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GEORGE SANTAYANA, CRITICAL ANOMALY

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of English
and the
Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies
University of Omaha

143

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Carol A. Erickson
February 1966

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Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate
Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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PREFACE

In beginning any work such as this, one of the first tasks must be to determine the extent of the scholarly research already done on the subject. Although Santayana is widely known as a philosopher, man of letters, even as poet and novelist, little attention has been paid him as a literary critic. Extensive works have been done on Santayana in his capacity as philosopher; studies have been done on his critical realism, his moral philosophy and even his aesthetics. Those works which have discussed his literary criticism have taken the form of brief eulogistic articles in scholarly and semi-scholarly periodicals. There are, however, certain exceptions. Paul Wermuth has written an unpublished dissertation on Santayana as a literary critic but this work is largely summations of Santayana's works with little analysis or evaluation. Roughly a third of the work is biography, the major portion is composed of close paraphrases of each work, and the concluding comments cover such varied topics as Santayana, a late Victorian; Santayana's similarity to Arnold; and Santayana's relation to the humanist movement (although a few evaluative remarks are included here). George Howgate has written a critical biography of Santayana which, though it approaches Santayana as a man of letters, devotes less than a chapter to Santayana as a literary critic. Its value is also limited by the fact that it was published in 1938. Irving Singer,

probably the most reputable author on Santayana's poetics and literary criticism, has written a volume on Santayana's aesthetics which, though it does include many valuable insights into Santayana's criticism, aims at total evaluation of his aesthetic theory, a purpose which is obviously much broader than the narrower topic of literary criticism. Willard Arnet has published a work on Santayana's aesthetics which, unlike Singer's book, attempts only explication and not evaluation. It, too, covers various points of literary theory but reaches much beyond this field. The conclusion is that little in the way of secondary materials is available on the subject, a fact that is both an advantage and disadvantage. The advantage is probably the greater as it allows the researcher to make an original contribution in his study, but, on the other hand, it largely limits his study to an analysis of Santayana's own writings and leaves him with no opinions by which he may verify his findings or opposing contentions by which he may challenge recognized authority.

The second question to be resolved was what phase of Santayana's literary criticism should be covered. Obviously, as the resumé of Wermuth's dissertation suggests, there are a number of intriguing topics. However, one of the most obvious characteristics of Santayana's writings is his lack of consistency which often result in confusion. The need for an unraveling of Santayana's theories seemed to be a pressing one. This paper, then will attempt to fulfill this need by analyzing

Santayana's literary theory or what could more properly be called his poetics, with the explicit purpose of not only outlining the fundamental principles of his poetics, but also straightening out, as nearly as possible, the ambiguities and contradictions present. The latter aim is not always accomplished, but it is hoped that at least the issues have been presented. Finally, the essays on specific authors and their works have been summarized and evaluated in order to illustrate the poetic principles found in Santayana's theoretical writings. The inclusion of a discussion of these specific essays also serves to give an idea of the scope and nature of what is perhaps more commonly termed "literary criticism."

The question may be raised as to whether it is ethical or sound to discuss Santayana's essays on such continental writers as Goethe and Dante when the researcher has not read their works in the original. But the purpose of this paper is to evaluate Santayana, not Dante or Goethe. For example, Santayana contends that in Goethe's Faust there is no really consistent view of life but simply a round of sensations and experiences. The question is then not whether Santayana has actually interpreted Goethe correctly, but what does such an interpretation reveal about Santayana's literary theory. Is such an interpretation consistent with the formula set out in his poetics? Is it consistent with what he has to say about other authors? And is such a pronouncement one which can be said to express the essence of great literary works?

A most sincere thanks is given to Dr. Wilfred Payne who read this manuscript and offered many valuable insights into Santayana's poetics. And to Dr. Ralph Wardle goes heartfelt appreciation for his ever ready encouragement and advice and most of all for his willingness to guide this project in the first place.

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INTRODUCTION

The events of George Santayana's life provide a valuable introduction to any study of his works. Though it cannot really be said that his life was filled with the sort of excitement or intrigue which makes for suspenseful biography, his life was one of steady productivity and ever increasing fame, first as poet, then as philosopher, essayist, critic, and novelist.

Born Jorge Augustin Nicolas Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás in Madrid on December 16, 1863, Santayana, at the age of nine, was taken to Boston. In 1912 he returned to Europe to become a citizen of the world. During the succeeding years he traveled on the continent, staying in England during World War I and in Italy during World War II. His last years, until his death in 1952, were spent in Rome at the Convent of the Blue Nuns.

It seems fairly certain that Santayana's parents were not a direct or major influence on him, yet his life was certainly marked by the circumstances surrounding their lives. Santayana's maternal grandparents lived for a time in Glasgow and Virginia, primarily because his grandfather's liberal ideas about politics and religion were not the most comfortable to hold in Spain. Santayana's mother and her parents later were to return to Spain when Santayana's grandfather was appointed to a position with the American consul by President Jackson. But in a few years Santayana's mother was again to take a long voyage, this time to the Philippines where her father hoped

to obtain a position. Her father died shortly after their arrival, but Santayana's mother was soon supporting herself by shipping hemp to Manila from an outer island where she was residing. Her Rousseau-like existence halted abruptly when a new government official was appointed to the island, for he was white and young, and propriety would not allow two white, young, unattached people to live unchaperoned on that single island. Ironically this same young man, many years later, was to become her second husband and Santayana's father. Meanwhile, though, Santayana's mother moved to Manila and married a young American by the name of George Sturgis.

When Sturgis died only a few years later, Santayana's mother took her two daughters to Boston, for she had promised her husband that the family should be raised there. A return trip to Spain in 1862 brought a renewed acquaintance with Augustin Santayana for Santayana's mother, and they were married. To this union one child, George, was born a year later and was named after his mother's first husband.

Soon Santayana's mother felt obliged to return to America, and Santayana was left in Spain with his father. Later his father decided that Santayana, too, should be reared in Boston. Since the elder Santayana had visited America and did not feel he could live there, young George was separated from his father and sent to live with his mother.

Santayana was educated at the Boston Latin School and entered Harvard in 1882. Fortunately, at that time Harvard

students were under the elective system and were allowed almost complete choice of subjects. This practice suited Santayana's temperament. His literary efforts, which had begun in grammar school, were continued at Harvard and when the Harvard Monthly was started, Santayana became not only a contributor but also a member of the editorial board. His contributions included poetry, essays, and translations. Even at this time Santayana was gaining a reputation as a budding poet and man of keen wit, for he supplemented his literary efforts by contributing satiric cartoons to the Lampoon.

After graduation Santayana took what seemed to him to be the path of least resistance and commenced graduate study. He spent two years studying at the University of Berlin on a Harvard fellowship and returned for a final year and his Ph.D. at Harvard. In 1889 he became a professor at his alma mater and remained there until 1912 when the death of his mother not only released him from his attachments to America but also provided him with a small independent income. Thereupon he left America, never to return. His early air of detachment seemed complete, for now he was free to pursue the course of the scholar and author.

Santayana wanted to be remembered as a man of letters rather than as a philosopher and the appellation is just. After publishing numerous articles and a first volume of poetry, in 1896 Santayana brought out The Sense of Beauty which was at that time a pioneer in the field and which is still a classic

in the study of aesthetics. Many critics, in fact, have seen it as the most influential single work on the subject. It was followed in 1900 by Interpretations of Poetry and Religion which included both new and previously published essays, all expounding the idea that religion and poetry are, in their highest form, fundamentally alike. Classic in its principles, it included a penetrating, and to many a startling, analysis of four romantic poets: Shakespeare, Emerson, Whitman, and Browning. In 1901 another volume of poetry appeared and in 1905-6 came his magnum opus, the five-volume work The Life of Reason, which included his Reason in Art. This work firmly established Santayana's reputation as a philosopher. In 1910 came the Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe, which was based on a popular course given by Santayana at Harvard. By some this work is viewed as Santayana's major contribution to literary criticism. The year 1913 saw the publication of the Winds of Doctrine, like Poetry and Religion, a collection of essays including the famous essay on Shelley which was considered by many as the best in the book and which was generally admired.¹

In addition, Santayana continued to write articles on nearly every area of intellectual interest. By 1920 his major writings in literary criticism were in the past as were his poetic endeavors. Being now removed from America Santayana

¹ George W. Howgate, George Santayana, (Philadelphia, 1938), p. 175.

nonetheless turned back to the United States and became a critic of the contemporary cultural scene. In 1920 Character and Opinion in the United States appeared. Prior to this publication Santayana had already published an article entitled "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" in which he outlined the mental characteristics he saw apparent in the United States, particularly in New England. Though the concept of the "genteel tradition" has had its many foes, it has become a by-word in nearly all cultural studies of the United States of that period. This concept was later expanded in The Genteel Tradition at Bay (1931). Earlier in 1916 Egotism in German Philosophy had been published and was quite popular in the United States during World War I. Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies (1922) came out of Santayana's stay in England and was a collection of short personal essays.

In 1923 the famous Skepticism and Animal Faith was published. The subtitle described it as "An Introduction to a System of Philosophy," a preview of Santayana's second major work in philosophy, the four-volume work The Realms of Being (1927, 1930, 1938, 1940). Apart from these volumes the most surprising book to appear in Santayana's "reclining" years was The Last Puritan (1936), a novel which had immediate success and a popularity which surprised and astounded its author, but these were by no means the extent of Santayana's active pen. Some of his other works were Dialogues in Limbo (1926), philosophic ideas explored through the medium of Socratic dialogue; Platonism

and the Spiritual Life (1927); Some Turns of Thought in Modern Philosophy (1933); Obiter Scripta: Lectures, Essays, and Reviews (1936); two volumes of the three-volume autobiography Persons and Places, The Background of My Life and The Middle Span (1944-45); The Idea of Christ in the Gospels (1946); and Dominations and Powers (1951), "glimpses of tragedy and comedy played unawares by governments."

The third volume of Persons and Places, My Host the World (1953), a volume of letters (1955), and a collection of essays, The Idler and His Works (1957) appeared posthumously.

Santayana's reputation and influence as a literary critic and a literary theorist are hard to measure. Generally, though, in terms of recognition his place as a literary critic seems to be second rank. Charles Glicksberg in his American Literary Criticism, 1900-1950 remarks that Santayana's philosophical criticism has polish and grace, yet his writings have left little impression on younger American critics.² Q. D. Leavis observes that unfortunately few who are interested in literature have been aware of his writings,³ and Paul Wermuth notes that Santayana has received little notice or mention in the major histories or anthologies of criticism.⁴ Those who do seem aware of Santayana as a literary critic seem to be most familiar

² New York, 1951, p. 21.

³ "The Critical Writings of George Santayana," Scrutiny IV (Dec., 1935), 278.

