

Chapter III

POETRY

INTRODUCTION

1. The temple of classical architecture needed a god to live in it; sculpture places him before us in plastic beauty and gives to the material it uses for this purpose forms which by their very nature are not alien to the spirit but are the shape immanent in the selected content itself. But the body, sensuousness, and ideal universality of the sculptural figure has contrasted with it both the subjective inner life and the particular character of the individual; and the content alike of the religious and the mundane life must gain actuality in the subjective and particular by means of a new art. This subjective and particular characteristic mode of expression painting introduces within the principle of the visual arts themselves, because it reduces the real externality of the shape to a more ideal appearance in colour and makes the expression of the inner soul the centre of the representation. Yet the general sphere in which these arts move, the first symbolic in type, the second ideally plastic, the third romantic, is the sensuous *external* shape of the spirit and things in nature.

But the spiritual content, by essentially belonging to the inner life of consciousness, has at the same time an existence alien to that life in the pure element of external appearance and in the vision to which the external shape is offered. Art must withdraw from this foreign element in order to enshrine its conceptions in a sphere of an explicitly inner and ideal kind in respect alike of the material used and the manner of expression. This was the forward step which we saw music taking, in that it made the inner life as such, and subjective feeling, something for apprehension by the inner life, not in visible shapes, but in the figurations of inwardly reverberating sound. But in this way it went to the other extreme, to an undeveloped concentration of feeling, the content of which found once again only a purely symbolic expression in notes. For the note, taken by itself, is without content and has its determinate character only in virtue of numerical relations, so that although

the qualitative character of the spiritual content does correspond in general to these quantitative relations which open out into essential differences, oppositions, and modulation, still it cannot be completely characterized qualitatively by a note. Therefore, if this qualitative side is not to be missing altogether, music must, on account of its one-sidedness, call on the help of the more exact meaning of words and, in order to become more firmly conjoined with the detail and characteristic expression of the subject-matter it demands a text which alone gives a fuller content to the subjective life's outpouring in the notes. By means of this expression of ideas and feelings the abstract inwardness of music emerges into a clearer and firmer unfolding of them. Yet on the one hand which it develops in this unfolding is not ideas and their artistically adequate form but only their accompanying inner sentiment; on the other hand, music simply snaps its link with words in order to move at will and unhampered within its own sphere of sound. Consequently, on its side too, the sphere of ideas, which transcends the rather *abstract* inner life of feeling as such and give to the world the shape of *concrete* actuality, cuts itself free from music and gives itself an artistically adequate existence in the art of poetry.

Poetry, the art of speech, is the third term, the totality, which unites in itself, within the province of the spiritual inner life and on a higher level, the two extremes, i.e. the visual arts and music. For, on the one hand, poetry, like music, contains that principle of the self-apprehension of the inner life as inner, which architecture, sculpture, and painting lack; while, on the other hand, in the very field of inner ideas, perceptions, and feelings it broadens out into an objective world which does not altogether lose the determinate character of sculpture and painting. Finally, poetry is more capable than any other art of completely unfolding the totality of an event into a successive series and the changes of the heart's movements, passions, ideas, and the complete course of an action.

2. But furthermore poetry is the third of the *romantic arts*, painting and music being the other two.

(a) Poetry (i) has as its general principle spirituality and therefore it no longer turns to heavy matter as such in order, like architecture, to form it symbolically into an analogous environment for the inner life, or, like sculpture, to shape into real matter the natural form, as a spatial external object, belonging to the spirit; on the

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contrary, it expresses directly for spirit's apprehension the spirit itself with all its imaginative and artistic conceptions but without setting these out visibly and bodily for contemplation from the outside. (ii) Poetry, to a still ampler extent than painting and music, can comprise in the form of the inner life not only the inner consciousness but also the special and particular details of what exists externally, and at the same time it can portray them separately in the whole expanse of their individual traits and arbitrary peculiarities.

(b) Nevertheless poetry as a totality is on the other hand to be essentially distinguished from the specific arts whose characters it combines in itself.

