, or object, or situation.

He not only sees, but understands (thereby only seeing the more) and will, therefore, also remember. The significance of the particular object he will retain by use of his intellectual apparatus of notion and general law, as, to use Plato's own figure, fluid matter may be retained in vessels not indeed of unbaked clay, but of alabaster or bronze. So much by way of

apology for general ideas - abstruse or intangible, or dry and seedy and wooden, as we may sometimes think them."[1]

Finally we have to consider the effect produced by Pater's intense consciousness of the flux of life upon his style. His cult of form rose, as he himself confesses through Marius, out of his desire to establish something enduring in the midst of things that pass. Flame may pale into orange, and orange into rose, and rose into pink, in the Western sky, until the sunset glory shudders into ashes on the horizon, but the poet's experience of will remain in his sculptured prose. "Could he but arrest, for others also, certain clauses of experience, as the imaginative memory presented them to himself! In those grand, hot summers, he would have imprisoned the very perfume of the flowers. To create, to live, perhaps a little while beyond the allotted hours, if it were but in a fragment of perfect expression:- it was thus his longing defined itself for something to hold by amid the 'perpetual flux.' With men of his vocation, people were apt to say, words were things. Well! with him, words should be indeed things, - the word, the phrase, valuable in exact proportion to the transparency with which it conveyed to others the apprehension, the emotion, the mood, so vividly real within himself."[2]

Here we have the psychological basis of the theory of art for art's sake, the cult of form. It is paralleled in our own day in the return to Byzantine art and in the expressionist

1. Pater, W., Plato and Platonism (MacMillan Company, London, 1909) p.159.

2. Pater, W., Marius the Epicurean (MacMillan Company, London, 1927) p.117.

schools. The desire to establish something rigid and permanent operates here, just as it operated when Pater worked and reworked his style. It accounts for the fact that Pater, who could, when he was genuinely moved, write prose incomparable in its beauty and its inner harmony, was also capable of the most laboured and obstructed style. Even when his verbal complications are absent there are passages, and to my mind the La Gioconda passage is one of these, which are mere, elaborate artificiality. They are but arabesques of words. There is nothing behind them but Pater, the stylist saying to himself, "What dashed good prose poetry I'm writing!"

Fortunately he was also possessed of the power of genuine aesthetic emotion. The following passage for instance has all the subtle fragrance of the old song - story of Aucassin and Nicolette, his dear lady he loved so well. "All through it one feels the influence of that faint air of overwrought delicacy, almost of wantonness, which was so strong a characteristic of the poetry of the Troubadours. The Troubadours themselves were often men of great rank; they wrote for an exclusive audience, people of much leisure and great refinement, and they came to value a type of personal beauty which has but little of the influence of the open air and sunshine. There is a languid Eastern deliciousness in the very scenery of the story, the full-blown roses, the chamber painted in some mysterious manner where Nicolette is imprisoned, the cool brown marble, the almost nameless colours, the odour of

plucked grass and flowers. Nicolette herself well becomes this scenery, and it is the best illustration of the quality I mean - the beautiful, weird, foreign girl whom the shepherds take for a fay, and who has the knowledge of simples, the healing and beautifying qualities of leaves and flowers whose skilful touch heals Aucassin's sprained shoulder, so that he suddenly leaps from the ground; the mere sight of whose white flesh, as she passed the place where he lay, healed a pilgrim stricken with sore disease so that he rose up, and returned to his own country."

How perfectly in harmony with its subject is this "pretty prose," fashioned with a touch as light as that of the fay Nicolette herself.[1]

In any study of Pater's work, it is impossible to ignore ethical considerations, since he was as much the aesthetic philosopher as the prose-poet. Any man who undertakes to show others how to live must expect such treatment; but if we may for a moment separate the creative critic from the philosopher, we must admit that no man more sensitive to beauty in all its forms ever lived and wrote.

1. Pater, W., Studies in the Renaissance (MacMillan Company, London, 1927) pp.21-22.

CHAPTER IV

IMPRESSIONISTIC CRITICISM IN THE LAST TWO DECADES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The last two decades of the nineteenth century have been defined by a modern critic in the following terms, perversity, artificialty, egoism, curiosity.

The definition is I suppose adequate enough as a formula for "fin de siècle." But just as no mere list of ingredients - oil of Persian roses, raw alcohol, and so on - can waft around us a fragrance called "Roses d'Ispahan," neither can mere tabulation convey to us any notion of the essential quality of the period, its minor harmonies and white symphonies, in their relation to the generation that was their creator. Max Nordau who has been called "the Jeremiah of the period" once wrote, "The disposition of the times is curiously confused, a compound of feverish restlessness and blunted discouragement, of fearful presage and hang-dog renunciation. The prevalent feeling is that of imminent perdition and extinction. Fin de siècle is at once a confession and a complaint. The old Northern faith contained the fearsome doctrine of the Dusk of the Gods. In our days there have arisen in more highly-developed minds vague qualms of a Dusk of the Nations, in which all suns and all stars are gradually waning, and mankind with all its institutions and creations is perishing in the midst of a dying world."[1]

1. Nordau, Max, Degeneration (William Heinemann, London, 1913) p.2.

We have here, not only a manifestation of the influence on late nineteenth century thought of science and oriental philosophy, but also evidence of that quality of the period which most nearly concerns this essay. It was, in brief, a period of criticism. Introspective, egoistic, individual, idealistic, it was a period that inevitably produced criticism. Indeed, the Beardsley period might be said to be itself the product of the critical mind, and "fin de siècle" a kind of prolonged pose, assumed by a nucleus of aesthetes in revulsion from bourgeois materialism - a pose that was publicized by the journalists that were the chief sources of literary creation. Never has Fleet street been bestarred by such a galaxy of journalists. Never, too, have so many serious artists found a medium of artistic expression in criticism.