⁴ "George Santayana as a Literary Critic," (n.p., 1955), p. 252.

with the Browning essay (especially the Browning partisans⁵) and with the Shakespeare essay but these essays seem to be regarded as merely unique aberrations of taste by a man whose taste otherwise was impeccable.

George Boas is a lone voice stressing Santayana's influence. Boas argues that around the turn of the century, when Santayana was writing his literary criticism, courses in literature in colleges and universities were composed mostly of biography and eulogy. Students had no inkling why the so-called great classics were classics or that art was something alive and vibrant going on outside the ivy walls. Santayana was a needed current in the other direction. Though Santayana rarely mentioned his contemporaries, he considered the classics in a manner which had a revitalizing effect. "If any one man is responsible for the contemporary sensitiveness to the arts in American university circles, it is this man," writes Boas.⁶

Perhaps Boas is right. Perhaps there has been a subtle, indirect, yet perceptible pressure emanating from Santayana's discussions, but if so it is a pressure which is impossible to measure or describe. Any direct, attributable influence is of scanty proportion.⁷

⁵ See Kenneth L. Knickerbocker, "Robert Browning: A Modern Appraisal," Tenn. Stud. in Lit., IV (1959), 1; Margaret Sherwood, Undercurrents of Influence in English Romantic Poetry, (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), p. 324.

⁶ "Santayana and the Arts," in The Philosophy of George Santayana, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, (Evanston, 1940), p. 260.

Nonetheless, Santayana's position is hardly weakened by his lack of recognition. True, he stands pre-eminently alone in this century as a philosophical critic, alone in a century which has devoted itself to textual analysis and microscopic studies of technical minutiae. To find a critic who writes from the vantage point of a reasoned philosophy, a philosophy which exists not in isolated reference to the arts but relates to all of life, is to find a critic whose work is worthy of study and thought. Santayana's genius was uniquely that of a man who is not content to survey only a portion of human endeavor, but who desires to see each part in relation to the whole. The result is philosophical criticism which is certainly worthy of consideration.

⁷ Some commentators have found it interesting to trace apparent influences on some of Santayana's more illustrious pupils such as T. S. Eliot and Walter Lippman and on close friends such as Robert Bridges. (See Howgate, p. 288.) But such observations are highly speculative.

THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM

Twentieth century literary criticism has gone in many directions. In spite of this diversity, though, most criticism today is interpretative; that is, it aims at achieving a greater understanding and thereby greater appreciation for the reader. Close textual analysis is carried out in order to clear away obscurities; biographical and historical studies are conducted in order to view a piece of literature in terms of the artist's temperament, of what he set out to do, of his cultural environment, of historical trends or patterns into which he may or may not be placed. Sociological and psychological studies have also been introduced into literary criticism so that a knowledge of these sciences as they are used in literature will be as familiar as the knowledge of such techniques as meter, rhyme scheme, or plot structure.

But there is another phase of literary criticism, one which has been largely neglected by today's serious critics. This criticism, which may and often does use the tools of interpretative criticism, is not content to rest with a thorough exegesis of a work. This criticism aims at nothing short of total evaluation or judgment of a work. Such evaluations attempt to rank a work on its merit in relation to other works which have been recognized as literary monuments.

Ironically, such evaluative criticism today is most often found in the literary review. The task of judgment seems left to the journalistic reviewer who breezes through dozens

of authors and their works annually and who is often something less than a scholar in his field. Moreover, rarely does one find evaluations of those literary works which have apparently secured their place in literary history. Certainly, on occasion evaluative comments are applied to literary masterpieces but they usually take the form of disconnected praise. The worth of the work is acknowledged but not often is such acknowledgement related to the particular point of interpretation being made. Even more uncommon is the negative evaluation. It is hardly imaginable that anyone should suggest that Shakespeare's plays are lacking in some vital element. The reason is undoubtedly obvious. Such literature has passed the judgment of time; its place is fixed; and no one really disagrees with the standards already asserted. Nonetheless, it is interesting that so little re-evaluation of the so called "greats" is practiced.

Another obstacle to critical evaluations is that they demand a standard of quality for measurement, and such a standard must in some degree imply an absolute, but in the mid-twentieth century absolutes are obsolete and slightly embarrassing to many people. It is fairly easy to eliminate what seems to be definitely inferior and to cautiously praise the exemplary but to make evaluations beyond these two categories is to tread on ground that is unwelcome to most scholars.

Assuming then that there are these two broad categories of criticism, the primarily interpretative and the evaluative, which was advocated and practiced by Santayana? In addition,

what does Santayana see as the capacities and limitations of the critic? What exactly are the critic's duties? Only when these questions are answered can one move on to an evaluation of Santayana as a critic for presumably his comments concerning the ideal critic will be the yardstick by which to measure his own critical endeavors.

At a glance, a first preliminary answer appears to be that Santayana does believe in the critic's ability and even duty to judge. Indeed, Santayana himself often seems to be making quite commanding statements. In the opening pages of The Sense of Beauty this view is substantiated when Santayana says, "Criticism implies judgment" ¹ In Reason in Art he describes at greater length exactly what the function of criticism is: "Criticism is an investigation of what the work is good for All criticism is . . . moral, since it deals with benefits and their relative weight." ² A work of art, as Santayana sees it, is a public possession and it is therefore the critic's job to determine how and to what degree the work of art fulfills this public capacity. ³ Criticism then must not only be moral, but objective and evaluative.

The critic's function can be further clarified by contrasting his inquiries with other intellectual pursuits which are not the domain of criticism. The creative process, for instance,

¹ New York, 1896, p. 16.

² New York, 1942, p. 151; first published in 1905.

³ Ibid., p. 201.

is a direct one in which the artist is lost in his medium; creation is the direct confrontation with the materials to be molded; it is not reflective as is criticism. The artist may become the critic after the creative act is complete (although Santayana sees him as an inferior one). Neither can the critic become the creator by trying to place himself in the position of the artist and imaginatively recreating the artist's feelings. This process would only make him a biographer and he would have only recreated in another set of words an inferior copy of the original. Psychological and biographical studies certainly are interesting in their own right and have a value of their own but they cannot be considered criticism. "Criticism, on the other hand, is a serious and public function; it shows the race assimilating the individual, dividing the immortal from the mortal part of a soul."⁴

Santayana, who was fond of analogies, used an apt one here. The artist is like the marksman who aims to shoot straight. He eyes the target studiously and then pulls the trigger. It is only after the bullet has been fired that a judgment (criticism) is made (either by him or by another) as to the accuracy of the shot. The critic's job is less immediate and perhaps in a sense secondary to that of the artist. "Having himself the ulterior office of judge, the [critic] must not hope to rival nature's children in their sportiveness and intuition."⁵

⁴ Ibid., pp. 150-151.

⁵ Ibid., p. 150.

This view of criticism seems to have remained with Santayana in later years. In a letter written at the age of 59 to an admirer who had admonished him for no longer writing literary criticism and had urged him to do so, Santayana replied,

But now I come to the part of your advice which I don't mean to follow at all. Criticism is something purely incidental--talk about talk--and to my mind has no serious value except perhaps as an expression of philosophy in the critic. When I have been led to write criticism it has never been for any other reason; and you don't know me at all if you suppose me capable of reading up Meredith or Thomas Hardy or any one else who hasn't come in my way, in order to describe them to other people. If you like that sort of vicarious literary nourishment, read Croce, or any other competent person who sets out to express the impression which literature has made upon him. But I should advise you to read the originals instead, and be satisfied with the impression they make upon you. You know Plato's contempt for the image of an image; but as a man's view of things is an image in the first place, and his work is an image of that, and the critic's feelings are an image of that work and his writings an image of his feelings, and your idea of what the critic means only an image of his writings,--please consider that you are steeping your poor original tea-leaves in their fifth wash of hot water, and are drinking slops. May not the remarkable sloppiness and feebleness of the cultivated American mind be due to this habit of drinking life in its fifth dilution only? What you need is not more criticism of current authors, but more philosophy: more courage and sincerity in facing nature directly, and in criticising books or institutions only with a view to choosing among them whatever is most harmonious with the life you want to lead. For as Dryden (or is it Pope?) says, "If you think the world worth winning, think, oh think it worth enjoying."⁶

In other words, for Santayana criticism is the means by which one approaches literature from the perspective of a philosophy of life. Thereby choices or judgments are made as to which

⁶ The Letters of George Santayana, ed. Daniel Cory, (London, 1955), pp. 195-196; to George Lawton, March 29, 1922.

literary works merit a place in this harmoniously integrated life. Another element is also introduced here--enjoyment. Both the idea of harmony and that of happiness are key terms in Santayana's criterion for making literary judgments.

Such judgments should not be simply academic exercises. Rather they are made for the purpose of increasing appreciation. In fact the judgment itself is a "reasoned appreciation" by a knowledgeable person who is versed in such matters as the occasion for the work, the technical process involved in the form, the degree of difficulty, the truth incorporated in it, the beauty present, and the originality: in short, anything that has contributed in any way to the creation of the work.⁷ Thus, although Santayana does not follow through here, it is tempting to further suppose that biographical study, psychological, and sociological investigations would have their place in criticism as long as they were subordinate to the primary goal: a mature judgment of the work. Once more Santayana states, somewhat elusively, that "the critic's function is precisely to feel and to confront all values, bringing them into relation, and if possible into harmony."⁸ This comment would seem to indicate again that an increased understanding would lead to increased appreciation which is the goal of such judgments of art.

⁷ "What is Aesthetics," in Obiter Scripta, ed. Justus Buchler and Benjamin Schwartz, (New York, 1936), p. 36; first published in The Philosophical Review, 13 (May, 1904), 320-327.

⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

Thus far Santayana's pronouncements seem relatively clear, but a return to The Sense of Beauty complicates the matter. Continuing, Santayana points out that judgments are after all based on many antecedent factors such as environment, educational influences, and personal temperament. Two men will reach the same judgment only when their backgrounds are similar. Further it is unreasonable to assume that a judgment made by one person should be accepted by another who has not, by searching his own inner nature and his sincerest convictions, reached that conclusion himself.⁹

Santayana goes on to assure his readers that the real merit of a work of art is not its capacity to be loved or appreciated by a great number. The term "real merit" here would imply that there is some objective standard. "The true test is the degree and kind of satisfaction a work of art can give to him who appreciates it most," contends Santayana.¹⁰ Not only must there be an objective standard, then, but one individual's judgment may indeed be superior to another's, even if he has no right to try to enforce it on another. Aristocratic Santayana comes to the obvious conclusion that the inability to appreciate great art is a limited and specialized one, accounting for the fact that the great ages of art have

⁹ Pp. 41-42; it must be noted here that Santayana is speaking of beauty and aesthetic judgments, not strictly literary judgments. However, as this paper will consider later, in The Sense of Beauty Santayana equates beauty with art. What is the most beautiful is therefore the highest form of art. The above comments can then at least be tentatively applied to judgments relating to literary art.

been intolerant.¹⁰

Yet should anyone dare presume that such reasoned appreciations will lead to a hierarchy of values or a hierarchy of poets and/or their works, Santayana emphatically utters a loud no. In the Three Philosophical Poets Santayana denies that a comparison of works implies a corresponding implication that one is better than another. He notes again that the pleasure a man will derive from a poem is determined by his temperament, his age in life, and the philosophy he is most familiar with in the poem whose language he knows best.¹¹ Thirty years later in his "Apologia" Santayana was again reiterating the point that he was heartily against an honors list of poets.¹² And back in the same note in the Three Philosophical Poets Santayana argues that to express a preference is not a criticism, but merely an expression of personal preference. But the Three Philosophical Poets certainly does rank the poets with Dante coming out on top of the honors list. Is Santayana merely too modest to admit that his "preference" is that judgment made by one who "appreciates most"?