(α) Painting, in this connection, has an over-all advantage when it is a matter of bringing a subject before our eyes in its external appearance. For, with manifold means at its command, poetry can indeed likewise illustrate, just as the principle of setting something out for contemplation is implicit in imagination generally, but since the element in which poetry principally moves, i.e. ideas, is of a spiritual kind and therefore enjoys the universality of thought, poetry is incapable of reaching the definiteness of sense-perception. On the other hand, the different traits which poetry introduces in order to make perceptible to us the concrete content of the subject in hand, do not fall together, as they do in painting, into one and the same whole which completely confronts us with all its details simultaneously; on the contrary, they occur separately because the manifold content of an idea can be expressed only as a succession. But this is a defect only from the sensuous point of view, one which the spirit can always rectify. Even where speech is concerned to evoke some concrete vision, it does not appeal to the sensuous perception of a present external object but always to the inner life, to *spiritual* vision, and consequently even if the individual traits only follow one another they are transferred into the element of the inwardly harmonious spirit which can extinguish a succession, pull together a varied series into *one* image and keep this image firmly in mind and enjoy it. Besides, this deficiency of sensuous reality and external definiteness in poetry as contrasted with painting is at once turned into an incalculable excess. For since poetry is exempt from painting's restriction to a specific space and still more to one specific feature of a situation or an action, it is given the possibility of presenting a subject in its whole inward depth

and in the breadth of its temporal development. Truth is absolutely concrete in virtue of comprising in itself a unity of essential distinctions. But these develop in their appearance not only as juxtaposed in space, but in a temporal succession as a history, the course of which painting can only present graphically in an inappropriate way. Even every blade of grass, every tree has in this sense its history, alteration, process, and a complete totality of different situations. This is still more the case in the sphere of the spirit; as actual spirit in its appearance, it can only be portrayed exhaustively if it is brought before our minds as such a course of history.

(β) As we saw, poetry has sounds as an external material in common with music. The wholly external material (ordinarily, though not philosophically, called 'objective') slips away finally, in the progressive series of the particular arts, into the subjective element of sound which cannot be seen, with the result that the inner life is made aware of itself solely by its own activity.¹ But music's essential aim is to shape these sounds into notes. For although in the course and progress of the melody and its fundamental harmonic relations the soul presents to feeling the inner meaning of the subject-matter or its own inner self, nevertheless what gives music its own proper character is not the inner life as such but the soul, most intimately interweaved with its *sounding*, and the formation of this *musical* expression. This is so much the case that music becomes music and an independent art the more that what preponderates in it is the complete absorption of the inner life into the realm of *notes*, not of the spirit as such. But, for this reason, it is capable only to a relative extent of harbouring the variety of spiritual ideas and insights and the broad expanse of a richly filled conscious life, and in its expression it does not get beyond the more abstract and general character of what it takes as its subject or beyond vaguer deep feelings of the heart. Now in proportion as the spirit transforms this abstract generality into a concrete ensemble of ideas, aims, actions, and events and adds to this process their inspection seriatim, it deserts the inner world of pure feeling and works it out into a world of objective actuality developed likewise in the inner sphere of imagination. Consequently, simply on account of this transformation, any attempt to

¹ Sound is heard, not seen, but an activity of mind is required to interpret the sound as music and the meaning of the music as an expression of the inner life.

express this new-won wealth of the spirit wholly and exclusively through sounds and their harmony must be abandoned. Just as the material of sculpture is too poor to make possible the portrayal of the richer phenomena which it is painting's business to call to life, so now harmonious sounds and expression in melody cannot give full reality to the poet's imaginative creations. For these possess the precise and known definiteness of ideas and an external phenomenal form minted for inner contemplation. Therefore the spirit withdraws its content from sounds as such and is manifested by words which do not entirely forsake the element of sound but sink to being a merely external sign of what is being communicated. The musical note being thus replete with spiritual ideas becomes the sound of a word, and the word, instead of then being an end in itself, becomes in itself a dependent means of spiritual expression. This gives us, in accordance with what we established earlier, the essential difference between music and poetry. The subject-matter of the art of speech is the entire world of ideas developed with a wealth of imagination, i.e. the spirit abiding by itself in its own spiritual element and, when it moves out to the creation of something external, using that only as a sign, itself different from the subject-matter. With music, art abandons the immersion of the spirit in a tangible, visible, and directly present shape; in poetry it gives up the opposite element of sound and hearing, at least in so far as this sound is no longer formed into an adequate external object and the sole expression of the subject-matter. Therefore the inner life is expressed [in music] but it will not find its actual existence in the perceptibility (even if more ideal) of the notes, because it seeks this existence solely in itself in order to express the experience of the spirit as that is contained in the heart of imagination as such.