So little of Walter Pater's work after "The Renaissance" and "Marius the Epicurean" was significant, that we are inclined to forget that he was still writing in the eighteen-eighties and nineties. Oscar Wilde, John Addington Symonds, Francis Thompson, and Arthur Synons, were producing serious critical work, and were laying down for all time the principles of aesthetic criticism. George Bernard Shaw was turning out musical criticism that was sheer and delightful bluff from beginning to end. Whistler, the imperial-yellow butterfly was holding his command performances at the unheard of hour of ten o'clock, to tell the upper stratum of London society exactly what he thought of it, in no uncertain terms; and was, incidentally, producing impressionistic criticism that had no mean

influence upon the critical writings of his contemporaries. Among the lesser journalists, such names as George Egerton, Herbert Cracken Thorpe, Henry Harland, A.B. Walkley, William Archer, retain a certain significance even after an interval of some forty years. And finally, the two chief mediums of their journalism, "The Yellow Book" and "The Savoy," were, even more than is ordinarily the case with this type of periodical, critical comments upon their age.

The aesthetes themselves were not unaware of the publicizing virtue of criticism. However, they could not but feel that Robert Hichen's "Green Carnation" (such a frail fantasy of a weapon, to deal so deadly a blow)[1] did them no great service. Only a very keen observer could distinguish the satire in this delicate study of the "green carnation" cult; but, whatever the manner of its acceptance, it was equally harmful to the literary and artistic set of its day. Taken as a serious work of art, it could be used with deadly purpose by the "Philistines." Accepted as a satire, it was a merciless exposure of the decadence. On the other hand, the critical comment on their period latent in Aubrey Beardsley's drawings and Max Beerbohm's cartoons was the type of publicity on which the aesthetes waxed fat.

Mr. Arthur Symons sums up the critical significance of Beardsley's work in the following terse comment. "Beardsley was the satirist of an age without convictions." He was indeed as Mr. Osbert Burdett, has implied in his study of "The Beardsley Period" the artist of corruption, of "the vision of evil."

1. Burdett, Osbert, The Beardsley Period (John Lane, London, 1924) p.116.

"From the foregoing it will be perceived that the word satirist applied to Beardsley does not mean that he was on the side of the conventions, but on the side of the reality they ignored. It came to him directly as a vision of evil, and he transcribed his vision, not with a self-conscious satirical purpose, but simply as a decorative artist. It is this artistic single-mindedness indeed which makes the designs terrible; for most of us see only what we wish to see and shrink from the eyes of truth as from the unabashed eyes of a child."[1]

But perhaps, for us, the deeper significance of Beardsley's drawings lies in their symbolism of his own life and art - of that abundant flowering which bore so proudly its own disease and doom. There was not a little in Beardsley of the courage of the grand old French comedian who made mock of his last illness in "Le Malade Imaginaire."

A newer and healthier criticism was possible through the medium of that altogether delightful personality, Max Beerbohm, who at the time divided honours with Hilaire Belloc and Gilbert Keith Chesterton as one of the three cleverest young men in London. His essays, and above all his caricatures, were crisp, critical comments upon everything in which his versatile mind chose to interest itself. He was perhaps the most thoroughly English of his group, the least tainted by French manners and morals, and he had the English capacity for making those gentle, wholly preposterous understatements that are the very quintessence of irony. The essay "Eighteen Eighty," for instance, is

1. Burdett, Osbert, op. cit., p.119.

typically "Max."

In fact Beauty had existed long before 1880. It was Mr. Oscar Wilde who managed her debut. To study the period is to admit that to him was due no small part of the social vogue that Beauty began to enjoy. Tired by his fervid words, men and women hurled their mahogany into the streets and ransacked the curio-shops for the furniture of Annish days. Dadoes arose upon every wall, sun flowers and the feathers of peacocks curved in every corner, tea grew quite cold while the guests were praising the Willow Pattern of its cup. A few fashionable women even dressed themselves in sinuous draperies and unheard-of greens. Into whatsoever ball-room you went, you would surely find, among the women in tiaras, and the fops and the distinguished foreigners, half a score of comely ragamuffins in velveteen, murmuring sonnets, posturing, waving their hands. Beauty was sought in the most unlikely places. Young painters found her mobbled in the fogs, and bank clerks, versed in the writings of Mr. Hamerton, were heard to declare as they sped home from the city, that the Underground Railway was beautiful from London Bridge to Westminster, but not from Sloane Square to Notting Hill Gate."[1]

Thoroughly English too, was the Gilbert and Sullivan opera "Patience" that set London laughing at the "peripatetics of long-haired aesthetics."

One could go on indefinitely enumerating the forms of impressionistic criticism that evolved between 1880 and 1900,

1. Muddiman, Bernard, The Men of the Nineties (Henry Danielson, London, 1920) pp.114-15.

for as is everywhere evident it was a period of self-criticism. At least one other form is deserving of mention. Conversation, neglected since the coffee-shop days of the eighteenth century, was cultivated as an art in the London drawing-rooms. At its least weighty it was that delightful, non-sensical chit-chat that Robert Hichens has taken off so well in "The Green Carnation." At its best, epigrammatic, artificial, satirical impressionistic, as in the recorded conversations of Wilde and Whistler, it formed a very significant comment upon art and life. "Dorian Gray" is an excellent source of such material. "His work was that curious mixture of bad painting and good intentions that always entitles a man to be called a representative British artist."[1]

"Death and vulgarity are the only two facts in the nineteenth century that one cannot explain away."[2]

The dominant note is, of course, the little, silvery, tinkling note of artificiality. I have stressed the fact that this was a period of criticism, and in this regard it is to be remembered that criticism, thrice removed from the original inspirational force, is essentially the most artificial of all literary forms. Especially so is much of the aesthetic criticism of the 1880 to 1900 period, involving as much of it did, criticism of criticism.