As the above discussion suggests, amid the contradictions there is much to support the idea that Santayana advocates a criticism which will judge, but the nature of that judgment

¹⁰ The Sense of Beauty, pp. 43-44.

¹¹ Cambridge, Mass., 1927, p. 203; first published in 1910.

¹² "Apologia Pro Mente Sua," in Schilpp, p. 554; see also Letters, p. 62 and Daniel Cory, Santayana: The Later Years, A Portrait with Letters, (New York, 1963), p. 155.

is hazy. The question seems to be: can these literary judgments have any value beyond the value to the individual? Are they in any sense absolute or are they entirely relative? In exploring this question further, it is necessary to go back again to The Sense of Beauty. The first suggestion that there may be a compromise between these two positions comes early in the book when Santayana comments that in making a judgment one is establishing an ideal and for the moment that ideal is categorical and absolute, but in another moment another judgment may be made, another ideal established, and another absolute created--for that moment.¹³ But these ideals appeal to no standard beyond the human instincts which prompted them. If such instincts or aspirations are sincerely and honestly appealed to then they must be considered genuine and thus absolute.

Such absolutism can, but should not, lead to dogmatism which is abhorrent to Santayana. Dogmatism may be allowed if it is understood to be the sincere preferences of an individual but it is absurd if that individual should consider his preferences binding on others. It is even more absurd if he should think they have any universal scope.¹⁴

Santayana was still insisting on the inability of anyone to criticize the ultimate basis of his or others' judgments in 1940:

Criticism, by a transcendental necessity, is thus internal to each logical organism or rational mind;

¹³ p. 12.

¹⁴ Reason in Art, p. 191.

and the choice between different ultimate criteria cannot be made critically but must be spontaneous and sanctioned only by the material and moral consequences. That these follow and that they are good or bad must be a direct dictum of the intellect or the heart; and the expression of such first principles cannot be criticism but only confession or propaganda. Criticism is therefore confined, in a certain sense, to the circle of one's intellectual kindred, and displays the dialectic of other assumptions only vicariously and within one's home logic.¹⁵

And in 1952, the year of his death, in a letter to Professor M. M. Kirkwood, he comments once again that every form of art has its charm and is appropriate in its own place and to argue that there is only one art form is "moral cramp."¹⁶

Are judgments, as Santayana uses the term, really in fact simple, but unalienable preferences? Santayana's position is not so beautifully simple. The picture is further complicated by the introduction of the word "taste," a term which Santayana goes to some lengths to explain. Taste here is not to be equated with uncomplicated likes or dislikes. Taste is the faculty which controls judgments (or preferences) but it is a faculty subject to those same important influences mentioned before: early teachers, increased knowledge of the work in question, the age in which one lives, the condition of one's health, and, Santayana admits, an undefinable factor called genius. Santayana notes, too, that youthful taste usually

¹⁵ "Apologia," p. 551.

¹⁶ M. M. Kirkwood, Santayana: Saint of the Imagination, (Toronto, 1961), p.72; see also George Santayana, My Host the World, Persons and Places, III, (New York, 1953), p. 33.

governs what will be the taste of maturity.¹⁷ In short, Santayana again repeats that the forces that make man what he is, also determine his critical faculties.

But again comes the unexpected. Some tastes are better than others, argues Santayana. A superior taste will be the one which allows its preferences to be harmonized with other demands and interests in life. For instance, not all literary work can be equal because not all are equally conducive to the achievement of human purposes and desires.¹⁸ There are thus levels of taste. A first or lower level of taste measures a response in terms of the degree of satisfaction or pleasure achieved. The second level involves the kind of satisfaction rather than simply a quantitative measure. The third level considers the work's moral significance, its relation to other important external things. Such appreciations on the third and highest level then must be compared to other enjoyments which might be had in similar circumstances.¹⁹ Thus again criticism, as seen by Santayana, evidently involves a moral and even a social commitment. Santayana is not then advocating an "anything goes" policy. Putting all minds at rest, he categorically states, "It is accordingly a moral truth which

¹⁷ The Sense of Beauty, p. 113; Reason in Art, pp. 194-195.

¹⁸ Interpretations of Poetry and Religion, (New York, 1900), p. 12.

¹⁹ Irving Singer, Santayana's Aesthetics: A Critical Introduction, (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 197; These levels of taste correspond to the levels of poetry; see below pp. 30-35.

no subterfuge can elude, that some things are really better than others."²⁰

Here is the central conflict that pervades all of Santayana's philosophy: it is the materialist arguing with the Platonist. Santayana, as a materialist, wants to insist on psychological determinism to account for the fact that critical judgments vary, that they are a product of environmental and biological factors. Santayana, as a Platonist, wants to insist that there is objective value in critical judgments and that morally some judgments are better than others.

Determining which taste is superior is complicated by still another factor. A harmony of interests would seem to imply a reasoned appraisal of each artistic work in relation to life's other pursuits. But, says Santayana, the test of taste is pleasure. Does the work of art actually please?²¹ For some, what pleases and what is harmonious may be the same. For others what pleases may conflict with another interest which also pleases. Is the answer to choose that which pleases the most? A man may find immense pleasure in reading O. Henry's stories but he can have time to do so only if he does not read the works which have been assigned for his great books discussion group. The discussion group provides him with prestige and a certain social mobility among his friends (factors which are important to him). Now if he judges solely on the

²⁰ Poetry and Religion, p. 100.

²¹ The Sense of Beauty, p. 80.

basis of which literary works please him the most he will choose O. Henry. On the other hand, if his social interests seem paramount to him, the great books will receive his studious attention. The example is obviously absurd. However, the point remains that Santayana has suggested two standards for critical judgment.

Nonetheless adherence to the hedonistic standard of pleasure would produce a hierarchy of value judgments, at least in regard to the individual. Obviously, too, what pleases need not be simply impulsive but, as Santayana insists, can be determined or molded by various beneficial influences.

Yet no matter how one's superiority of taste is decided--whether it be because his pleasure is more intense or of a longer duration (how pleasure can be measured is another question) than another's or because his preferences are more inclusive--judgments arising from that taste cannot be applied to another individual, except when the constitutions of two people are similar.²²

Thus superiority does not, evidently, imply authority. One must be content in the self-knowledge that his own judgment (taste) is impeccable and achieve satisfaction from that fact. Such a situation, however, would soon eliminate any formal discussions of literary works and criticism would become a personal, introspective activity.

Santayana pragmatically notes, however, that for one to

²² Reason in Art, pp. 192-193.

rest secure in his own superiority is not always feasible. Even though it may be possible to advocate anarchy in criticism, which cannot really be refuted by argument, in practice it simply cannot exist.²³ Hence a person with a heightened sensibility or a broadened criterion of taste by psychological necessity will probably hope to educate and persuade others. Also, the critic who has the broadest range of interest, the greatest knowledge and perception, will not only have an inherent superiority, but practically he will command the greatest influence, for his judgments, by their very breadth, will find agreement among a greater number of people.²⁴

Santayana realizes, though, that a heightened taste may be a limiting factor both for creator and critic. The poet who has a higher standard of perfection for the world will see more of the existent blight, but, insists Santayana, the more blemishes he sees in the man the more excellences he will also see.²⁵ However, many would agree with Irving Singer who maintains that higher standards of judgment often make a person less tolerant of imperfections.²⁶ The man who loves Shakespeare and the metaphysical poets may well be less receptive to the verses of Edgar Guest. Even if he is still able to appreciate

²³ Winds of Doctrine: Studies in Contemporary Opinion, (New York, 1926), p. 155; first published in 1913.

²⁴ The Sense of Beauty, p. 130.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 122-123.

²⁶ Santayana's Aesthetics, p. 219.

Guest the greater preoccupation with Shakespeare will leave him with less time for poets of Guest's caliber.

Santayana observes still another limitation imposed by the increasing perfection of taste. "It impedes the wandering of the arts into those bypaths of caprice and grotesqueness in which, although at the sacrifice of formal beauty, interesting partial effects might still be discovered. And this objection applies with double force to the first crystallizations of taste."²⁷ Increased perfection of taste limits experimentation and the appreciation of the avant-garde.

The conclusion must be that there are many standards or criteria by which judgments are made. Some of these standards will be superior to others, but there will be many which are equally natural, sincere, and spontaneous yet seasoned with educated reason and topped with a keen sensibility. Therefore many standards will be equally good.²⁸

One of the most fundamental characteristics of Santayana's thought is his desire to come to rest in a middle position, thus avoiding the hazards of the extremes--in the case of the preceding question, between the absolute and the relative. But such a middle course is often an uneasy, unstable one as it is here. There are problems. For instance, as Singer insists, Santayana is really a dogmatist on another level for Santayana

²⁷ The Sense of Beauty, p. 109.

²⁸ Willard E. Arnet, Santayana and the Sense of Beauty, (Bloomington, 1955), p. 51.

is implying that one ought to do (judge) as one's nature commands. He is really demanding an objective standard of value by stating that preferences are justifiable when they spring from knowledge of what is really desired. But the barbarian is controlled by a passion which does not let him determine the consequences of his preferences and he gives in to his romantic impulses in contrast to the person who follows the life of reason and considers the implications of his judgments in terms of the total harmony of life. But to ask the barbarian to act according to Santayana's criterion for the life of reason is to ask him to do something which is in opposition to his nature.²⁹

Moreover, as Singer wonders, how can one really know when he has found his inner nature? How is he to discover which impulses and preferences are valid ones? Or how is one always to know if such judgments are going to be in harmony with other personal and public interests?³⁰

Singer's questions have more theoretical than practical value. Though most beginning students of literature will tend to prefer Bret Harte and O. Henry to such writers as Hawthorne, Chekhov, or Katherine Anne Porter, the more perceptive ones will readily admit that their likes have changed after a number of weeks of guided critical study. Most will probably also state that their later preferences are the more valid ones

²⁹ Santayana's Aesthetics, p. 205.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 206.

