

EZRA POUND

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C

OF READING

First published in 1934
by George Routledge Limited
New edition published in 1951
by Faber and Faber Limited
3 Queen Square London WC1N 3AU
This paperback edition first published in 1961
Reissued 1991

Printed in Great Britain by Cox & Wyman Ltd, Reading, Berkshire

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A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
ISBN 0 571 05892 2

Warning

1 There is a longish dull stretch shortly after the beginning of the book. The student will have to endure it. I am at that place trying by all means to avoid ambiguity, in the hope of saving the student's time later.

2 Gloom and solemnity are entirely out of place in even the most rigorous study of an art originally intended to make glad the heart of man.

Gravity, a mysterious carriage of the
body to conceal the defects of the mind.

LAURENCE STERNE

3 The harsh treatment here accorded a number of meritorious writers is not aimless, but proceeds from a firm conviction that the only way to keep the best writing in circulation, or to 'make the best poetry popular', is by drastic separation of the best from a great mass of writing that has been long considered of value, that has overweighted all curricula, and that is to be blamed for the very pernicious current idea that a good book must be of necessity a dull one.

A classic is classic not because it conforms to certain structural rules, or fits certain definitions (of which its

author had quite probably never heard). It is classic because of a certain eternal and irrepressible freshness.

An Italian state examiner, jolted by my edition of Cavalcanti, expressed admiration at the almost ultra-modernity of Guido's language.

Ignorant men of genius are constantly rediscovering 'laws' of art which the academics had mislaid or hidden.

The author's conviction on this day of New Year is that music begins to atrophy when it departs too far from the dance; that poetry begins to atrophy when it gets too far from music; but this must not be taken as implying that all good music is dance music or all poetry lyric. Bach and Mozart are never too far from physical movement.

Nunc est bibendum
Nunc pede libero
Pulsanda tellus.

SECTION ONE

why the composer went wrong, or couldn't very well have done otherwise.

2

ANY general statement is like a cheque drawn on a bank. Its value depends on what is there to meet it. If Mr. Rockefeller draws a cheque for a million dollars it is good. If I draw one for a million it is a joke, a hoax, it has no value. If it is taken seriously, the writing of it becomes a criminal act.

The same applies with cheques against knowledge. If Marconi says something about ultra-short waves it MEANS something. Its meaning can only be properly estimated by someone who KNOWS.

You do not accept a stranger's cheques without reference. In writing, a man's 'name' is his reference. He has, after a time, credit. It may be sound, it may be like the late Mr. Kreuger's.

The verbal manifestation on any bank cheque is very much like that on any other.

Your cheque, if good, means ultimately delivery of something you want.

An abstract or general statement is GOOD if it be ultimately found to correspond with the facts.

BUT no layman can tell at sight whether it is good or bad.

Hence (omitting various intermediate steps) . . . hence the almost stationary condition of knowledge throughout the middle ages. Abstract arguments didn't get mankind rapidly forward, or rapidly extend the borders of knowledge.

THE IDEOGRAMMIC METHOD OR THE METHOD OF SCIENCE

HANG a painting by Carlo Dolci beside a Cosimo Tura. You cannot prevent Mr. Buggins from preferring the former, but you can very seriously impede his setting up a false tradition of teaching on the assumption that Tura has never existed, or that the qualities of the Tura are non-existent or outside the scope of the possible.

A general statement is valuable only in REFERENCE to the known objects or facts.

Even if the general statement of an ignorant man is 'true', it leaves his mouth or pen without any great validity. He doesn't KNOW what he is saying. That is, he doesn't know it or mean it in anything like the degree that a man of experience would or does. Thus a very young man can be quite 'right' without carrying conviction to an older man who is wrong and who may quite well be wrong and still know a good deal that the younger man doesn't know.

One of the pleasures of middle age is to *find out* that one WAS right, and that one was much righter than one knew at say seventeen or twenty-three.

This doesn't in the least rule out the uses of logic, or of good guesses, or of intuitions and total perceptions, or of 'seeing how the thing HAD TO BE'.