However, studied artificiality is fundamental to most of the serious literary productions of the time. Robert Hichens exposes it in the "Green Carnation" in a dialogue between Lady

1. Wilde, Oscar, Plays, Prose Writings and Poems (J.M. Dent & Sons, London) p.246.

2. Ibid., p.244.

Locke and Reggie. "'I think a pantomime is very touching,' said Reggie. 'The pantaloon is one of the most luridly tragic figures in art or in life. If I were a great actor, I would as soon play the pantaloon as King Lear.' 'Perhaps his mournful possibilities have been increased since I have been out of England,' said Lady Locke. 'Ten years ago, he was a mere shadowy absurdity.'"[1]

This arraying of Pantaloon in the mourning garments of Hamlet, this manufacturing of values where none exist, belongs of course, to the rules of cult of artificiality. But the trend is best summed up in the Yellow Book essay "In Defence of Cosmetics." Solemn critics assure us that it is a highly serious work, written by Max Beerbohm under the influence of Oscar Wilde. We would find it easier to believe that Hamlet was a farce, written by Shakespeare under the influence of Aristophanes. Who can doubt that Max was writing with his tongue in his cheek, indulging as usual his flair for subtle absurdity. It is probable, nevertheless, that the cult of the artificial is linked in some dark cavern of the consciousness with that terror of the flux of things which we have already examined in Walter Pater, and which was intensified with the development of the decadence.

The book which presents in clearly recognizable form, all the trends of the period, curiosity of sensation, perversity, artificiality, egoism, introspection, impressionistic criticism, is of course George Moore's "Confessions of a Young Man."

1. Hichens, Robert, The Green Carnation (D. Appleton & Company, New York, 1894) pp.9-10.

In a sense this is the work of Moore which is most truly representative of the period of which he was such a vivid and unforgettable figure. What Mr. Amarinth said of Pantaloon, "He never develops at all,"[1] is tragically true of most of the representative figures of the time. The Beardsley period is a rose garden full of white buds that will never be full blown. Beardsley, Dowson, Wilde, and the rest are like the children of a silvery night, making moon shadows on the shores of infinite mysteries that they can never breast. But George Moore differed from the others. He grew up. "The Confessions of a Young Man" is the testament of his emotional adolescence, which had taken on the colours of the society in which it evolved without being stunted by their poisonous dyes.

For a time he assumed the green carnation with all the grace with which he wore his Japanese dressing gown. He drank absinthe in the café's of the Place Pigale. He nourished his pet python on guinea pigs. He wrote his "Roses of Midnight," of which a typical heroine was the light of love who went into the desert to tempt the holy man who died as he yielded, and his arms stiffening by some miracle into iron-like rigidity, held her prisoner until she died of starvation as her bondage loosened in decay.

He makes over and over again, frank confessions of his individualistic, emotional approach to art. Of George Meredith, whose poetry he admired, he writes, "I expected,

1. Hichens, Robert, op. cit., p.10.

therefore, one of my old passionate delights from his novels, I was disappointed, painfully disappointed. But before I say more concerning Mr. Meredith, I will admit at once frankly and fearlessly, that I am not a competent critic, because emotionally I do not understand him, and all except an emotional understanding is worthless in art. I do not make this admission because I am intimidated by the weight and height of the critical authority with which I am overshadowed, but from a certain sense of which I am distinctly conscious, viz., that the author is, how shall I put it? the French would say "quelqu'un," that expresses what I would say in English. I remember, too, that although a man may be able to understand anything, that there must be some modes of thoughts and attitudes of mind which we are so naturally antagonistic to, and so entirely out of sympathy with, that we are in no true sense critics of them."[1]

And again, "What leaves me cold to-day will madden one to-morrow. With me literature is a question of sense, intellectual sense if you will, but sense all the same, and ruled by the same caprices - those of the flesh. Now we enter on very subtle distinctions. No doubt that there is the brain - judgement and the sense-judgement of a work of art. And it will be noticed that these two forces of discrimination exist sometimes almost independently of each other, in rare and radiant instances confounded and blended in one immense and unique love."[2]

1. Moore, George, op. cit., pp.164-65.

2. Ibid., p.81.

This frank avowal of impressionism by a man who so well understood the form, and who puts us on our guard against its limitations, disposes all but the most severe neo-classicists to a sympathetic study of his theory and practice. We realize, for example, that it was typical of the mam Moore that he should dislike Leconte de Lisle, the agonized apostle of impassibility. "I was repelled by Leconte de Lisle from the first, and it was only by a very deliberate outrage to my feelings that I bought and read "Les Poèmes Antiques," and "Les Poèmes Barbares." I was deceived in nothing, all I had anticipated I found - long, desolate boredom. Leconte de Lisle produces on me the effect of a walk through the new Law Courts, with a steady but not a violent draught sweeping from end to end. Oh, the vile old professor of rhetoric! and when I saw him the last time I was in Paris, his head - a declaration of righteousness, a cross between a Caesar by Gerome and an archbishop of a provincial town, set all my natural antipathy instantly on edge."[1]

Another of Moore's oft re-iterated theories is deserving of mention because it is one which will recur in Wilde, and because it is a manifestation of Pater's influence on Moore. It is the conception of art as a creative influence in the formation of character. The first formative influence in that inner life of the emotions that was so important to him, begins with his ecstatic discovery of "Lady Audley". And indeed, Moore's development may be traced step by step through its period of decadence, of impressionism, of symbolism, of

1. Moore, George, op. cit., pp.52-53.

naturalism, to its final regeneration in his discovery of the Elizabethans. Curiously enough, Pater, so baneful an influence upon most of his contemporaries, was for Moore a saviour.