(even though they may well have been influenced considerably by the instructor) since the later judgments are the product of further knowledge of both the works and themselves. Almost never does one ask himself whether he likes (used in the broad sense of approval) a piece of literature. He may question whether such judgments as "this is a great work of art" are valid, but immediate or reflective responses in terms of personal involvement are rarely doubted. Nor do people really question their ability to determine which of their artistic interests are detrimental to the fulfillment and enrichment of their lives, either as individuals or as members of a community. Even those people who adamantly prefer Agatha Christie or Ian Fleming to Dante or Goethe do not doubt the validity of their judgments. Disputes may arise (and do) between those who read Dante and those who read Fleming, but, as Santayana contends, there is rarely even a common ground for discussion, and debate concerning literary merits often does seem to be limited to discussions between those people of similar interests and tastes.

Singer insists, too, that desire for agreement is a kind of dogmatism or insecurity. A man who knows what is fine does not feel the need to impress such knowledge on others.³¹ It seems equally possible, however, that a person may wish another to share his judgment in order that he, too, may share the pleasure which arises from such knowledge.

But the fact does remain that an uneasy compromise has

³¹ Ibid., p. 196.

been reached. Are one's literary judgments to be limited only to oneself or only to those of similar interest, or to those who can be persuaded, who have a malleable disposition? Even if the answer to each of these questions is yes, the value and significance of formal literary criticism which attempts to evaluate seems considerably lessened. To have a taste for some particular literary work, and yet to keep it to oneself is quite like saying, "I don't know anything about literature, but I know what I like." If literature is valuable its value must be, at least to some degree, demonstrable, and if there is good and bad literature there must be some objective standard beyond that of the individual, no matter how discerning he is or how knowledgeable or refined his taste may be.³²

Another obvious criticism which can be leveled at Santayana's view of criticism and the one which cuts to first principles is that pleasure or happiness or satisfaction is not an adequate criterion for measuring art. It can be argued that pleasure a priori is no better a standard than, say, a sense of excitement, duty, nobility, even pain. However, for the purposes of this paper Santayana will be allowed his first principles for not to do so would take this paper beyond its intended scope into something more philosophical (and perhaps metaphysical) than planned.

Do Santayana's own critical writings reflect the problems

³² David Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1956), pp. 268-269.

found in his theory of criticism? Perhaps Santayana looked into his own soul when he observed that it is human nature to attempt to persuade for his critical writings are illustrations of the critic of refined taste who judges (but who often interprets as well), who speaks persuasively and convincingly for his point of view, even though elsewhere he is contending that his tenets really hold only for himself.

Any final judgment of Santayana as a critic must wait, of course, until an examination of his thoughts on what poetry is for and his individual studies of some of the great figures of literature has been made. Nevertheless, it should be interesting at this point to briefly review some of the statements made by other critics about Santayana.

As in most things agreement is not universal. Considering Santayana's role as judge versus that of interpreter, Howgate remarks that Santayana is always a judge, never merely expositor,³³ while Lane Cooper suggests that Santayana is more successful as an interpreter than as a critic. Citing the Three Philosophical Poets as evidence, Cooper observes that Santayana's students must have thought each poet the wisest and best. He sees in Santayana's writings no permanent or decisive standard.³⁴ Arnet concurs.³⁵ Wermuth also agrees in viewing Santayana as

³³ George Santayana, p. 167.

³⁴ Review of the Three Philosophical Poets, The Philosophical Review, XX (July, 1911), 443.

³⁵ Santayana and the Sense of Beauty, p. 49.

primarily an interpreter. He cites Santayana's emphasis on historical setting in both the essays on Browning and Shakespeare. Santayana really might be called a historian of culture and ideas rather than a literary critic.³⁶

Many have seen Santayana's writings as the expression of his own particular taste, an observation which has been made in both derision and praise. Ludwig Lewisohn says that Santayana's "ultimate appeal is to nothing more compelling, however admirable than his own temper and taste."³⁷ Q. D. Leavis, however, sees the basis of his judgment as simply the "finest possible taste."³⁸ But the majority of writers have commented on the fact that in spite of Santayana's denials, he is creating a standard and not expressing a mere personal preference.³⁹ Perhaps Gerald Weales has the answer when he suggests that Santayana does have his own dogma, but as a skeptic he recognizes that it is his own personal myth, not more true than other myths, but one which allows him to operate. Santayana has become his own absolute.⁴⁰

Santayana would probably agree.

³⁶ "George Santayana as a Literary Critic," pp. 65, 292.

³⁷ Cities and Men, (New York, 1927), p. 66; the italics are mine.

³⁸ "The Critical Writings of George Santayana," p. 290.

³⁹ See Irving Singer, "Introduction," Essays in Literary Criticism of George Santayana, (New York, 1956), p. xiii; Charles T. Harrison, "Aspects of Santayana," Sewanee Review, 65 (1957), 146.

⁴⁰ "A Little Faith, A Little Envy: A Note on Santayana and Auden," American Scholar, XXIV (Summer, 1955), 343.

THE FUNCTION OF POETRY

The Philosophic versus the Aesthetic

In attempting to determine the exact nature of poetry,¹ how it should function and by what standard it should be judged, Santayana, in true Platonic fashion, begins by deciding what poetry should be ideally. Then it simply follows that the best poetry is that which most nearly fulfills its ideal function. Although occasionally when the voice of the materialist is allowed to sound, there are passages which read as if they are a description of and not a normative standard for poetry, for the most part it is the Platonist deciding how poetry ought to function.

First, then, what are the basic materials at the poet's disposal? The most obvious of these is the language itself. Having been a practicing poet, Santayana always retained a poet's love of words. He sees that language is a set of symbols for communication and thus has an intellectual function, but language also has a sensuous quality which is inherent in the words themselves, apart from the ideas they suggest. Euphony is that element of beauty in language and particularly in poetry. The highest form of euphony is found in song, but language cannot often reach this height since practical necessity demands a mode of expression more efficient, more rapid, than

¹ "Poetry" is used here and throughout in its broad sense to mean all imaginative or creative literature.

is possible in song.²

Form is a second element in any art, and one which is exceedingly important in poetry. "Numbers," for instance, is a common synonym for verse. Perhaps form, even more than euphony, is the equivalent of beauty, writes Santayana. Therefore, by giving form to words through such devices as meter and rhyme³ and by using words which are euphonious, the poet is able to give a heightened power to speech, a power which is apart from the idea expressed, a power which may even exceed that found in the content. Thus, Santayana reaches a preliminary definition of poetry: "Poetry is speech in which the instrument counts as well as the meaning--poetry is speech for its own sake and for its own sweetness."⁴ He continues by contrasting poetry with prose: "While the purest prose is a mere vehicle of thought, verse, like stained glass, arrests attention in its own intricacies, confuses in its own glories, and is even at times allowed to darken and puzzle in the hope of casting over us a supernatural spell."⁵ For instance, Shelley's "Revolt of Islam" and Keats's "Endymion" are examples of this kind of

² Poetry and Religion, pp. 252-254.

³ Santayana here seems to be using the term "poetry" in its narrower sense. However, all the elements discussed could easily be applied to other literary genres. In view of Santayana's other works, it is reasonable to assume that he would not object to a broader application of the word "poetry," as he, himself, most often uses it thus.

⁴ Poetry and Religion, p. 255.

⁵ Ibid., p. 256.

poetry; these works have no definite meaning, contain an "objectless passion," but theirs is a rich medium filled with euphony and measured form which creates a sensuous movement of color and image. Such poetry, thinks Santayana, is not worthy of the mature mind but must be classed as poetical, for without such a background or foundation no poetry can truly gain its most significant effects.⁶

A third element in poetry is euphuism, defined by Santayana as the "choice of coloured words and rare elliptical phrases," that is, a highly ornate style, a precious vocabulary. Interestingly, Santayana chooses Pope as a negative example. The poetry of Pope has meter and euphony but not euphuism and is therefore an "outline or skeleton of poetry without the filling." "Endymion" and "Revolt of Islam" are merely verbal, but Pope, on the other hand, is "too intellectual and has an excess of mentality." Santayana even hesitates to call his works truly poetical.⁷

These, then, are the elements of poetry on its two lower levels. On the first level the poet is concerned only with manipulation of language, with the sensuous appeal of sound. On the second level the poet is concerned with form and with emotive elements. Content is present on this level, for the poet recreates images and ideas which have pleased him. Repre-

⁶ Ibid., pp. 251, 255-256.

⁷ Ibid., p. 257.

sentation is present but not necessarily "information." Rather than beliefs, which are the intellect's private domain, the second level presents sense impressions.

It is on this level that the pathetic fallacy is often present. The pathetic fallacy, originating with primitive peoples, is an emotion which is falsely transferred to surrounding objects. When poetry recalls this natural confusion it does people a service for, while such a view of the world is untrue, the pathetic fallacy is a part of an experience that man is in danger of forgetting. This experience has a vigor and zest which lifts one out of the logical, everyday world. Speaking of poetry which makes use of the poetic fallacy, Santayana becomes almost lyrical:

Therein is her vitality, for she pierces to the quick and shakes us out of our servile speech and imaginative poverty; she reminds us of all we have felt, she invites us even to dream a little, to nurse the wonderful spontaneous creations which at every waking moment we are snuffing out in our brain. And the indulgence is no mere momentary pleasure; much of its exuberance clings afterward to our ideas; we see the more and feel the more for that exercise, we are capable of finding greater entertainment in the common aspects of Nature and life. When the veil of convention is once removed from our eyes by the poet, we are better able to dominate any particular experience and, as it were, to change its scale, now losing ourselves in its infinitesimal texture, now in its infinite ramifications.⁸

The virtues of the pathetic fallacy, in fact, can apply generally to the casting of experience on the second level of poetry. But, if poetry did not go beyond this level it would be only pleasant relaxation. Unfortunately, many people, even

⁸ Ibid., p. 257.

Plato, see all poetry as second level poetry, see poetry as merely flattery and entertainment.

For Santayana there is, or ought to be, a higher level. On a third level poetry takes the experiences and ideas found on the second level, but remolds them into a form which will give expression to man's most profound philosophic concepts, which will express his goals, his aspirations. In short, third level poetry sees life, not necessarily as it is, but as in perfection it might have been. Experience now takes on a form more compatible and intelligible to man. However, there is one principle present on all three levels and that is the principle of beauty.⁹

Poetry on this highest level is akin to religion. Poetry and religion are identical in essence but different only in their practical implications. "Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life, and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry." Both religion and poetry may go astray: religion when it pretends to record facts or natural laws; and poetry when it is merely a play of the imagination without regard to man's highest ideals. Poetry ideally has a universal and moral function to perform, for when it is identical with religion it "loses its frivolity and ceases to demoralize, while religion surrenders its illusions and ceases to deceive."¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., pp. 266-272.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. v-vi, 288.