It has, however, a good deal to do with the efficiency of verbal manifestation, and with the transmittability of a conviction.

Chapter Four

1

‘Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.’

Dichten = condensare.

I begin with poetry because it is the most concentrated form of verbal expression. Basil Bunting, fumbling about with a German-Italian dictionary, found that this idea of poetry as concentration is as old almost as the German language. ‘Dichten’ is the German verb corresponding to the noun ‘Dichtung’ meaning poetry, and the lexicographer has rendered it by the Italian verb meaning ‘to condense’.

The charging of language is done in three principal ways: You receive the language as your race has left it, the words have meanings which have ‘grown into the race’s skin’; the Germans say ‘wie in den Schnabel gewachsen’, as it grows in his beak. And the good writer chooses his words for their ‘meaning’, but that meaning is not a set, cut-off thing like the move of knight or pawn on a chess-board. It comes up with roots, with associations, with how and where the word is familiarly used, or where it has been used brilliantly or memorably.

You can hardly say 'incarnadine' without one or more of your auditors thinking of a particular line of verse.

Numerals and words referring to human inventions have hard, cut-off meanings. That is, meanings which are more obtrusive than a word's 'associations'.

Bicycle now has a cut-off meaning.

But tandem, or 'bicycle built for two', will probably throw the image of a past decade upon the reader's mental screen.

There is no end to the number of qualities which some people can associate with a given word or kind of word, and most of these vary with the individual.

You have to go almost exclusively to Dante's criticism to find a set of OBJECTIVE categories for words. Dante called words 'battered' and 'shaggy' because of the different NOISES they make. Or *pexa et hirsuta*, combed and hairy.

He also divided them by their different associations.

NEVERTHELESS you still charge words with meaning mainly in three ways, called phanopoeia, melopoeia, logopoeia. You use a word to throw a visual image on to the reader's imagination, or you charge it by sound, or you use groups of words to do this.

Thirdly, you take the greater risk of using the word in some special relation to 'usage', that is, to the kind of context in which the reader expects, or is accustomed, to find it.

This is the last means to develop, it can only be used by the sophisticated.

(If you want really to understand what I am talking about, you will have to read, ultimately, Propertius and Jules Laforgue.)

IF YOU WERE STUDYING CHEMISTRY you would be told that there are a certain number of elements, a certain number of more usual chemicals, chemicals most in use, or easiest to find. And for the sake of clarity in your experiments, you would probably be given these substances 'pure' or as pure as you could conveniently get them.

IF YOU WERE A CONTEMPORARY book-keeper you would probably use the loose-leaf system, by which business houses separate archives from facts that are in use, or that are likely to be frequently needed for reference.

Similar conveniences are possible in the study of literature.

Any amateur of painting knows that modern galleries lay great stress on 'good hanging', that is, of putting important pictures where they can be well seen, and where the eye will not be confused, or the feet wearied by searching for the masterpiece on a vast expanse of wall cumbered with rubbish.

At this point I can't very well avoid printing a set of categories that considerably antedate my own *How to Read*.

2

WHEN you start searching for 'pure elements' in literature you will find that literature has been created by the following classes of persons:

1 Inventors. Men who found a new process, or whose extant work gives us the first known example of a process.

2 The masters. Men who combined a number of such processes, and who used them as well as or better than the inventors.

3 The diluters. Men who came after the first two kinds of writer, and couldn't do the job quite as well.

4 Good writers without salient qualities. Men who are fortunate enough to be born when the literature of a given country is in good working order, or when some particular branch of writing is 'healthy'. For example, men who wrote sonnets in Dante's time, men who wrote short lyrics in Shakespeare's time or for several decades thereafter, or who wrote French novels and stories after Flaubert had shown them how.

5 Writers of belles-lettres. That is, men who didn't really invent anything, but who specialized in some parti-

cular part of writing, who couldn't be considered as 'great men' or as authors who were trying to give a complete presentation of life, or of their epoch.