"But 'Marius the Epicurean' was more to me than a mere emotional influence, precious and rare though that may be, for this book was the first in English prose I had come across that procured for me any genuine pleasure in the language itself, in the combination of words for silver or gold chime, and unconventional cadence, and for all those lurking half-meanings, and that evanescent suggestion, like the odour of dead roses, that words retain to the last of other times and elder usage. Until I read "Marius" the English language (English prose) was to me what French must be to the majority of English readers. I read for the sense and that was all; the language itself seemed to me coarse and plain, and awoke in me neither aesthetic emotion nor even interest. "Marius" was the stepping stone that carried me across the channel into genius of my own tongue. The translation was not too abrupt; I found a constant and careful invocation of meaning that was a little aside of the common comprehension, and also a sweet depravity of ear for unexpected falls of phrase,and of eye for the less observed depths of colours, which although new was a sort of sequel to the education I had chosen, and a continuance of it in foreign, but not wholly unfamiliar medium, and having saturated myself with Pater, the passage to De Quincey was easy. He too, was a Latin in manner and in temper of mind; but he was truly English, and through him I passed to the study of the Elizabethan

dramatists, the real literature of my race, and washed myself clean."[1]

In our final estimate of Moore as a critic, our chief studies must be the quality of the literature to which he gives the highest praise and the type of emotional experience from which he derives the greatest satisfaction. When he had succeeded in conquering the appetite for perversity that grew out of his long contact with the French decadence, we find that his taste in the arts is essentially the expression of a classic mind. The distinguishing mark of the decadence, was of course the theory of art for the sake of art, replacing that of art for the sake of life. For where art ceases to develop in rythmic relation to life, the decadence begins. It is to Moore's credit as a critic that it is from Balzac, the most truly classic of the French novelists, that he derives an enduring satisfaction.

From a study of Moore, it is the merest step to that of Wilde, for Wilde is the enduring manifestatiom of a phase which Moore was to outgrow. He is Moore, mummified at his moment of emotional adolescence.

In Wilde's criticism we are confronted with a situation exactly the reverse of that with which we have formerly had to cope. Wilde was the theoretician of the impressionistic school. His volume of critical theory, "Intentions," represents the manifesto of the decadent impressionism of the nineties. He knew a certain delight in playing with critical theories, some of them vague and fantastic enough,

1. Moore, George, op. cit., pp.185-6.

as a clown plays with many-coloured balls. He returns to his theorizing again and again. We encounter it in the most unlikely places. For instance, the most important statement of his aesthetic doctrine is inserted as a preface and apologia to his much discussed novel, "The Picture of Dorian Gray." Moreover the novel itself is rich with epigramatic, artistic pronouncements of a general and theoretical nature. His actual, direct criticism of literature and the other arts is fragmentary, and forms in a very small part of the whole body of his criticism. It occurs, as a rule, merely in illustration of some theoretical maxim in which he has just laid down. He was in any case, never a voluminous writer. "Writing bores me so," he once said to Andre Gide, a statement which seems less the expression of a pose than is usually the case with Wilde.

Let us examine our deductions from a study of Wilde's critical writings. The terms creative criticism, Paterism, Platonism, perversion, and art for art's sake, most adequately sum up Oscar Wilde as a critic. Of these the most important is of course his conception of the critic as an artist, and of criticism as a form of literary creation of essentially the same nature as any other artistic creation. This idea is stated in his Preface to "Dorian Gray." "The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things."[1]

And again, we find the correlated statement. "The highest, as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of

1. Wilde, Oscar, op. cit., p.69.

autobiography."[1] This is given a full and concrete development in his magnificient essay, "The Critic as Artist," in which there is hardly a statement which is not important to our study of Wilde's impressionism. It is perhaps most adequately summed up in the following lines, "Gilbert. But, surely, Criticism is itself an art. And just as artistic creation implies the working of the critical faculty, and, indeed, without it cannot be said to exist at all, so criticism is really creative in the highest sense of the word. Criticism is, in fact, both creative and independent."[2]

Further on, this theme is elaborated. "Ernest. But is criticism really a creative art?

Gilbert. Why should it not be? It works with materials and puts them into form that is at once new and delightful. What more can one say of poetry? Indeed, I would call criticism a creation within a creation. For just as the great artists, from Homer and Aeschylus, down to Shakespeare and Keats, did not go directly to life for their subject-matter, but sought it in myth, and legend, and ancient tale, so the critic deals with materials that others have, as it were, purified for him, and to which imaginative form and colour had been already added. Nay, more, I would say that the highest Criticism, being the purest form of personal impression, is in its way more creative than creation, as it has least reference to any standard external to itself, and is, in fact, its own reason for existing,

1. Wilde, Oscar, op. cit., p.69.

2. Wilde, Oscar, Intentions, (Modern Library, New York) p.133.

and, as the Greeks would put it, in itself, and to itself, an end."[1]

Here we have the principles of impressionistic and creative criticism laid down for all time. It is left to us to see how they were worked out in Wilde's practice.

His direct literary criticism, like his theoretical writing employs the prose form, or rather, that very special kind of prose-poetry which was his inheritance from Pater. He himself has described his initiation into this form of literature. He remembers that on the occasion of his first meeting with Pater, the master said to him,"Why do you always write poetry? Why do you not write prose? Prose is so much more difficult."[2] But it was not until the ballade and villanelle forms to which he was addicted had ceased to charm him with their little, silver tinkling, that Pater's words became really significant. "I did not quite understand what Mr. Pater really meant, and it was not till I had carefully studied his beautiful and suggestive essays on the Renaissance that I fully realized what a wonderful self-conscious art the art of English prose writing really is, or may be made to be."[3]

The great risk incurred by the writer of prose-poetry is that which had already been analysed in the work of Swinburne, a tendency to hyper-consciousness of form, of words, to the complete exclusion of any attendant emotion. To Wilde's credit may it be said that we are less conscious of this form of artistic insincerity in his prose than in his poetry. "The Sphinx" for

1. Wilde, Oscar, op. cit., pp.134-35.
2. Mason, Stuart, Art and Morality (Frank Palmer, London) pp.134-35
3. Ibid., pp.134-35.

this reason is at once a splendid word mosaic, and a very bad poem. But for the most part those fragments of literary appreciation which jewel his theoretical writings call out an immediate response to their power of illumination. When we read of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, "As one turns over the pages of his "Plain Tales from the Hills," one feels as if one were seated under a palm-tree reading life by superb flashes of vulgarity,"[1] and again, of Pepys, "Poor, silly, conceited Mr. Secretary Pepys has chattered his way into the circle of the Immortals, and, conscious that indiscretion is the better part of valor, bustles about among them in that "shaggy purple gown with gold buttons and looped lace" which he is so fond of describing to us, perfectly at his ease, and prattling, to his own and our infinite pleasure, of the Indian blue petticoat he bought for his wife, of the good hog's harslet, and the 'pleasant French fricassee of veal' that he loved to eat, of his game of bowls with Will Joyce, and his 'gadding after beauties,' and his reciting of 'Hamlet' on a Sunday, and his playing of the viol on week days, and other wicked or trivial things"[2] - our first delighted reaction is, "How well Oscar Wilde wrote!"