The function of poetry can best be summed up in Santayana's own words:

For his [the poet's] complete equipment, then, it is necessary, in the first place, that he sing; that his voice be pure and well pitched, and that his numbers flow; then, at a higher stage, his images must fit with one another, he must be euphuistic, colouring his thoughts with many reflected lights of memory and suggestion, so that their harmony may be rich and profound; again, at a higher stage, he must be sensuous and free, that is, he must build up his world with the primary elements or intelligence; he must draw the whole soul into his harmonies, even if in doing so he disintegrates the partial systematizations of experience made by abstract science in the categories of prose. But finally, this disintegration must not leave the poet weltering in a chaos of sense and passion; it must be merely the ploughing of the ground before a new harvest, the kneading of the clay before the modelling of a more perfect form. The expression of emotion should be rationalized by derivation from character and by reference to the real objects that arouse it--to Nature, to history, to the universe of truth; the experience imagined should be conceived as a destiny, governed by principles, and issuing in the discipline and enlightenment of the will. In this way alone can poetry become an interpretation of life and not merely an irrelevant excursion into the realm of fancy, multiplying our images without purpose, and distracting us from our business without spiritual gain.¹¹

A high and noble calling for creative literature!

The foregoing discussion of the function of poetry, based on "The Elements of Poetry" in Interpretations of Poetry and Religion, gives a clear and unequivocal account of the elements of poetry in a neat hierarchy of significance. However, a look at some of Santayana's other writings produces not clarity but confusion, not confirmation but ambiguity. For example, in the earlier The Sense of Beauty, a much greater emphasis

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 287-288.

is placed on the importance of the aesthetic elements (those particular to the two lower levels of poetry) and less on ideality or philosophic content. In fact, the underlying premise of the book is that beauty is the essential fundamental in all art, including the literary arts. The conflict is very like the old question as to whether poetry should delight or teach. Today, of course, to teach is not quite apropos as didactic poetry is in bad repute, but the idea that poetry should express a perception of the world which reveals something significant and meaningful, not merely entertaining or delightful, is a concept still held by many.

In The Sense of Beauty Santayana's discussion is again divided into three main parts and a parallel to his discussion in Poetry and Religion is easily drawn. He begins by outlining the materials of beauty as the lowest denominator; then comes the formal aspect of beauty, and finally the element Santayana calls "expression." Taking poetry as the art form, the material again becomes the language, euphonious sound; form may be such things as meter, rhyme, plot, and character.

Expression, the third element in the make-up of the beautiful, is defined as a quality acquired by works of art through association with other elements. Expression may make some things beautiful which did not seem so before or it may heighten a beauty already present.¹² Expression then contains two terms:

¹² For instance, in Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" the correspondent who is out on the open seas in a dinghy and is contemplating death suddenly remembers a poem read in his youth

the first is the actual object, in literature the word or image; the second is the further thought or emotion evoked. Expressiveness constitutes the range of thoughts each allied to other thoughts in a given mind. A piece of writing expresses the thoughts aroused in the reader, not in the mind of the author. Since expression depends in its second part on the ability of the mind to reconstruct ideas, the more agile mind, both intellectually and imaginatively, will find greater expressiveness in a particular work of art. Thus expressiveness depends largely on the reader or observer. Of course, some works are capable of evoking greater expression in the reader than others. The term "expressiveness" is given to mean all the capacity of suggestion contained in a work of art, and "expression" to mean the "aesthetic modification" which expressiveness causes.¹³

Expressiveness in terms of literary works of art would seem to be very close to what is usually referred to as content. The third element in the sense of beauty may be parallel to the third level of poetry, though it may also be analagous to elements on the second level, for even on the second level images are presented which presumably could be suggestive of other images or feelings. Nonetheless, expression seems to be more closely allied to poetry on the third level. And this

about a man dying in Algiers; he now has a new understanding and insight into the experience rendered in the poem. Presumably "expression" has become present and made this work of art more aesthetic and pleasing.

¹³ The Sense of Beauty, p. 197.

power to suggest ideas seems to be much less significant to Santayana in The Sense of Beauty than does philosophic content in Poetry and Religion. In the former work, Santayana says that expression may not be present at all or that expression may be hostile to the other two elements, material and form. For example, the ugly or disagreeable expressive elements in art cannot be aesthetic. In tragedy, for instance, such elements must be overcome by the delight in form and material.¹⁴

To further illustrate the workings of expression, Santayana conducts an interesting analysis of Keats's 30th stanza of the "Eve of St. Agnes."¹⁵ He notes (and this observation is a recurring theme with Santayana) that the Northern poets are not as sensuously imaginative as the Southern poets and further that the Northern poets, even Keats the most sensuous of all, seldom remain on this plane but require some further imaginative touch. The references to Samarcand, to things transferred in argosy from Fez, to the cedars of Lebanon--all add a suggestiveness beyond their sensual qualities. Santayana, who can never resist a dig at the New England conscience, comments that such

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 201-228; see below pp. 103 for more detailed treatment of tragedy and the disagreeable real.

¹⁵ "And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanched linen, smooth and lavendered,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd,
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates in argosy transferred
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one
From silken Samarcand to cedared Lebanon."

poetic references (e.g. "Cedars of Lebanon") "which even the Puritan may sing without a blush, add to our wavering satisfaction and reconcile our conscience to this unchristian indulgence of sense!" He continues that perhaps the time is near when poetry, with the other arts, will dwell nearer to the "fountain-head of all inspiration." Without the senses the imagination and the intellect cannot function. After all if it were not for the sensuous elements present in these references in the "Even of St. Agnes" the imaginative or associative elements would not appear. What would these allusions be without the presence of the shade and the winds whispering through the Cedars of Lebanon? without the feel of the hot sun in Fez? without "the languors of oriental luxury"? without the "mystery of the desert" and the "picturesqueness of caravans" surrounding Samarcand? without the cry of the sea to surround an argosy?¹⁶

The conclusion to be gathered here is not entirely clear. The fact that the senses are the foundation of all poetic construction does not necessarily imply that the more sensuously imaginative poet will be the superior one. Yet the implication seems to be that the Southern poets (as well as the Southern mind) are superior to those of the North who need the crutch of expressiveness in order to be able to accept the sensuous.

Santayana reiterates again and again that the primary interest in the arts is really beauty and that their business is primarily to delight. A man who is really a student of

¹⁶ The Sense of Beauty, pp. 67-68.

psychology, history, or philosophy will never rest with the "vague and partial oracles of poetry." It is only mental and moral confusion which has thus obscured the respective functions of science and art. The sudden advance of science in the nineteenth century overloaded the mind with new ideas and at the same time was breaking up old habits of perception and old ideals. Thus people came to see expressiveness as the only value and came almost to identify expressiveness with beauty.¹⁷

Emphasizing further the role of the aesthetic element in poetry, Santayana avows that it is the aesthetic which constitutes the distinctive essence of poetry. Such elements as euphony, meter and rhyme add a color and charm and are the medium in which the message is couched. Moreover, the "magic" of poetry is directly attributable to this medium, and though it is the factor which makes reproduction or imitation nearly impossible, the medium is in fact the ultimate nature of art. Santayana continues his case by citing a revealing example. For instance, when one considers the proverb it is easy to see that it is the "verbal pungency" and the uniqueness of the rhetoric that make the proverb memorable. The proverb becomes more significant than the original event which prompted it since now it is applicable to many new cases.¹⁸

In the essay "Justification of Art," Santayana contends

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 232-233.

¹⁸ Reason in Art, pp. 77, 81-82.

also that art is "abstract and inconsequential," that it encourages sensuous abstraction and is not concerned with influencing the world, nor does it do so. Such statements are not made to disparage the value of art. On the contrary, "beauty gives men the best hint of ultimate good which their experience as yet can offer; and the most lauded geniuses have been poets, as if people felt that those seers, rather than men of action or thought, had lived ideally and known what was worth knowing."¹⁹ Again, Santayana points out that Plato's conception of the arts was erroneous in that he overestimated their influence in practical affairs.²⁰

Even if beauty is the essence of art, and if the arts have no utilitarian value, it is perhaps still possible to conceive of poetry that is both philosophic and sensuous; that is, poetry which arouses the senses, yet still offers ideas for the intellect. Such ideas or thoughts, however, would have no practical consequences but be merely intriguing schemes, airy utopias.²¹ But at least, in the above discussion Santayana seems less concerned with the sort of philosophic poetry he so admires in Poetry and Religion. Here he seems to see the distinctive attribute of poetry as the capacity to

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 172.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 169-176.

²¹ Some would view Shelley as a poet whose works would fit the above description, and interestingly Santayana is an admirer of Shelley.

delight and enchant, to lift the mind from the humdrum, thereby offering a glimpse of beauty and loveliness not present here.

Finally, many have seen Santayana himself as the epitome of aestheticism. His personality and personal life seem to smack of the late Victorian aesthete to those of the worldly twentieth century. His aloofness but self sufficiency set him apart from this bustling world. His undisguised scorn for the Puritan ethic and the genteel tradition, his love of the culture of the Mediterranean countries, his devotion to the Catholic Church for its pomp and beauty, his avocation as a poet and his reputation as a connoisseur of the arts--all seemed to make him a man not only not of this country but not of this century. It also seemed that, according to Santayana, the life of reason was to live life aesthetically. The life of reason was life lived in a harmony of interests, both practical and aesthetic, but which in itself, in the very harmony of it, came to have an aesthetic quality.

Whether such abstract impressions of a man and his work are at all accurate, much less whether they should have any bearing on an analysis of a man's literary criticism is highly debatable. But perhaps they do suggest further why Santayana and aestheticism are often thought of as synonymous.²²

²² Arnet, for instance, in his study of Santayana sees Santayana's entire theory of art in terms of the aesthetic. For example, Arnet sums up Santayana's thought by saying, "A work of art may be enhanced, of course, if it inspires, if it indicates the direction of moral endeavor and increases the understanding of moral standards and situations or reveals

However, the evidence is much stronger for the view that poetry at its best is poetry which incorporates philosophic concepts. The Three Philosophical Poets is both a tribute to as well as a critical interpretation of three poets who were primarily philosophic in scope. The opening statement of the introduction states that the advantage in possessing great works of literature lies in what they can help man to become. Santayana speaks of the increased "value and dignity" which such works can give to the mind of man. "But poetry cannot be spread upon things like butter; it must play upon them like light, and be the medium through which we see them." Poetry, then, is a way of seeing, of perceiving. But it is not philosophy's medium--that of cold scholastic logic--that is to be linked to poetry but rather philosophy's view of the world. "The vision of philosophy is sublime. The order it reveals in the world is something beautiful, tragic, sympathetic to the mind, and just what every poet, on a small or on a large scale, is always trying to catch." Philosophy's goal is the contemplation of the value of things.²³

Still, many would agree with Poe that there is no such thing as a long poem, and a philosophic poem, by its very scope, would seem to imply such length. A poet's inspiration

some otherwise inexpressible truth about man. But such functions belong more truly to science and dialectic, and are not . . . the essence of fine art." (Santayana and the Sense of Beauty, p. 79.)