6 The starters of crazes.

Until the reader knows the first two categories he will never be able 'to see the wood for the trees'. He may know what he 'likes'. He may be a 'compleat book-lover', with a large library of beautifully printed books, bound in the most luxurious bindings, but he will never be able to sort out what he knows or to estimate the value of one book in relation to others, and he will be more confused and even less able to make up his mind about a book where a new author is 'breaking with convention' than to form an opinion about a book eighty or a hundred years old.

He will never understand why a specialist is annoyed with him for trotting out a second- or third-hand opinion about the merits of his favourite bad writer.

Until you have made your own survey and your own closer inspection you might at least beware and avoid accepting opinions:

1 From men who haven't themselves produced notable work (vide p. 17).

2 From men who have not themselves taken the risk of printing the results of their own personal inspection and survey, even if they are seriously making one.

Chapter Seven

It doesn't matter which leg of your table you make first, so long as the table has four legs and will stand up solidly when you have finished it.

Mediocre poetry is in the long run the same in all countries. The decadence of Petrarchism in Italy and the 'rice powder poetry' in China arrive at about the same level of weakness despite the difference in idiom.

Chapter Eight

Coming round again to the starting-point.

Language is a means of communication. To charge language with meaning to the utmost possible degree, we have, as stated, the three chief means:

I throwing the object (fixed or moving) on to the visual imagination.

II inducing emotional correlations by the sound and rhythm of the speech.

III inducing both of the effects by stimulating the associations (intellectual or emotional) that have remained in the receiver's consciousness in relation to the actual words or word groups employed.

(phanopoeia, melopoeia, logopoeia)

Incompetence will show in the use of too many words.

The reader's first and simplest test of an author will be to look for words that do not function; that contribute nothing to the meaning OR that distract from the MOST important factor of the meaning to factors of minor importance.

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One definition of beauty is: aptness to purpose.

Whether it is a good definition or not, you can readily see that a good deal of BAD criticism has been written by men who assume that an author is trying to do what he is NOT trying to do.

Incredible as it now seems, the bad critics of Keats' time found his writing 'obscure', which meant that they couldn't understand WHY Keats wrote.

Most human perceptions date from a long time ago, or are derivable from perceptions that gifted men have had long before we were born. The race discovers, and rediscovers.

TESTS AND COMPOSITION EXERCISES

I

1 Let the pupils exchange composition papers and see how many and what useless words have been used—how many words that convey nothing new.

2 How many words that obscure the meaning.

3 How many words out of their usual place, and whether this alteration makes the statement in any way more interesting or more energetic.

4 Whether a sentence is ambiguous; whether it really means more than one thing or more than the writer in-

tended; whether it can be so read as to mean something different.

5 Whether there is something clear on paper, but ambiguous if spoken aloud.

II

It is said that Flaubert taught De Maupassant to write. When De Maupassant returned from a walk Flaubert would ask him to describe someone, say a concierge whom they would both pass in their next walk, and to describe the person so that Flaubert would recognize, say, the concierge and not mistake her for some other concierge and not the one De Maupassant had described.

SECOND SET

- 1 Let the pupil write the description of a tree.
- 2 Of a tree without mentioning the name of the tree (larch, pine, etc.) so that the reader will not mistake it for the description of some other kind of tree.
- 3 Try some object in the class-room.
- 4 Describe the light and shadow on the school-room clock or some other object.
- 5 If it can be done without breach of the peace, the pupil could write descriptions of some other pupil. The author suggests that the pupil should not describe the instructor, otherwise the description might become a vehicle of emotion, and subject to more complicated rules of composition than the class is yet ready to cope with.

In all these descriptions the test would be accuracy and vividness, the pupil receiving the other's paper would be the gauge. He would recognize or not recognize the object or person described.

Rodolfo Agricola in an edition dating from fifteen hundred and something says one writes: *ut doceat, ut moveat ut delectet*, to teach, to move or to delight.

A great deal of bad criticism is due to men not seeing which of these three motives underlies a given composition.