For Wilde brought to his criticism of literature the essential quality of the aesthetic critic, a genuine upsurge of emotion. Unhappily the same cannot be said of his criticism of painting and music. He knew much less about painting than the tone of his writings would indicate, all of which would probably account for Whistler's hostility to him. (Posing about art was

1. Wilde, Oscar, Intentions (Modern Library, New York) p.199.
2. Ibid., p.95.

utterly abhorrent to Whistler.) Of music he knew absolutely nothing.

The influence of Pater is more marked and less felicitous in other realms of his criticism. No reader of Wilde and Pater can have any doubt that Wilde's mind was saturated with Paterism in all its manifestations. Sometimes indeed he falls, we cannot believe unconsciously, into Pater's rhythms, his words even. This line from "Dorian Gray" is certainly pure and unacknowledged Pater." And it has all been to you no more than the sound of music;"[1] and again, "Life is a question of nerves and fibres and slowly built up cells in which thought hides itself and passion has its dreams."[2]

Wilde's faculty for assimilating other peoples ideas, and turning them out with the Oscar stamp, was, of course, notorious. But in the case of Pater, whose power of expression he could not hope to equal, the plagiarism is obvious.

It was from Pater too, that he got his delightfully fantastic theories of nature, the imitator. "Nature is no great mother who has born us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence. At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets

1. Wilde, Oscar, Plays, Prose Writings and Poems (J.M. Dent & Sons, London) p.248.

2. Ibid.

and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist until Art had invented them. Now, it must be admitted, fogs are carried to excess. They have become the mere mannerism of a clique, and the exaggerated realism of their method gives dull people bronchitis. Where the cultured catch an effect, and uncultured catch cold."[1]

It is generally assumed that Wilde owes this conception to Whistler. However there is in "Imaginary Portraits" a passage which would support the theory that the debt is in reality to Pater. "The antiquities, beautiful curiosities of all sorts - above all, the original drawings of those old masters Antony so greatly admires - are ranged all around one there, that the influence, the genius of those things may imperceptibly play upon and enter into one, and form what one does."[2]

The truth of the matter is, probably, that the conception was a part of the "fin de siècle" pose, that it was in the air, and that it infected first Whistler and then Wilde. It is probable too, that it originated in Pater's misunderstanding of Plato's reason for excluding the poet from his Utopia, that it was publicized by him, to be further distorted in concrete, literal translation by his disciples. Indeed, Paterism and Platonism are inevitably linked in Wilde. He was himself a classical scholar of no mean ability, but we do not underestimate

1. Wilde, Oscar, op. cit., p.40.

2. Pater, W., Imaginary Portraits (MacMillan Company, London, 1919) p.30.

him in saying that practically all of his interpretation of Plato he got from Pater. Wilde's was not an original mind. Any attempt to interpret Plato for himself was invariably sketchy and misleading. For instance, there is in his essay on "The Truth of Masks" a vague statement which would lead us to believe that he sought the origin of impressionistic criticism in Plato. He writes, "And just as it is only in art-criticism, and through it, that we can apprehend the Platonic theory of ideas, so it is only in art-criticism, and through it, that we can realize Hegel's system of contraries. The truth of metaphysics are the truths of masks."[1]

By art-criticism we may presume he means that which he considered the only true criticism, impressionistic criticism. And by further filling in the gaps of his reasoning, we may assume that he regards impressionistic criticism as an expression of the Platonic "idea" or "ideal" of the beauty of the original impression. The vagueness of this intellectual conception was typical of Wilde, typical too of his period, when the aesthetes took refuge from bourgeois philistinism in idealism, mysticism and metaphysics.

Finally, it is only too evident that the element of perversion in Wilde's criticism is also in part attributable to the influence of Pater. It arises of course from that misconception of the conclusion to "The Renaissance," which Pater himself had apprehended. It is summed up in the following extraordinary statement in "Dorian Gray" "Crime belongs exclusively to the

1. Wilde, Oscar, Intentions (Modern Library, New York) p.250.

lower orders. I dont blame them in the smallest degree. I should fancy that crime was to them what art is to us, simply a method of procuring extraordinary sensations."[1]

Not only does such a passage bear witness to Wilde's utter remoteness from reality, it shows that for him life and art had been reduced to a common denominator, sensation. It was, moreover, no healthy and sane sensationalism, it was "extraordinary sensationalism," the sensationalism of a man who had exhausted all the legitimate means of satisfaction.

The most decisive mark of Wilde's decadence is of course, the "art for art's sake" doctrine which he got from French sources. It is to be stressed however, that "art for art's sake" was something that was innate in the age of decadent romanticism in which Wilde wrote, and by which he was conditioned. The French influence served only, to give it direction and form. Let us examine the manner in which Wilde expresses its fundamental principles. The preface to "Dorian Gray," alone, would provide us with ample material.

"No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style."

"All art is at once surface and symbol."

"Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril."

"Those who read the symbol do so also at their peril."[2]

It will be seen then that the doctrine reduces itself to an extreme concern for form. Should there be left in the

1. Wilde, Oscar, Plays, Prose Writings and Poems (J.M. Dent & Sons, London) p.245.
2. Mason, Stuart, op. cit., pp.271-2.

mind of the reader any doubts as to the true nature of Wilde's art for art's sake he will find adequate illumination in the "The Critic as Artist."