²³ pp. 3, 9-11.

seems to be captured in moments and set down in a few lines or even in one arresting image. Moments of inspiration, because of their very intensity, must slip away. In a long poem the parts are invariably better than the whole, and today to be brief is almost a requisite of inspiration. Furthermore, the rapturous moment for the reader is also by necessity brief. Life, history, the future, then, must be objects unfit for the poetic imagination. Moreover, Santayana also observes that there may be fullness and scope in even the briefest of inspirations, and that depth and focus may be present in the pregnancy of suggestion. But primarily the objections to philosophical poetry are swept away by the simple answer that such objections to the union of philosophy and poetry are simply not valid. If such conditions which seem to point to the impossibility of writing philosophical poetry do exist, it is simply because of a "lack of faculty on our part, lack of imagination and memory, and above all a lack of discipline."²⁴

Poetry, then, is elevated to a position at the very summit of life and the poet to the company of the gods. The poet "is never so much a poet as when, in a single cry, he summons all that has affinity to him in the universe, and salutes his ultimate destiny. It is the acme of life to understand life. The height of poetry is to speak the language of

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 11-14; it can be observed again that Santayana's pronouncements are normative rather than descriptive.

the gods."²⁵

However, the best evidence for saying that for Santayana poetry is pre-eminently philosophic can be found in his analysis of specific authors and their works. Interestingly, although his rhapsodizing on the merits of philosophic poetry is almost hypnotic, his application of these principles to actual works clearly brings to light the weaknesses in his ideas.

As Santayana implies, a philosophic poet or poem is a rare thing; therefore, naturally most of the works which he examines fall short of desired perfection. Two of the most famous which came under his critical eye and fell short of his criterion were Shakespeare and Browning. Today, over a half century later these essays are still raising anguished cries from those who disagree.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

Shakespeare, the Unphilosophic

Santayana expressed a greater and a more continuing interest in Shakespeare than in any other literary figure. The key essay in Santayana's writings on Shakespeare, "The Absence of Religion in Shakespeare," is an early one.

Santayana begins by writing that although Shakespeare is usually characterized as having universal scope, his works are really lacking in one important element--religion. Certainly there are religious references and allusions in Shakespeare, but the dramatist has merely borrowed these from the society around him; they are not his own sentiments and thus do not have authenticity, claims Santayana. For instance, when Iago says "'sblood" he is not expressing his own sentiment; such oaths are merely "fossils of piety." Or the passages in Richard II commemorating the death of Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, which are filled with tenderness, nobility, and chivalry are but the echo of the spirit of war rather than the spirit of religion. But even a true expression of religious sentiment is not enough. Henry V after the battle at Agincourt expresses such sincere feelings (the kind that might be expected from a true dramatist, comments Santayana); but these religious feelings are a "manifestation of human nature and an expression of human passion." Hence, such passion cannot be attributed to Shakespeare's creative imagination for he was simply being historical (as evidence Santayana cites Shakespeare's source, Holinshed) and

has not, as he usually did, rejected the religious element.¹

Even such sonnets as "Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth" which might seem to express a religious emotion are simply "dramatically proper" and also here "rationally just" but not religious. Shakespeare's mind was undoubtedly "philosophically pious" and "spiritual." In fact, the sonnets on the whole are spiritual. But in all this "depth of experience" the religious image is still missing. Spirituality is not Christianity. Since any poet of this age would have had only the framework of Christianity for religious thought, Shakespeare then had the choice of Christianity or nothing; he chose the latter.. Such a choice was not made because Shakespeare lacked imagination, and the life he portrayed was not merely a set of chaotic experiences. Thus the absence of religion is therefore all the more astounding. For, reasons Santayana, even if an absence of religion is not considered a weakness in the dramatist himself, it must be considered so in the portrayal of others.²

Religion, after all, has always given a larger and richer significance to life, argues Santayana, and the importance of religion is easily demonstrated by comparing Shakespeare with other great poets. For instance, Homer and Dante, who

¹ "The Absence of Religion in Shakespeare," in Interpretations of Poetry and Religion, pp. 147-150; first published in The New World (Boston), V (Dec., 1896), 681-691.

² Ibid., pp. 151-153.

portrayed "man with his piety and the world with its gods," gave to their universe a totality and completeness which is lacking in Shakespeare's world--the mere world of human society. If one were to question the essential meaning in Shakespeare's cosmos the answer could only be that expressed in Macbeth's "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" speech. Homer and Dante, on the other hand, "had caught in the reality the hint of a lovelier fable--a fable in which that reality was completed and idealized, and made at once vaster in its extent and more intelligible in its principle." Even Greek tragedy (which perhaps is a closer comparison, since Dante and Homer are epic poets rather than dramatists) involves a fate, a conception of the decrees of heaven, a higher force than man which guides human success and failure. To Santayana Shakespeare is characteristic of the romantic dramatist for whom life is a series of accidents which control a meaningless happiness or unhappiness.³

Santayana then pauses in his argument to outline the historical explanation for Shakespeare's alleged inferiority.⁴ He traces the dissolution of the Greek religion and the rise of Christianity and the coming of the miracle plays which had dramatic power but whose crudity did not allow them to survive

³ Ibid., pp. 154-157.

⁴ Many have seen in Santayana's writings the influence of Taine and his theory that literature depends on the cultural milieu and is therefore determined; [see John M. Major, "Santayana on Shakespeare," Shakespeare Quarterly, X (Autumn, 1959), 472]. Yet for Santayana any suggestion of determinism does not lessen the fact that a piece of literature may be a decided failure.

the Renaissance. With only a few exceptions did Christian drama appear and thus drama occupied itself almost exclusively with the secular. The fact that art and serious thought have never united satisfactorily is because western civilization has drawn its culture from one source and its religion from another (the Greeks and Christianity respectively). Then came the idea, one which Santayana could never countenance, that art should not deal with everything but only with the "world of polite conventions." The serious and sacred were to be left unexpressed.⁵

Thus it is easy to understand why Shakespeare confined himself to the representation of secular things. Santayana also maintains that in Shakespeare's time to be religious already meant to be Puritanical and certainly, that being the case, Santayana, better than anyone, could understand such a rejection. "A world of passion and beauty without a meaning must seem to [Shakespeare] more interesting and worthy than a world of empty principle and dogma, meagre, fanatical, and false." In short, it was simply impossible for that age to synthesize a unified world view, to find a controlling principle that would unite the passions and excitements of this world with a complementary supernatural world.⁶

And to those who would argue that Shakespeare should be praised for choosing the world of men rather than condemned

⁵ "The Absence of Religion in Shakespeare," pp. 158-160.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 160-161.

or that a man of such creative sensitivity had no real choice, Santayana comes back with his usual, uncompromising answer. Such an argument is presented by those who "flatter themselves that they can escape defeat by not attempting the highest tasks." He continues that when art or civilization has reached a peak of development, it has formed "a conception of its place in Nature, no less than of the contents of its life; and that this conception has been the occasion of religious sentiments and practices; and further, that every art, whether literary or plastic, has drawn its favourite themes from this religious sphere."⁷

Santayana then utters what is to become his dictum for nearly all his literary criticism:

For what is required for theoretic wholeness is not this or that system but some system. Its value is not the value of truth, but that of victorious imagination. Unity of conception is an aesthetic merit no less than a logical demand. A fine sense of the dignity and pathos of life cannot be attained unless we conceive somehow its outcome and its relations. Without such a conception our emotions cannot be steadfast and enlightened. Without it the imagination cannot fulfil [sic]⁸ its essential function or achieve its supreme success.⁸

Had Shakespeare lived in another age perhaps he would not have been hampered by a religion which did not stimulate the imagination. Even a pagan era would have allowed him to see natural forces at work behind his heroes.⁹

⁷ Ibid., p. 162.

⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 164-165.

This essay clearly illustrates Santayana's contention that the greatest literature must be philosophic; but here philosophy has been narrowly and specifically defined. "An expression of man's aspirations or ideals" will not suffice; this expression must be in the form of a reasoned, systematic world view, one which offers totality, which places man in his cosmos. In short, there must be a framework, a form, a mold for philosophic thought. Obviously, if such a criterion is essential for literature, then religion is going to be imperative as that necessary frame.

There are three methods of attack for those who wish to dispute Santayana's view of Shakespeare: 1) that Santayana has misinterpreted or misread Shakespeare; that Shakespeare does in fact incorporate a religious conception of man in the world; 2) that philosophic scope is not necessary for great literature; or 3) that philosophic scope is an ingredient of great literature but that Santayana has interpreted the term too narrowly.

The first objection has not to any degree been leveled at Santayana. Most critics seem to agree that Shakespeare was not, in his plays, religious in the sense defined by Santayana or in the sense that Dante was. Many have argued, though, that Santayana has incorrectly read Shakespeare when he sees no cosmic forces at work on man and his universe, but this argument really anticipates objection number three.

In regard to the second objection, certainly it can be

contended that some of the best loved and most cherished literature is that which delights the ear and the eye, but which is not particularly profound in thought. Such works have survived because of the virtuosity of the poet in handling the materials of his trade. The works of Keats, Byron, Poe, even Spenser (whose poetry succeeds despite its "moral") apparently have lived for just such reasons. To deny a place to these works is to cut off a large segment of literature as most people know it. (Such a line of reasoning would hardly have impressed Santayana, for again he attempts to describe what ought to be rather than what is or has been.) However, the judgment of time does seem to be on Santayana's side for the literary monuments of civilization do reflect man's attempt to cope with the conflicts confronting him or reflect his view of the world, whether as he saw it or as he saw it ought to be. The fact that such works are studied and appreciated in translation (even perhaps at some loss) attests to this fact.

One might add, too, that Santayana's observation that great literature of the past embodied the supernatural is a sound one but the inference then that successive works of literature must also embody the supernatural lacks something in terms of logic. (True, in some of Santayana's writings the supernatural does not seem to be a requisite but in the Shakespeare essay, where the term "religion" is defined as something distinct from the merely "spiritual," the supernatural is clearly a must for religious poetry.) As Santayana, himself, would

admit, those works were a reflection of the periods when religion and the supernatural played a key role in life. Neither Dante's nor Homer's gods nor their conceptions of the supernatural world were products of their own imagination. Santayana's own emphasis on the historical and cultural causative factors leads to the observation that perhaps, since succeeding ages have become more secularly oriented, their literature in turn will be concerned with secular rather than religious problems. These works then will lack religion in a formal sense.