The converse processes, not considered by the pious teachers of antiquity, would be to obscure, to bamboozle or mislead, and to bore.

The reader or auditor is at liberty to remain passive and submit to these operations if he so choose.

FURTHER TESTS

LET the pupil examine a given piece of writing, say, the day's editorial in a newspaper, to see whether the writer is trying to conceal something; to see whether he is 'veiling his meaning'; whether he is afraid to say what he thinks; whether he is trying to appear to think without really doing any thinking.

Metrical writing

- 1 Let the pupil try to write in the metre of any poem he likes.
- 2 Let him write words to a well-known tune.
- 3 Let him try to write words to the same tune in such a way that the words will not be distorted when one sings them.
- 4 Let the pupil write a poem in some strophe form he likes.
- 5 Let him parody some poem he finds ridiculous, either because of falsity in the statement, or falsity in the disposition of the writer, or for pretentiousness, of one kind or another, or for any other reason that strikes his risible faculties, his sense of irony.

The gauging pupil should be asked to recognize what author is parodied. And whether the joke is on the parodied or the parodist. Whether the parody exposes a real defect, or merely makes use of an author's mechanism to expose a more trivial contents.

Note: No harm has ever yet been done a good poem by this process. FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat* has survived hundreds of parodies, that are not really parodies either of Omar or FitzGerald, but only poems written in that form of strophe.

Note: There is a tradition that in Provence it was considered plagiarism to take a man's form, just as it is now considered plagiarism to take his subject matter or plot.

Poems frankly written to another man's strophe form or tune were called 'Sirventes', and were usually satirical.

FURTHER TESTS

1 Let the pupils in exchanging themes judge whether the theme before them really says anything.

2 Let them judge whether it tells them anything or 'makes them see anything' they hadn't noticed before, especially in regard to some familiar scene or object.

3 Variant: whether the writer really had to KNOW something about the subject or scene before being able to write the page under consideration.

The question of a word or phrase being 'useless' is not merely a numerical problem.

Anatole France in criticizing French dramatists pointed out that on the stage, the words must give time for the action; they must give time for the audience to take count of what is going on.

Even on the printed page there is an analogous ease.

Tacitus in writing Latin can use certain forms of condensation that don't necessarily translate advantageously into English.

The reader will often misjudge a condensed writer by trying to read him too fast.

The secret of popular writing is never to put more on a given page than the common reader can lap off it with no strain **WHATSOEVER** on his habitually slack attention.

Anatole France is said to have spent a great deal of time searching for the *least possible* variant that would turn the most worn-out and commonest phrases of journalism into something distinguished.

Such research is sometimes termed 'classicism'.

This is the greatest possible remove from the usual English stylist's trend or urge toward a style different from everyone else's.

Before deciding whether a man is a fool or a good artist, it would be well to ask, not only: 'is he excited unduly', but: 'does he see something we don't?'

Is his curious behaviour due to his feeling an oncoming earthquake, or smelling a forest fire which we do not yet feel or smell?

Barometers, wind-gauges, cannot be used as engines.

THE INSTRUCTOR

I The teacher or lecturer is a danger. He very seldom recognizes his nature or his position. The lecturer is a man who must talk for an hour.

France may possibly have acquired the intellectual leadership of Europe when their academic period was cut down to forty minutes.

I also have lectured. The lecturer's first problem is to have enough words to fill forty or sixty minutes. The professor is paid for his time, his results are almost impossible to estimate.

The man who really knows can tell all that is transmissible in a very few words. The economic problem of the teacher (of violin or of language or of anything else) is how to string it out so as to be paid for more lessons.

Be as honest as you like, but the danger is there even when one knows it. I have felt the chill even in this brief booklet. In pure good will, but because one must make a rough estimate, the publishers sent me a contract: 40,000 to 50,000 words. I may run over it, but it introduces a

'factor', a component of error, a distraction from the true problem:

What is the simplest possible statement?

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II No teacher has ever failed from ignorance.