(c) If, thirdly and lastly, we look for the special character of poetry in its distinction from music, and from painting and the other visual arts, we find it simply in the above-mentioned subordination of the sensuous mode of presenting and elaborating all poetic subject-matter. Since sound, as in music (or colour, as in painting), is no longer able to harbour and present that entire subject-matter, the musical treatment of it by way of the beat, harmony, and melody necessarily disappears here, and what is left is, in general, only the tempo of words and syllables, rhythm, and euphony, etc. And even these remain not as the proper

element for conveying the subject-matter but as a rather accidental externality which assumes an artistic form only because art cannot allow any external aspect to have free play purely by chance, arbitrarily, or capriciously.

(α) Granted the withdrawal of the spiritual content from sensuous material, the question arises at once: What, in default of musical notes, will now be the proper external object in the case of poetry? We can answer quite simply: It is the *inner* imagination and intuition itself. It is *spiritual* forms which take the place of perceptibility and provide the material to be given shape, just as marble, bronze, colour, and musical notes were the material earlier on. For here we must not be led astray by the statement that ideas and intuitions are in truth the subject-matter of poetry. This of course is true enough, as will be shown in detail later; but it is equally essential to maintain that ideas, intuitions, feelings, etc., are the specific forms in which every subject-matter is apprehended and presented by poetry, so that, since the sensuous side of the communication always has only a subordinate part to play, these forms provide the proper material which the poet has to treat artistically. The thing in hand, the subject-matter, is to be objectified in poetry for the spirit's apprehension, yet this objectivity exchanges its previously external reality for an internal one and it acquires an existence only within consciousness itself as something spiritually presented and intuited. Thus the spirit becomes objective to itself on its own ground and it has speech only as a means of communication or as an external reality out of which, as out of a mere sign, it has withdrawn into itself from the very start. Consequently in the case of poetry proper it is a matter of indifference whether we read it or hear it read; it can even be translated into other languages without essential detriment to its value, and turned from poetry into prose, and in these cases it is related to quite different sounds from those of the original.

(β) Further, the question arises: Granted that inner ideas constitute the material and form of poetry, for what is this material to be used? It is to be used for the absolute truth contained in spiritual interests in general, yet not merely for their substance in its universality of symbolical meaning [in architecture] or its classical differentiation [in sculpture] but also for everything detailed and particular within this substance, and so for almost everything which interests and occupies the spirit in any way. Consequently the art

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of speech, in respect of its subject-matter and its mode of expounding it, has an enormous field, a wider field than that open to the other arts. Any topic, all spiritual and natural things, events, histories, deeds, actions, subjective and objective situations, all these can be drawn into poetry and fashioned by it.

(γ) But this most variegated material is not made poetic simply by being harboured in our ideas, for after all a commonplace mind can shape exactly the same subject-matter into ideas and have separate intuitions of it without achieving anything poetic. In this connection we previously called ideas the *material* and element which is only given a poetically adequate form when art has shaped it afresh, just as colour and sound are not already, as mere colour and sound, painting and music. We can put this difference in general terms by saying that it is not ideas *as such* but the artistic imagination which makes some material poetic, when, that is to say, imagination so lays hold of it that, instead of confronting us as an architectural, sculptural, plastic, and painted shape or of sounding like musical notes, it can communicate with us in speech, in words and their beautiful spoken assembly.