Under Santayana's criterion two impossible positions result. One, that nothing artistic will achieve as high a quality as did those in the earliest periods of man's development, an idea which Santayana actually suggests. Although few persons would propose that literary art is getting better and better, most would argue that the possibility exists for great literature, if not during the present at least in the future, or that greatness resides in some of those past works produced since the fall of the Roman Empire. The other position must be that an impossible demand is being made of literature; that is, can one really demand that literature be something that is not the product of the temper of the age and the best minds which produced it?

On the other hand, perhaps the whole idea of greatness or great artistic works is obsolete. Santayana almost seems to ascribe to this view for in "The Progress of Philosophy" he states that although new poets arise with new talents and

thus they increase and enrich the volume of poetry, the earliest poets were the best (e.g. again Homer and Dante). He does add Shakespeare's name as the best in England, but here the emphasis is placed on the fact that Shakespeare, too, was an early poet.¹⁰ However, consistency not being Santayana's strong point, he also suggests in the Three Philosophical Poets that the modern age offers great possibilities for the poet since he now has a greater historical scope.¹¹

The most significant weakness in Santayana's poetic theory is clearly his application of the term "philosophy," and the Shakespeare essay illustrates that weakness. Surely one can have a view of life which sees human experience in terms of meaningful values; it is possible to "conceive somehow life's outcome and its relation" without a systematically worked out dogma. To exclude spirituality and idealism in favor of a more rigidly outlined concept of the supernatural is to exclude the very essence of the religious experience. The strange thing, though, is that Santayana himself was not a "believer" in the supernatural; rather his demand for the supernatural in literature is an aesthetic demand. Acceptance, at least on the part of the reader, of such a religious system as it is presented in literature is not asked. The reader need not think such a system is true.¹² It is not "this system or that

¹⁰ See Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies, (New York, 1922), pp. 208-209.

¹¹ Pp. 67-68.

system, but some system" that is required. Thus, even in advocating the philosophic, Santayana is in one sense still asking for an aesthetic element.

It can be argued, too, that Shakespeare is not a romantic in the sense that he portrays the world as meaningless and without moral order.¹³ The tragedies provide an illustration. The significance of the conclusions in Macbeth, Lear, and Othello, for instance, reassert that the moral rightness of things has been reinstated. Evil has been eradicated: Macbeth the villain is no more; Othello has regained his nobility and human dignity through expiation of his tragic flaw; and although Lear and the innocent have suffered, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund have met a deserving fate. Further, to ascribe to Shakespeare the sentiments expressed by Macbeth is to confuse appropriate dramatic sentiments with personal ones.

Singer writes that Santayana has simply misunderstood

¹² This position is reversed in the later essay "Tragic Philosophy" (1936); see below pp. 62-63.

¹³ Compared with some of the naturalist writers or some mid-twentieth century writers, Shakespeare seems quite moral and optimistic. Santayana would undoubtedly be appalled and shocked by the profound and utter pessimism about the worth of life so often expressed in modern literature. Santayana wrote to Daniel Cory in 1947 and expressed the following opinion about Camus and Sartre: "Did I tell you that I have got a volume of Camus [Le Mythe de Sisyphe] that I long ago asked for and one of the plays by Sartre from Paris? They are clever but nasty. Everything now seems to be rotten. But I suppose people would say that I am like the old German spinster who would sing nothing at her piano save 'Wie dumm sind die Leute --von Heute!'" (Cory, The Later Years, p. 271.)

romanticism by failing to realize what the romantics were attempting to do. The romantic writers saw the world in terms of moral problems to be solved--in terms of action to be taken. Their interest was simply of a different sort. Hamlet is faced with such a choice--the need to do something. Religion did not concern Shakespeare because it was unable to settle such questions or problems. Santayana, on the other hand, was interested in religious problems, in intellectual, aesthetic, even metaphysical problems (though he denied interest in the latter) rather than in questions of doing.¹⁴

The principles (and their corresponding problems) raised in this early essay are expanded and elaborated eight years later in another essay dealing with the character of Hamlet. In this essay the discussion of the creation of character carries out suggestions made earlier in The Sense of Beauty. In the latter, it will be remembered, form is the most important element, and in drama, plot corresponds to form; the materials are the versification, music, and stage settings; and expression is found in the ethos and sentiments expressed through characterization. To Santayana Shakespeare unfortunately excels in characterization, as do many modern authors. He simply elaborates on the suggestions of character given in the plot. Such creation of memorable characters is "ingenious," "fascinating," and "delightful," but a seriously studied plot

¹⁴ Irving Singer, "Introduction," Essays in Literary Criticism of George Santayana, p. xx.

enables one to see life more realistically, for it views men's minds through their actions and not vice versa, the former being the method practiced in daily life.¹⁵

The idea, then, that Shakespeare, like other romantic dramatists, simply elaborated on a character which evolved out of the plot is the foundation for Santayana's essay on Hamlet. Hamlet was simply "an afterthought and a discovery." This creative process accounts for the incoherence of Hamlet's behavior. For instance, Hamlet's reasons for sparing the King while he was praying must be sentiments taken from the old story for these sentiments are too conventional and Christian to be Shakespeare's own.¹⁶ Santayana is still clinging to his absence-of-religion-in-Shakespeare theory.

In short, all the action in the play ties in with the character of Hamlet rather than the personality of Hamlet corresponding to the action. This thesis Santayana backs up with some interesting evidence. The ghost was probably meant to be taken literally, not as a symbol of Hamlet's disturbed mind, for his accounts of torments correspond to the then current and popular notions of purgatory, yet the ghost trembles at the cock's crow and he seeks revenge. Thus he cannot be a truly penitent, Christian soul.¹⁷

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The Sense of Beauty, pp. 174-176.

¹⁶ "Hamlet," Obiter Scripta, pp. 42-44; first published as the introduction to The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Vol. 15, (New York, 1908), pp. ix-xxxiii.

Further, why is Hamlet sworn to secrecy and why does he delay? Why does he not gather his comrades and rush off and kill the king? Because, answers Santayana, the play pre-existed. Hamlet is not mad; let no one think so. His soul searching and idealism are admirable, but they are too weak to create a plan of positive action. Such a criticism coming from the reflective and soulful Santayana seems strange, but of course, what Santayana really objects to is Hamlet's vacillation and lack of decisiveness, even in his thoughts. The crude idea of vengeance which is imposed on Hamlet by the plot stifles his higher potential, thinks Santayana, but in a moment of doubt he cannot resist adding, "Or is it only a fond critic's illusion that makes us read that better idea into what is purely unconscious barbarism and a vacillation useful for theatrical purposes?"¹⁸

Santayana then moves to a discussion of what he was to keep referring to as "Shakespeare's medium," or the poetic language which was the dramatist's greatest artistic accomplishment.

We may observe in general that Shakespeare's genius shines in the texture of his poems rather than in their structure, in imagery and happy strokes rather than in integrating ideas. His poetry plays about life like ivy about a house, and is more akin to landscape than to architecture. He feels no vocation to call the stones themselves to their ideal places and enchant the very substance and skeleton of the world. How

17 Ibid., p. 48.

18 Ibid., p. 55.

blind to him, and to Hamlet, are all ultimate issues, and the sum total of things how unseizable! The heathen chaos enveloping everything is all the more sensible on account of the lovely natures which it engulfs.¹⁹

Santayana goes on to give perhaps one of the finest, most eloquent, and sympathetic accounts of Hamlet's character. Hamlet is more than a dramatic figure--witty, intelligent, drawn with breadth, depth, and precision; "he lays bare the heart of a whole race" or the "conflict to which every soul is more or less liable." But this turn of mind is one proper to youth (or the youth of a race) and it gives only an illusion of profundity. (Here, the earliest is evidently not the best.) Such a mind does not test itself in action.²⁰ Hamlet is for Santayana typical of the romantic philosophy he associates with Shakespeare and with the Northern mind generally.

Still, Santayana does caution that perhaps such a feat of artistic creation may not be measured in comparison with other works which are not of the same type or standard. Such works as Hamlet should be studied and absorbed because they represent a part of human feelings or experiences, but they should be read with the understanding that they are not the expression of "necessary human tragedy . . . universal destiny or divine law"; rather they are the "picture of incidental unfitness," of "genius wasted." Hamlet is the reflection of man's incoherent soul.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 57.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

In brief, Hamlet is further evidence that Shakespeare lacks completeness.

In 1915 Santayana, still preoccupied with the Shakespearean medium, wrote "Shakespeare: Made in America." In this essay he conducts an interesting experiment by rewriting Shakespeare's "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes." His aim was to replace every phrase or image which would not be common in twentieth century America with updated diction. His purpose was to make "evident how much old finery there is in our literary baggage, and how original an original poet would have to be." For instance, he points out that the suggestion that fortune is a monarch was rhetorical even in Shakespeare's day; that to "beweep" is "unrepublican"; and that "outcast" is an inapplicable metaphor for in this tolerant society a person will always be taken in by someone. The result follows:

When times are hard and old friends fall away
 And all alone I lose my hope and pluck,
 Doubting if God can hear me when I pray,
 And brood upon myself and curse my luck,
 Envyng some stranger for his handsome face,
 His wit, his wealth, his chances, or his friends,
 Desiring this man's brains and that man's place,
 And vexed with all I have that makes amends,
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,--
 By chance I think of you, and then my mind,
 Like music from deep sullen murmurs rising
 To peaks and raptures, leaves the earth behind:
 For if you care for me, what need I care
 To own the world or be a millionaire?²²

Although Santayana contends that the result is not absurd on purpose, the effect is ludicrous and one cannot help suspect

²² New Republic, 2 (1915), 96-97.

that Santayana was having more fun here than anything else. Intentionally or unintentionally, however, the results seem to indicate that Shakespeare's language, even though antiquated, still has a hold on the imagination and it is a hold which Santayana fully recognizes.