"For the real artist is he who proceeds, not from feeling to form, but from form to thought and passion. He does not first conceive an idea, and then say to himself, 'I will put my idea into a complex meter of fourteen lines," but, realixing the beauty of the sonnet-scheme, he conceives certain modes of music and methods of rhyme, and the mere from suggests what is to fill it, and make it intellectually and emotionally complete. From time to time the world cries out against some charming artistic poet, because to use its hackneyed and silly phrase, he has "nothing to say." But if he had something to say, he would probably say it, and the result would be tedious. It is just because he has no new message, that he can do beautiful work. He gains his inspiration from form, and from form purely, as an artist should. A real passion would ruin him. Whatever actually occurs is spoiled for art. All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling. To be natural is to be obvious, and to be obvious is to be inartistic."[1]

"This is essentially the manifesto of a diseased art, the expression of a decadent mind. For, in all healthy, classic art it is the reverse process that takes place, the form evolves inevitably from the basic emotion. In every art that is the expression of a rising civilization, form in its

1. Wilde, Oscar, Intentions, (Modern Library, New York) p.192-3.

rigid geometric sense is swept away before a rush of confident feeling. On the other hand, in a declining civilization, the focal point of attention is shifted to form.

Psychologically, as has been already stated, this hyper-sensitivity to form grows out of a sense of fear, of insecurity, and, ultimately out of a desire to establish something stable that will weather the flux. The geometric arts, and the expressionism of our own era are manifestations of the advanced stage of the decadence. They developed in dialectical relation to the impressionism and the "art for art's sake" of the nineties.

We come finally to a consideration of the one-time editor of "The Savoy," Mr. Arthur Symons, who is in many ways the most interesting and vigorous critic of his period and indeed of the impressionistic school. I confess I cannot sympathize with Mr. T.S. Eliot's unfavourable comparison of him with Swinburne as critic. He labels him "the imperfect critic" and condemns him in one of those blatantly assured passages which are so typical of him.

"It would be rash to speculate, and is perhaps impossible to determine, what is unfulfilled in Mr. Symons charming verse that over-flows into his critical prose; certainly we may say that in Swinburne's verse the circuit of impression and expression is complete; and Swinburne was therefore able, by his criticism, to be more a critic than Mr. Symons. This gives us an intimation why the artist is, each within his own limitations, oftenest to be depended upon

as a critic. His criticism will be criticism, and not the satisfaction of a supressed creative wish, which in most other persons, is apt to interfere fatally."[1]

It is hard to recognize Mr. Arthur Symons in this criticism, Arthur Symons whose graceful, critical prose was fortified by aesthetic judgements of such soundness and insight that it has ever since served as an infallible guide to his period. He has long survived the period of which he is so just a critic, yet the fundamentals of his criticism of it were never altered an iota. Intellectually and emotionally the man of 1935 is no more mature than the grave boy of 1895. He remains,as Mr. Bernard Muddiman, quoting Cynara's lover has expressed it, "faithful in his fashion" to the days which were so formative to his genius.

His singularity is that he could recognize the decadence, analyse it, and at the same time admit its perverse charm. And because his reason was thus operative, he is less susceptible to the evils of the Beardsley period. For instance, he writes of Huysmans, "Barbaric in its profusion and deliberately perverse, it is in its very perversity that Huysmans work is so fascinating, so repellent, so instinctively artificial. It comes to represent as the work of no other writer can be said to do, the main tendencies of the decadent movement in literature."[2]

He never qhite surrenders to the black magic of the decadents; and it is a witness to his soundness as a critic that

1. Eliot, T.S., The Sacred Wood (Methuen, London, 1920) p.18.

2. Symons, Arthur, Dramatis Person (Bobbs-Merril, Indianapolis, 1923) p.117.

he can write of Zola, "Zola has made up his mind that he will say everything without omitting a single item; so that his vision is the vision of the mediocre man."[1] Perversity without art is abhorrent to him. We note too, that alone among his contemporaries he recognized the cult of form for what it was, the mark of a culture sabotaged by fear, emotionally and intellectually sterile. He writes, "Meanwhile something which is vaguely called decadence had come into being. That name, rarely used with any precise meaning was usually either hurled as a reproach or hurled back as a defiance. It pleased some young men in various countries to call themselves Decadents, with all the thrill of unsatisfied virtue masquerading as uncomprehended vice. As a matter of fact the term is in its place only when applied to style; to that ingenious deformation of the language, in Mallarmé, for instance, which can be compared with what we are accustomed to call the Greek and Latin of the Decadence. No doubt perversity of form, and perversity of matter are often found together, and, among the lesser men especially, experiment was carried far, not only in the direction of style."[2]

Such a man's conception of criticism must of course, be illuminating, and we have ample evidence, both direct and indirect, of Symons' critical theories. For Symons, criticism was, in brief, a penetration to the very adytum of creation. Of Coleridge, who approaches most nearly to his ideal of the

1. Symons, Arthur, op. cit., p.117.

2. Symons, Arthur, The Symbolist Movement (Archibald Constable, London, 1908) pp.6-7.

critic he writes, "When Coleridge says in this book that the ultimate end of criticism is more to establish the principle of writing than to furnish rules how to pass judgement upon what has been written by others, he is defining that form of criticism in which he is supreme among critics. Lamb can be more instant in the detection of beauty, Pater can make over again an image or likeness of that beauty which he defines with more sensitive precision, but no one has ever gone deeper down into the substance of creation itself, or more nearly reached that unknown point where creation begins. As a poet he knows, as a philosopher he understands; and thus, as a critic, he can explain, almost, the origin of creation."[1] It follows, then, that this penetrative criticism involves as its fundamental principle a valuation of the emotional forces at work in the act of creation. Symons might fittingly have said of all art what Wallace Steven's Peter Quince said of music, "Music is feeling then, not sound." It is this emotional conception of criticism that underlies most of his definitions of the critical faculty. Such a conception of criticism alone can explain and justify Symons absorbing interest in the personality of the artist he is considering.

It is typical of him that one of the most important of his works of criticism should be called "Dramatis Person For here, as elsewhere in his criticism, a study of the artist's life and temperament forms an organic whole with a

1. Symons, Arthur, Dramatis Personae (Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1923) pp.94-95.

consideration of his work. In view of the fact that Symons knew intimately many of the most vivid personalities of his period, Dowson, Wilde, Verlaine, George Moore, his work would, inevitably have a certain biographical significance. But because of his conception of criticism, such material achieves more than a mere biographical interest. It contributes to his criticism aesthetic considerations of intense importance.