The basic demand necessitated here is limited to this: (i) that the subject-matter shall not be conceived either in terms of scientific or speculative thinking or in the form of wordless feeling or with the clarity and precision with which we perceive external objects, and (ii) that it shall not enter our ideas with the accidents, fragmentation, and relativities of *finite* reality. In this regard the poetic imagination has, for one thing, to keep to the mean between the abstract universality of thought and the sensuously concrete corporeal objects that we have come to recognize in the productions of the visual arts; for another thing, it has on the whole to satisfy the demands we made in the First Part of these lectures in respect of any artistic creation, i.e. in its content it must be an end in itself and, with a purely contemplative interest, fashion everything that it conceives into an inherently independent and closed world. For only in this event does the content, as art requires, become by means of the manner of its presentation an organic whole which gives in its parts the appearance of close connection and coherence and, in contrast to the world of mutual dependence, stands there for its own sake and free on its own account.

3. The final point for discussion in connection with the difference between poetry and the other arts likewise concerns the

changed relation which the poetic imagination introduces between its productions and the external material of their presentation.

The arts considered hitherto were completely in earnest with the sensuous element in which they moved, because they gave to a subject-matter only a form which throughout could be adopted by and stamped on towering heavy masses, bronze, marble, wood, colours, and notes. Now in a certain sense it is true that poetry has a similar duty to fulfil. For in composing it must keep steadily in mind that its results are to be made known to the spirit only by communication in language. But this changes the whole relation to the material.

(a) The sensuous aspect acquires importance in the visual arts and in music. It follows that, owing to the specific determinacy of the material they use, it is only a *restricted* range of presentations that completely corresponds to particular real things existent in stone, colour, or sound, and the result is that the subject-matter and the artistic mode of treatment in the arts considered hitherto is fenced in within certain limits. This was the reason why we brought each of the specific arts into close connection with only *one* of the particular art-forms which this and no other art seemed best able to express adequately—architecture with the symbolic art-form, sculpture with the classical, painting and music with the romantic. It is true that the particular arts, below and above their proper sphere, encroached on the other art-forms too, and for this reason we could speak of classical and romantic architecture, and symbolic and Christian sculpture, and we also had to mention classical painting and music. But these deviations did not reach the real summit of art but either were the preparatory attempts of inferior beginnings or else displayed the start of a transition to an art which, in this transition, seized on a subject-matter, and a way of treating the material, of a type that only a further art was permitted to develop completely.

In the expression of its content on the whole, architecture is poorest, sculpture is richer, while the scope of painting and music can be extended most widely of all. For with the increasing ideality and more varied particularization of the external material, the variety of the subject-matter and of the forms it assumes is increased. Now poetry cuts itself free from this importance of the material, in the general sense that the specific character of its mode of sensuous expression affords no reason any longer for restriction

to a specific subject-matter and a confined sphere of treatment and presentation. It is therefore not linked exclusively to any specific form of art; on the contrary, it is the *universal* art which can shape in any way and express any subject-matter capable at all of entering the imagination, because its proper material is the imagination itself, that universal foundation of all the particular art-forms and the individual arts.

This is the point that we reached at the close of our treatment of the particular art-forms. Their culmination we looked for in art's making itself independent of the mode of representation peculiar to *one* of the art-forms and in its standing above the whole of these particular forms. The possibility of such a development in every direction lies from the very beginning, amongst the specific arts, in the essence of poetry alone, and it is therefore actualized in the course of poetic production partly through the actual exploitation of every particular form, partly through liberation from imprisonment in any exclusive type and character of treatment and subject-matter, whether symbolic, classical, or romantic.

(b) From this point of view too the position we have assigned to poetry in our philosophical development of the arts can be justified. Since poetry is occupied with the universal element in art as such to a greater extent than is the case in any of the other ways of producing works of art, it might seem that a philosophical explanation had to begin with it and only thereafter proceed to particularize the ways in which the other arts are differentiated by their sensuous material. But, as we have seen already in connection with the particular art-forms, the process of development, regarded philosophically, consists on the one hand in a deepening of art's spiritual content, and on the other in showing that at first art only *seeks* its adequate content, then *finds* it, and finally *transcends* it. This conception of beauty and art must now be made good in the arts themselves too. We began therefore with architecture which only strove after the complete representation of spiritual material in a sensuous element, so that art achieved a genuine fusion of form and content only in sculpture; with painting and music, on account of the inwardness and subjectivity of their content, art began to dissolve again the accomplished unification of conception and execution in the field of sense. This latter character [of unification] poetry displays most strikingly because in its artistic materialization it is essentially to be interpreted as a withdrawal from the real world of

sense-perception and a subordination of that world, yet not as a production that does not dare to embark yet on materialization and movement in the external world. But in order to expound this liberation philosophically it is first necessary to explain what it is from which art undertakes to free itself, and, similarly, how it is that poetry can harbour the entire content of art and all the forms of art. This too we have to regard as a struggle for a totality, a struggle that can be demonstrated philosophically only as the cancellation of a restriction to the particular, which in turn implies a previous treatment of the one-sided stages, the unique value possessed by each being negated in the totality.