That is empiric professional knowledge.

Teachers fail because they cannot 'handle the class'.

Real education must ultimately be limited to men who INSIST on knowing, the rest is mere sheep-herding.

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III You can prove nothing by analogy. The analogy is either range-finding or fumble. Written down as a lurch toward proof, or at worst elaborated in that aim, it leads mainly to useless argument, BUT a man whose wit teems with analogies will often 'twig' that something is wrong long before he knows why.

Aristotle had something of this sort in mind when he wrote 'apt use of metaphor indicating a swift perception of relations'.

A dozen rough analogies may flash before the quick mind, as so many rough tests which eliminate grossly unfit matter or structure.

It is only after long experience that most men are able to define a thing in terms of its own genus, painting as painting, writing as writing. You can spot the bad critic when he starts by discussing the poet and not the poem.

.

I mistrust the man who starts with forty-nine variants before stating three or four principles. He may be a very serious character, he may be on his way to a fourth or fifth principle that will in the long run be useful or revolutionary, but I suspect that he is still in the middle of his problem, and not ready to offer an answer.

The inexperienced teacher, fearing his own ignorance, is afraid to admit it. Perhaps that courage only comes when one knows to what extent ignorance is almost universal. Attempts to camouflage it are simply a waste, in the long run, of time.

If the teacher is slow of wit, he may well be terrified by students whose minds move more quickly than his own, but he would be better advised to use the lively pupil for scout work, to exploit the quicker eye or subtler ear as look-out or listening post.

The best musician I know admitted that his sense of precise audition was *intermittent*. But he put it in the form '*moi aussi*', after I had made my own confession.

When you get to the serious consideration of any work of art, our faculties or memories or perceptions are all too 'spotty' to permit anything save mutual curiosity.

There is no man who knows so much about, let us say, a passage between lines 100 to 200 of the sixth book of the *Odyssey* that he can't learn something by re-reading it **WITH** his students, not merely **TO** his students. If he knows Guido's *Donna Mi Prega* as well as I now know it, meaning microscopically, he can still get a new light by some cross-reference, by some relation between the thing he has examined and re-examined, and some other fine work, similar or dissimilar.

I believe the ideal teacher would approach any masterpiece that he was presenting to his class *almost* as if he had never seen it before.

TASTES

THERE is no reason why the same man should like the same books at eighteen and at forty-eight.

There are certain divisions and dissociations that I refrain from making because I do not think that, at my age, I should try to force the taste of a middle-aged man on the younger reader.

Thank heaven there are books that one enjoys **MOST** before one is twenty-five, and that there are *other* books that one can **STILL** read at forty-five and still hope to be able to read in the sere and yellow.

Realism, romanticism, men as they are seen, men as they are imagined or 'dramatized', men as they are quite simply known **NOT** to be. . . .

Consider the anecdote of Jack Dempsey. When Tunney was being touted as the educated boxer, a reporter approached Mr. Dempsey on the subject of literature. I think he mentioned Cashel Byron or some novel in which the ring appears. Dempsey wouldn't have it: 'Agh, it tain't **LIKE** that.'

The reporter observed that Dempsey had a lurid novel about a Russian Grand Duke. He suggested that if Dempsey had been a Grand Duke he might have found similar discrepancies in the portrayal of old Russian high life.

Dempsey: 'I never *wuz* a Grand Duke.'

Perfectly sincere people say 'you can't teach literature', and what they MEAN by that statement is probably true.

You *can* quite distinctly teach a man to distinguish between one kind of a book and another.

Certain verbal manifestations *can* be employed as measures, T squares, voltmeters, or can be used 'for comparison', and familiarity with them can indubitably enable a man to estimate writing in general, and the relative forces, energies and perfections or imperfections of books.

You don't furnish a house entirely with yard sticks and weighing machines.

The authors and books I recommend in this introduction to the study of letters are to be considered AS measuring-rods and voltmeters.

The books listed are books to have in mind, BEFORE you try to measure and evaluate other books. They are, most emphatically, NOT all the books worth reading.