The hand of decadent romanticism is heavy upon Symons in that he was a most extreme and introvert individualist. Along with that of his contemporaries, his philosophy had been coloured by the reading of Nietzsche. The idea of the superman sending his single indomnitable will into conflict with forces of destruction is not absent from Symons' work. "There is not a dream which may not come true if we have the energy which makes us choosers of our own fate."[1]

And again, "It is only the dreams of those light sleepers who dream faintly that do not come true."[2]

It is, of course, to the great individualists, the subtle and complex personalities, that he is most attracted. Verlaine, to whom "happily, experience taught nothing;"[3] Rimbaud, who wrote sonnets, and traded in frankincense and ivory with the Arabs, and became a legend while he was yet alive; Gérard de Nerval, to whose genius madness came as "the liberating, precipitating, spirit, disengaging its finer essence."[4]

1. Dowson, Ernest, Prose and Poems (Modern Library, 1925) p.11.

2. Ibid.

3. Symons, Arthur, The Symbolist Movement (Constable, London, 1908) p.82.

4. Ibid., p.33.

At the same time however, he can write with the most tender sympathy and understanding of Ernest Dowson who died young, "worn out by what was never really life to him, leaving a little verse which had the pathos of things too young and too frail ever to grow old."[1]

He relates this interest in human nature to his ideals of the critic and of the artist. Among his definitions of criticism we find the following : "Criticism when it is not mere talk about literature comcerns itself with the first principles of human nature and with fundamental ideas."[2]

And among the very great artists he ranks Joseph Conrad whose sense of character in action was so dramatic and so vital. "Lord Jim is the soul's tragedy, ending after a long dim suffusion in clouds, in a great sunset, sudden and final glory. No man lives wholly in his day; every hour of these suspensive and foreboding days and nights is a part of the past or of the future. Even in a splendid moment, a crisis like the love scene of Nina and Dain in the woods, there is no forgetfulness. In the sublime beauty of her kind she was thinking already of moulding a god out of the clay at her feet. He spoke of his forefathers. Lord Jim, as he dies, remembers why he is letting himself be killed, and, in that remembrance tastes heaven. How is it that no one except Conrad has got to this hidden depth where the soul really lives and dies - where in an almost, perpetual concealment it works out its plan, its

1. Dowson, Ernest, Poems and Prose (Modern Library) p.16.

2. Symons, Arthur, Dramatis Personae (Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1923) p.90.

own fate? Tolstoy, Hawthorne, know something of it; but the one turns aside into moral tracts, and the other to shadows and things spiritual. Conrad gives us the soul's own dream of itself - as if a novelist of adventure had turned neo-Platonist."[1]

In the matter of form Symons affected the impressionism of his period. Such a passage as the following on "Salammbô" might have come from the pen of Wilde himself, so conscious is its effort to translate into concrete, sensuous image the critic's personal impression of Flaubert's heroine. "She has a hieratic beauty, and a consciousness as pale and vague as the moon whom she worships. She passes before us, "her body saturated with perfumes," encrusted with jewels like an idol, her head turreted with violet hair, the gold chain tinkling between her ankles; and is hardly more than an attitude, a fixed gesture like the Eastern women whom one sees passing, with oblique eyes and mouths painted into smiles, their faces curiously traced into a work of art, in the languid movements of a pantomimic dance."[2]

But Symons differs from Wilde in that he never becomes enamoured of form for its own sake. His impressionism does not make for an emotional and intellectual sterility. It is indeed almost classic in its selective quality, its yearning toward the truth that lies like a jewel at the heart of all beauty.

1. Symons, Arthur, op. cit., p.5..

2. Symons, Arthur, The Symbolist Movement (Dutton & Company, New York, 1919) p.108.

"Impressionistic writing requires the union of several qualities, and to possess all these qualities except one, no matter which, is to fail in impressionistic writing. The first thing is to see, and with an eye which sees all, and as if one's only business were to see; and then to write, from a selecting memory, and as if one's only business were to write. It is the interesting heresy of a particular kind of art to seek truth before beauty; but in an impressionistic art, concerned, as the art of painting is, with the revelation, the recreation of a coloured and harmonious world, which (they tell us) owes its very existence to the eyes which sees it, truth is a quality which can be attained only by him who seeks beauty before truth. The true impressionist may be imagined as saying, 'Suppose I wish to give you an impression of the Luxembourg Gardens, as I see them when I look out of my window, will it help to call up in your mind the impression of those glimmering alleys and the naked darkness of the trees, if I begin by telling you that I can count seven cabs, half another at one end, and a horse's head at the other, in the space between the corners of the Odéon and the houses on the opposite side of the street; that there are four trees and three lamp-posts on the pavement; and that I can read the words 'Chocolat Menier' in white letters, on a blue ground, upon the circular black kiosk by the side of the second lamp-post? I see those things, no doubt, unconsciously, before my eye travels as far as the railings of the garden; but are they any essential part of my memory of the scene afterward?'"[1]

1. Symons, Arthur, op. cit., p.344.

And it is only on the ground that it lacks selectivity, that its impressionism is true to nothing but an accumulation of detail, that Symons condemns Moore's "Confessions of a Young Man."

Finally, if Symons was in many respects the typical impressionistic critic, in others, through some accident of temperament, he transcended his period and his school. He is however, the last of the great impressionists. Unhappily too, his influence serves but to intensify the decadence. There is, after him, nothing that is vital in the movement.