Only as a result of considering the series of the arts in this way does poetry appear as that particular art in which art itself begins at the same time to dissolve and acquire in the eyes of philosophy its point of transition to religious pictorial thinking as such, as well as to the prose of scientific thought. The realm of the beautiful, as we saw earlier, is bordered on one side by the prose of finitude and commonplace thinking, out of which art struggles on its way to truth, and on the other side the higher spheres of religion and philosophy where there is a transition to that apprehension of the Absolute which is still further removed from the sensuous sphere.

(c) Therefore, however completely poetry produces the totality of beauty once and for all in a most spiritual way, nevertheless spirituality constitutes at the same time precisely the deficiency of this final sphere of art. In the system of the arts we can regard poetry as the polar opposite of architecture. Architecture cannot so subordinate the sensuous material to the spiritual content as to be able to form that material into an adequate shape of the spirit; poetry, on the other hand, goes so far in its negative treatment of its sensuous material that it reduces the opposite of heavy spatial matter, namely sound, to a meaningless sign instead of making it, as architecture makes its material, into a meaningful symbol. But in this way poetry destroys the fusion of spiritual inwardness with external existence to an extent that begins to be incompatible with the original conception of art, with the result that poetry runs the risk of losing itself in a transition from the region of sense into that of the spirit. The beautiful mean between these extremes of architecture and poetry is occupied by sculpture, painting, and music, because each of these arts works the spiritual content entirely into a natural medium and makes it intelligible alike to sense and spirit.

For although painting and music, as romantic arts, do adopt a material which is already more ideal, yet on the other hand for the immediacy of tangible objects, which begins to evaporate in this enhanced ideality of the medium, they substitute the wealth of detail and the more varied configuration which colour and sound are capable of providing in a richer way than is requirable from the material of sculpture.

Poetry for its part likewise looks for a substitute: it brings the objective world before our eyes in a breadth and variety which even painting cannot achieve, at least on a single canvas, and yet this always remains only a real existence in the *inner* consciousness; and even if poetry in its need for an artistic materialization makes straight for a strengthened sensuous impression, still it can produce this only by means foreign to itself and borrowed from painting and music, or else, in order to maintain itself as genuine poetry, it must always put these sister arts in the background, purely as its servants, and emphasize instead, as the really chief thing concerned, the spiritual idea, the imagination which speaks to inner imagination.

So much in general about the relation of the nature of poetry to the nature of the other arts. The more detailed consideration of the art of poetry must be arranged as follows:

We have seen that in poetry both content and material are provided by our inner ideas. Yet ideas, outside art, are already the commonest form of consciousness and therefore we must in the first place undertake the task of distinguishing poetic from prosaic ideas. But poetry should not abide by this inner poetical conception alone but must give its creations an expression in language. Here once again a double duty is to be undertaken. (i) Poetry must so organize its inner conceptions that they can be completely adapted to communication in language; (ii) it must not leave this linguistic medium in the state in which it is used every day, but must treat it poetically in order to distinguish it from expressions in prose by the choice, placing, and sound of words.

But despite its expression in language, poetry is free in the main from the restrictions and conditions laid on the other arts by the particular character of their medium, and consequently it has the widest possibility of completely developing all the different *genres* that a work of art can permit of, independently of the one-sidedness of any particular art. For this reason the most perfect articulation of the different *genres* of poetry comes into view.

Accordingly our further course is

- First,* to discuss poetry in general and the poetic work of art;
- Secondly,* poetic expression;
- Thirdly,* the division of this art into epic, lyric, and dramatic poetry.

AESTHETICS

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BY

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