A great deal that you read, you simply need not 'bother about'.

On the other hand, you needn't fall into the silly snob-bism that has ruined whole shoals of fancy writers, polite essayists, refined young gents, members of literary cénacles und so weiter.

DISSOCIATE

‘Man should be prouder of having invented the hammer and nail than of having created masterpieces of imitation.’ Hegel, quoted by Fernand Leger.

‘The intellectual love of a thing consists in understanding its perfections.’

Spinoza

A GREAT deal of critical rancour has been wasted through a failure to distinguish between two totally different kinds of writing.

A Books a man reads to develop his capacities: in order to know more and perceive more, and more quickly, than he did before he read them.

and

B Books that are intended and that serve as REPOSE, dope, opiates, mental beds.

You don’t sleep on a hammer or lawn-mower, you don’t drive nails with a mattress. Why should people go on applying the SAME critical standards to writings as different in purpose and effect as a lawn-mower and a sofa cushion?

There is one technique for the mattress-maker and one for the builder of linotype machines. A technique of construction applies both to bedsteads and automobiles.

The dirtiest book in our language is a quite astute manual telling people how to earn money by writing. The fact that it advocates the maximum possible intellectual degradation should not blind one to its constructive merits.

Certain parts of the technique of narrative writing ARE common to Homer, Rudyard Kipling *and* to Mr. Kipling's star disciple, the late Edgar Wallace.

The only intelligent adverse criticism of my *How to Read* was not an attack on what was in it, but on what I had not been able to put there.

One can't get everything into forty-five pages. But even if I had had 450 at my disposal I should not have attempted a treatise on major form in the novel. I have not written a good novel. I have not written a novel. I don't expect to write any novels and shall not tell anyone else how to do it until I have.

If you want to study the novel, go, READ the best you can find. All that I know about it, I have learned by reading:

Tom Jones, by Fielding.

Tristram Shandy and *The Sentimental Journey* by Sterne (and I don't recommend anyone ELSE to try to do another *Tristram Shandy*).

The novels of Jane Austen and Trollope.

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[Note: If you compare the realism of Trollope's novels with the realism of Robert McAlmon's stories you will get a fair idea of what a good novelist means by 'construction'. Trollope depicts a scene or a person, and you can clearly see how he 'leads up to an effect'.]

Continuing:

The novels of Henry James, AND especially the prefaces to his collected edition; which are the one extant great treatise on novel writing in English.

In French you can form a fairly good ideogram from:

Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*.

The first half of Stendhal's *Rouge et Noir* and the first eighty pages of *La Chartreuse de Parme*.

Madame Bovary, *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, *Trois Contes*, and the unfinished *Bouvard et Pécuchet* of FLAUBERT, with Goncourt's preface to *Germinie Lacerteux*.

After that you would do well to look at Madox Ford's *A Call*.

When you have read James' prefaces and twenty of his other novels, you would do well to read *The Sacred Fount*.

There for perhaps the first time since about 1300 a writer has been able to deal with a sort of content where-with Cavalcanti had been 'concerned'.

You can get a very brilliant cross-light via Donne. I mean the differences and nuances between psychology in Guido, abstract philosophic statement in Guido, the blend in Donne, and again psychology in Henry James, and in all of them the underlying concept of FORM, the structure of the whole work, including its parts.

This is a long way from an A B C. In fact it opens the vista of post-graduate study.

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N.B.

Jealousy of vigorous-living men has perhaps led in all times to a deformation of criticism and a distorted glorification of the past. Motive does not concern us, but error does. Glorifiers of the past commonly err in their computations because they measure the work of a present DECADE against the best work of a past century or even of a whole group of centuries.

Obviously one man or six men can't produce as many metrical triumphs in five years or in twenty, as five hundred troubadours, with no cinema, no novels, no radio to distract 'em, produced between 1050 and 1300. And the same applies in all departments.