Finally, among the minor critics of the period, two critics better known for their poetry than their criticism, must be mentioned because their work embodies that which had become the quintessence of impressionistic criticism, the translation into prose-poetry of vicarious experience, that is to say, an imagist presentation of inspiration derived at a literary source. Of James Thompson it may be said that he was in more ways than one, of the type of those poets who have made some of the best critics. However, it is probably because of the fact that the muse must be fed, that Thompson always seems to be writing for an audience. He is the grandstander among critics. As sometimes in Pater's works and always in Wilde's, we are conscious of Thompson telling himself that he is really writing very fine prose poetry. There is no doubt, but that the reading of Shelley and Blake had been for him the sheerest and that his criticism of them is a work of loving and sympathetic reminiscence. However neither can we deny that the

following passage on Shelley, for instance, is too rich, too imaged to be altogether sincere. "He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He makes bright mischief with the moon. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He teases into growling the kennelled thunder, and laughs at the shaking of its fiery chain. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven: its floor is littered with his broken fancies. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world. He gets between the feet of the horses of the sun. He stands in the lap of patient Nature, and twines her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions, to see how she will look nicest in his song."[1]

Beautiful?, yes, a masterpiece of concrete expression, the ultimacy of impressionism'. But what does it mean? It tells us nothing about Shelley; it does not even tell us much about Francis Thompson. For we have in Thompson the unhappy example of the poet whose powers of expression were greatly in excess of his powers of emotion. Had they existed in rhythmic relation one to the other he must surely have been the greatest of the impressionistic critics.

In Mr. W.B. Yeats' critical work, on the other hand, there is we should say, too great a tendency to read Mr. W.B. Yeats, his mystical philosophy and his crudest superstitions into every work of which he undertakes the criticism. He transports his poets willy-nilly to some amethyst and rose-coloured world, "beyond the margin." He himself, in an essay

1. Thompson, Francis, Works, Vol.III (Burns and Oates Ltd., London, 1913) p.18.

entitled "The Autumn of the Body" describes his transition from the outer world to the inner. "I remember that when I first began to write I desired to describe outward things as vividly as possible, and took pleasure in which there was perhaps, a little discontent, in picturesque and declamatory books. And then quite suddenly, I lost the desire of describing outward things, and found that I took little pleasure in a book unless it was spiritual and unemphatic."[1]

In other words, it is his desire to yield utterly to the emotionsl forces, the laws, operating within the bounds of a work of art, and through then to achieve comprehension of the hidden laws of the universe. All his characteristic criticism is a manifestation of this aim. For instance, in the contemplation of Shakespearean tragedy he seeks to unveil in the plot and sub-plot, the shadows laid upon shadows, "the emotion of multitude"[2] to penetrate through "the little, limited life of the fable" to "the rich, far-wandering, many-imaged, life of the half-seen world beyond it."[3]

Applied by a critic of classic mind, this method might approach a valuation of the universal element in a work of art. In the hands of the introvert romanticist, it becomes merely an instrument for the further examination of his own ego.

However, both these two poet critics are interesting to the student of impressionism because they are symbolic, to

1. Yeats, W.B., Essays (MacMillan Company, London, 1924) p.232.
2. Ibid., p.265.
3. " p.266-67.

a certain extent, of the fundamental contradictions within impressionism that were to work its ultimate destruction.

In Yeats, we find the introvert tendencies, that, carried to their ultimate comclusion, produce perversion, a seeking of sensation beyond legitimate bounds, and in the end, an arid nullity of emotion. In Thompson on the other hand, we find the stylistic, too concrete manner, that becomes, eventually, mere automatic writing.

And with these two writers the cycle of impressionism in criticism may be considered complete.

CONCLUSION

It is a fallacy supported by most students of the movement that impressionism was exotic to English criticism, that it was a French importation introduced into English aesthetics in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Moreover, from this basic fallacy there arises another, the idea of the essentially decadent character of impressionistic criticism.

The truth of the matter is that impressionistic criticism was English both in origin and development, and that the French influence which worked upon it through the medium of the critics of the Beardsley period, contributed only a few subjective phenomena. The movement was, in fact, a manifestation of romanticism in the field of criticism. It had its origin in the origins of the romantic movement; it flourished within romanticism; it fell into decay within romanticism.

It is a commonplace of modern thought that every organism, every movement, carries within itself the germs that will bring about its own decay. This process may be observed in the romantic movement, and, consequently, in impressionistic criticism, where the shift from the outer world to the inner is the essential characteristic.

In an age of advancing civilization, of rising culture, this tendency would but serve to unleash a rush of healthy,

confident feeling.

On the other hand, in a period of decadence, the impressionistic critic, conditioned by his age, would tend to become introvert; so to project himself into his art, that it becomes merely an instrument for the examination of his own ego. The pleasure which is ordinarily the by-product of the artistic emotion becomes an end in itself. The critic seeks to widen the field of sensation beyond legitimate bounds. As a result the emotion which is so essential to his approach to art loses all touch with reality.

We have seen these processes in operation in the literature of some two centuries. The shift from the outer world to the inner began in the work of Addison, Young, and Morgann, who injected an element of emotion and fancy, in opposition to reason, into aesthetic criticism. As yet, however, there was no attempt to recreate for the reader the critic's personal experience or impressions of a work of art. This creative element was the contribution to the movement of De Quincey, Lamb, and, especially, of Hazlitt.

And finally, the contradictions, the germs of the decadence which had been present in the movement since its origin became manifest in the emotional and intellectual sterility of the work of Swinburne and Pater and their disciples.

It must not be assumed, however, that the decadence in criticism came to an end with the nineteenth century, to be replaced by a healthy and vital movement. The emotional crisis of 1895 involved, merely, a swing away from certain

surface phenomena which had come to be labelled "decadent."

The decadence drags on, propagated not merely by those writers who survived the Beardsley period, but by the best intellects, the most delicate sensibilities, our age has produced. Two poet critics will serve as examples. Mr. Ezra Pound, for instance, is a true decadent. He is an expression of the Spenglerian ideal of the western man of the twentieth century, to whom there is left only the virtue of grim fortitude before the spectacle of his own decay.

Mr. Humbert Wolfe, with his retreat into a pretty-pretty Victorian romanticism is as truly typical of the decline as is Mr. Pound.

We can only hope for the evolution of a new school of critics, the vanguard of a new culture, who will be able to see beyond the crumbling frontiers of our civilization to the new era and the vital arts that are to come.

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