The honest critic must be content to find a VERY LITTLE contemporary work worth serious attention; but he must also be ready to RECOGNIZE that little, and to demote work of the past when a new work surpasses it.

SECTION TWO

EXHIBITS

THE ideal way to present the next section of this booklet would be to give the quotations **WITHOUT** any comment whatever. I am afraid that would be too revolutionary. By long and wearing experience I have learned that in the present imperfect state of the world, one **MUST** tell the reader. I made a very bad mistake in my **INSTIGATIONS**, the book had a plan, I thought the reader would see it.

In the present case I shall not tell the student everything. The most intelligent students, those who most want to **LEARN**, will however encompass that end, and endear themselves to the struggling author if they will read the **EXHIBITS**, and not look at my footnotes until they have at least tried to find out **WHAT THE EXHIBIT IS**, and to guess why I have printed it. For any reader of sufficient intelligence this should be as good a game as Torquemada's cross-word abominations. I don't expect it to become ever as popular, but in an ideal **REPUBLIC** it would.

THE ECSTASY

Where like a pillow on a bed
A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest
The violet's reclining head
Sat we two, one another's best.

Our hands were firmly cémented
By a fast balm which thence did spring,
Our eye-beams twisted and did thread
Our eyes upon one double string

So to engraft our hands, as yet
Was all the means to make us one,
And pictures in our eyes to get
Was all our propagation.

As twixt two equal armies Fate
Suspends uncertain victory,
Our souls, which to advance their state
Were gone out, hung twixt her and me.

And whilst our souls negotiate there,
We like sepulchral statues lay.
All day the same our postures were
And we said nothing all the day.

If any, so by love refined
That he soul's language understood
And by good love were grown all mind,
Within convenient distance stood,

He, though he knew not which soul spake
(Because both meant, both spoke the same),
Might thence a new concoction¹ take
And part far purer than he came.

This ecstasy doth unperplex,
We said, and tell us what we love,
We see by this it was not sex
We see, we saw not what did move,

But as all several souls contain
Mixture of things they know not what,
Love these mixed souls doth mix again
And make both one, each this and that.

A single violet transplant,
The strength, the colour and the size,
All, which before was poor and scant,
Redoubles still and multiplies,

When love with one another so
Interinanimates two souls
That abler soul which thence doth flow
Defects of loneliness controls,

We then, who are this new soul, know
Of what we are composed and made,
For th' anatomies of which we grow
Are souls whom no change can invade.

¹ Technical alchemical term

But O alas, so long, so far
Our bodies why do we forbear?
They are ours though they're not we. We are
Th' intelligences, they the spheres.

We owe them thanks because they thus
Did us to us at first convey;
Yielded their forces to us
Nor are dross to us, but alloy.¹

On man heaven's influence works not so
But that it first imprints the air,
So soul into soul may flow
Though it to body first repair

As our blood labours to beget
Spirits as like souls as it can
Because such fingers need to knit
That subtle knot which makes us man

So must pure lovers' souls descend
To affections and to faculties
Which sense may reach and apprehend
Else a great prince in prison lies.

To our bodies turn we then that so
Weak men on love reveal'd may look,
Loves mysteries in souls do grow
But yet the body is his book

¹ alloy, i.e. that makes metal fit for a given purpose

And if some lover such as we
Have heard this dialogue of one,
Let him still mark us, he shall see
Small change when we're to bodies¹ gone.

¹ probably technical for atoms.

Platonism believed. The decadence of trying to make pretty speeches and of hunting for something to say, temporarily checked. Absolute belief in the existence of an extra-corporeal soul, and its incarnation, Donne stating a thesis in precise and even technical terms. Trivial half-wits always looking for the irrelevant, boggle over Donne's language. You have here a clear statement, worthy to set beside Cavalcanti's 'Donna mi Prega' for its precision, less interesting metrically, but certainly not less interesting in content.

It would take a bile specialist to discover why the *Oxford Book of Verse* includes the first five of the strophes and then truncates the poem with *no indication that anything has been omitted*.

Donne's work is uneven, there is a great deal of it, but he is the one English metaphysical poet who towers above all the rest. This doesn't mean there weren't other learned and convinced Platonists who have left beautiful poems. Neither does it mean that Donne at his lowest potential doesn't march coterminous with his dallying contemporaries.

In Donne's best work we 'find again' a real author saying something he means and not simply 'hunting for sentiments that will fit his vocabulary'.

It might be well to emphasize the difference between an expert and inexpert metaphysician. For centuries a series

of men thought very thoroughly and intently about certain problems which we find unsusceptible to laboratory proof and experiment. The results of such thinking can be known and compared, gross follies and self-contradiction can be eliminated. The difference between a metaphysical treatise that could satisfy my late friend, the Father José Maria de Elizondo, and contemporary religious works whose authors cite Mr. Wells and Mr. Balfour, is very considerable.

Equations of psychology worked out by knowers of Avicenna may not be wholly convincing, but a number of such equations exist, and cannot be disproved by experience, even though belief and predilection must depend on the introspective analysis of highly sensitized persons.

Between 1250 and the Renaissance, people did manage to communicate with each other in respect to such perceptions and such modalities of feeling and perception.

WHITMAN

FROM an examination of Walt made twelve years ago the present writer carried away the impression that there are thirty well-written pages of Whitman; he is now unable to find them. Whitman's faults are superficial, he does convey an image of his time, he has written *histoire morale*, as Montaigne wrote the history of his epoch. You can learn more of nineteenth-century America from Whitman than from any of the writers who either refrained from perceiving, or limited their record to what they had been taught to consider suitable literary expression. The only way to enjoy Whitman thoroughly is to concentrate on his fundamental meaning. If you insist, however, on dissecting his language you will probably find that it is wrong NOT because he broke all of what were considered in his day 'the rules' but because he is spasmodically conforming to this, that or the other; sporadically dragging in a bit of 'regular' metre, using a bit of literary language, and putting his adjectives where, in the spoken tongue, they are not. His real writing occurs when he gets free of all this barbed wire.

Certainly the last author to be tried in a classroom.

In the main I don't see that teaching can do much more than expose counterfeit work, thus gradually leading the student to the valid. The hoax, the sham, the falsification become so habitual that they pass unnoticed; all this is fit matter for education. The student can in this field profit by his instructor's experience. The natural destructivity of

the young can function to advantage: excitement of the chase, the fun of detection could under favourable circumstance enliven the study.

Whereas it is only maturer patience that can sweep aside a writer's honest error, and overlook unaccomplished clumsiness or outlandishness or old-fashionedness, for the sake of the solid centre.

Thus many clever people have overlooked Thomas Hardy's verses, even though the author of the *Mayor of Casterbridge* lurks behind them.

Narrative sense, narrative power can survive ANY truncation. If a man have the tale to tell and can keep his mind on that and refuses to worry about his own limitations, the reader will, in the long or short run, find him, and no amount of professorial abuse or theoretical sniping will have any real effect on the author's civil status. Barrels of ink have flowed to accuse Mr. Kipling of vulgarity (that was perhaps before the present reader was born), to accuse him of being a journalist . . . etc. . . .

Thomas Hardy's Noble Dames and Little Ironies will find readers despite all the French theories in the world.

More writers fail from lack of character than from lack of intelligence.

Technical solidity is not attained without at least some persistence.

The chief cause of false writing is economic. Many writers

need or want money. These writers could be cured by an application of banknotes.

The next cause is the desire men have to tell what they don't know, or to pass off an emptiness for a fullness. They are discontented with what they have to say and want to make a pint of comprehension fill up a gallon of verbiage.

An author having a very small amount of true contents can make it the basis of formal and durable mastery, provided he neither inflates nor falsifies: Vide the Aucassin, the Canzoni of Arnaut, the Daphnis and Chloe.

The plenum of letters is not bounded by primaeval exclusivity functioning against any *kind* of human being or talent, but only against false coiners, men who will not dip their metal in the acid of known or accessible fact.