In 1932, at the age of 69, Santayana was still reading Shakespeare but evidently his opinions had changed little. In a letter to Henry Ward Abbott he remarks that he was reading the whole of Shakespeare through systematically. "How wonderful!" he exclaims; "yet how horribly impure, occasional, only half-lifted out of some vile plot and some ranting theatrical tradition. The best of it is that entrancing fusion of music in language with passion, colour, and homely saturation of every word in the humours of life."²³

The following year he incorporated in a letter to Logan Pearsall Smith what was to become the substance of his essay "Tragic Philosophy." Here again, Santayana seems awed by Shakespeare's ability to manage his medium, his eloquence, his manipulation of words. Such a gift as Shakespeare's was set free, thinks Santayana, by the conditions of the Renaissance, which almost sounds as if Shakespeare were lucky to live when he did rather than unlucky as suggested in the "Absence of Religion in Shakespeare." Yet Shakespeare's medium did limit him; "he might have run over into the preserves of Rabelais, Cervantes,

²³ Letters, p. 274.

or Pietro Aretino." ("Preserves" suggests some form such as the epic or the novel rather than drama; the epic, at least, was preferred by Santayana.) Exuberance accounts for Shakespeare's charm and genius as well as for his failures and weaknesses. It accounts for the "irrelevant elaboration of language and of characters." Such effusion may suggest to some profundity but to Santayana simply "knowingness and quick intuition," and a philosophy that all life is a dream. Such a philosophy, T. S. Eliot contended,²⁴ was inferior to Dante's and Santayana agrees if "inferior" is interpreted to mean "morally and imaginatively," but he shifts from his earlier emphasis on the unimportance of truth in such a philosophy, by saying that Shakespeare's philosophy happens to be true for such a man as Shakespeare, a man who viewed the universe without the aid of the supernatural. This philosophy is of ancient origin; Shakespeare did not invent it, he simply believed it.²⁵

Supporting the idea that truth is important, Santayana points out that two passages cannot be poetically equal if one is philosophically inferior, but asserts that total sat-

²⁴ Eliot, in an attempt to clarify his position, noted that he was contending that Dante did have a philosophy in a sense that Shakespeare did not, but that he was not placing less value on Shakespeare as a result--as many people seemed to think. In fact, the distinction is unimportant, he adds. [The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, (London, 1933), p. 98.]

²⁵ "Tragic Philosophy," Scrutiny, IV (March, 1936), 365.

isfaction can only be achieved when the reader believes in the reality of the thing presented.²⁶ Such a statement runs counter to Santayana's previous assertion that it was not this system or that system in poetry that counted, but simply some system; it is also contradictory to much modern thought which holds that it is possible to fully appreciate a literary work through a sympathetic understanding rather than an acceptance of the ideas presented. Many enjoy the works of Hopkins and the later works of Eliot who do not share their religious sentiments.

Santayana returns to Macbeth's "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" speech, but this time he does grant that Macbeth's thoughts are not necessarily those of Shakespeare. Like any good dramatist, Shakespeare was simply putting into the mouths of his characters the thoughts which were appropriate to them. Macbeth has no philosophy because he was incapable of having any. Still, in spite of this assertion, Santayana goes right on as if Macbeth were speaking for Shakespeare. He compares Macbeth's philosophy with that expressed in Seneca's tragedies but Seneca, he avows, would never have written that life signified nothing. Life even though cruel, is superseded by something in man which enables him to rise above black chaos and disorder. Santayana does concede, however, that Seneca's rhetoric, unlike Shakespeare's, is often stilted.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 366-367.

Again Santayana reiterates his favorite theme that Shakespeare was a Renaissance man, molded by the Renaissance, and that his greatest gift was the gift of language. "Shakespeare was a professional actor, a professional dramatist; his greatness lay there, and in the gift of the gab: in that exuberance and joy in language which everybody had in that age, but he supremely. The Renaissance needed no mastering living religion, no mastering living philosophy. Life was gayer without them."²⁸ John Major finds such a view of the Elizabethan intellectual and spiritual attitudes "a strange, one-sided view,"²⁹ which indeed it is, but it is a view which leads Santayana back to his original conclusion that Macbeth's speech does in fact characterize Shakespeare as well as any other he wrote. Santayana concludes that "if Shakespeare had been pressed by some tiresome friend to propound a personal philosophy, he might have found in his irritation nothing else to fall back upon than the animal despair of Macbeth. Fortunately we may presume that burgherly comfort and official orthodoxy saved him from being unreasonably pressed."³⁰

Hence, nothing in Santayana's views of Shakespeare has changed at all. Shakespeare still has no shaping philosophy.³¹

²⁸ Ibid., p. 367.

²⁹ "Santayana on Shakespeare," p. 476.

³⁰ "Tragic Philosophy," p. 368.

³¹ Major sees "Tragic Philosophy," the last published work by Santayana on Shakespeare, as the culmination of a

To find a mastering philosophy poetically expressed it is only necessary to compare Macbeth's speech with Dante's passage in Paradiso, spoken by Piccarda when she answers Dante's question as to whether she desires to dwell in a higher part of heaven. But these two passages are really incommensurable, maintains Santayana, for there is simply no common ground; they belong to two different worlds which are hostile to each other. There is not even a common ground of truth, taste, or beauty.³²

Santayana has made a sound point, one which perhaps he might have done well to consider in some of his earlier criticism: that many works cannot be compared; only their differences may be noted. This is not to say that standards cannot be evoked. As T. S. Eliot has noted, the important thing is to realize what distinguishes Dante and Shakespeare from poets of obviously lesser stature.³³

Again, being happily inconsistent, Santayana continues to compare the incomparable by insisting that not only is Dante's philosophy superior, but that Shakespeare's medium, his greatest

gradual change on Santayana's part toward a more reasoned and sympathetic appreciation of the great bard. It is obvious, however, that Major's great admiration for Santayana and his love of Shakespeare have led him to see a greater bond between the two than actually exists. Santayana was always effusive in his praise, but his praise was always coupled with reservations about Shakespeare's limitations.

³² "Tragic Philosophy," pp. 368-369.

³³ The Use of Poetry, p. 98.

strength as well as his greatest weakness, is also really inferior to Dante's. Shakespeare's medium is "rich and thick and more important than the idea, whereas in Dante the medium is as unvarying and simple as possible, and meant to be transparent." Now, a clear and transparent medium is used when the poet loves what he has to say, but when the poet is not definite about what he wishes to convey, he insists on "stirring the waters deeply, suggesting a thousand half-thoughts, and letting the very unutterableness of . . . passion become manifest in . . . disjointed words."³⁴ The opacity of Shakespeare's medium is not a new idea with Santayana. As early as 1905 in Reason in Art, Santayana contrasted Shakespeare to Homer. When Shakespeare tells that Macbeth's dagger was "unmannerly breeched in gore," Achilles would have told what other blood had stained the same blade on other occasions. Shakespeare's phrase dazzles but Homer's would be simple and true.³⁵ Such an effect appeals because modern minds are "insecure, distracted, and impatient," thus accounting for Shakespeare's popularity over Dante's. An audience does not think or reason with Shakespeare; it dreams with him, indulging its passions, emotions, and sense for theatricality.³⁶

Continuing the comparison, Santayana repeats his former

³⁴ "Tragic Philosophy," p. 367.

³⁵ P. 113.

³⁶ "Tragic Philosophy," pp. 369-370.

statement that he agrees with Eliot. Dante's is the superior philosophy, but why, he wonders, does Eliot not see that Dante's philosophy is, for the modern mind, false? Dante's picture of the world is too imaginary, too visionary, too emotional.³⁷

Santayana patiently explains that the whole problem arises from the disparity between the world of inspiration--the aesthetic world--and the world of truth--the harsh workaday world. Inspiration is often felt to be of more value than truth or to have its own truth, the truth of the soul. Furthermore, inspiration should never conflict with the truth of things; like music and lyric poetry, it should float above the harsh march of reality, free and undogmatic. But the human animal, being what he is, keeps demanding that knowledge be knowledge of ulterior facts. This conflict is the essence of tragedy: tragedy is the conflict between inspiration and truth. The result must be death, for the passion of inspiration must die and the poet or hero with it.³⁸

This diversion into the problem of truth versus the inspired ideal, one which plagued Santayana in all his literary criticism, is actually for Santayana the explanation as to why Shakespeare kept to a disillusioned philosophy which remained true to the facts of life. Shakespeare was a dramatist who portrayed inspired, but earthly individuals whose inspirations were opposed to the facts of this earthly life. Not being

³⁷ Ibid., p. 373.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 373-374.

able to compromise their inspiration, they are defeated by the world. But "this defeat, together with a proud and grandiloquent acceptance of it, is final for the tragic poet."³⁹

Santayana has come a distance from his first essay on Shakespeare. Shakespeare, still a product of his time, is viewed more sympathetically, and Santayana almost concedes that the dramatist had a philosophy of sorts. There is also this insight into tragedy as it was portrayed by Shakespeare. Yet there is no recantation of earlier principles. Paradoxically, Shakespeare is still a lesser poet, even if a more beloved one.

Santayana's criticism of Shakespeare, it should be quite clear, is flawed, but it should also be remembered that the early essays were written at a time when Bardolatry flourished and A. C. Bradley was convincing many that Shakespeare was a great philosopher.⁴⁰ Santayana did call Shakespeare a romantic which is, in Santayana's vocabulary, not as great a compliment as if he were to call Shakespeare a classicist, but he did not call him a barbarian, his term of greatest derision. Moreover, a full measure of tribute is paid to Shakespeare's portrayal of the complexities of human nature and to the beauties of his language.

Coming back to the original issue then of the philosophic

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 374-375.

⁴⁰ Philip Blair Rice, "The Philosopher as Poet and Critic," in Schilpp, p. 287.

versus the aesthetic in Santayana's criticism, it is apparent that his Shakespearean studies place the balance on the side of the philosophic. Poetry must be philosophic in content, incorporating a unified ideal which expresses a total and complete conception of the world and man's place in it. This view of the ideal function of poetry can be further seen in Santayana's discussion of two poets who, like Shakespeare, fell short of this ideal but, unlike Shakespeare, won much less appreciative understanding, for Browning and Whitman are not simply romantic poets; they are "barbarians."

Whitman and Browning, the Barbarians

Santayana has been almost universally regarded as an anti-romantic and a defender of classical principles in his criticism. The cleavage is not as sharp as such a generalization suggests. Although he does lean toward what is generally accepted as the classic, he by no means shuns the romantic and even at times seems to regard it rather wistfully; at any rate he certainly recognizes the part the romantic impulse has to play in any act of creativity. Santayana's first confrontation with the romantic-classic controversy came in a very early essay in 1890 entitled "Walt Whitman: A Dialogue." Van Tender, the advocate of romanticism, and McStout, his counterpart for classicism, are debating the merits of each literary mode, using Whitman as their poet in question. Van Tender opens by observing that he reads Whitman because his verses, unlike Keats's or Shakespeare's, bring him inspiration, inspiration apparently in the form of an attitude, "a faculty of appreciation." He goes on to argue that beauty is everywhere and that any subject is a fit one for poetry; romanticism's virtues are those of freshness, originality, newness of sensation and effect. It expresses the whirling multiplicity of life; objects in life are worshiped for their intrinsic worth, not for their ulterior values.¹

But McStout answers that the value in poetry derives from

¹ The Harvard Monthly, X (May, 1890), 87-90.

a just selection of the materials at hand. The critical impulse needs this restraint in the form of a selective principle. Such selectivity must be ultimately moral. "It isn't immoral to call a spade a spade, but it is immoral to treat life as a masquerade, as a magic pantomime in which acts have no consequences and happiness and misery don't exist."² Such indiscrimination or apparent impartiality "unnerves a man and makes him incapable of indignation or enthusiasm."³ However, McStout does concede that the times are favorable to Whitman and his disciples such as Van Tender who insist on praising his "vague pantheism, his formlessness, his confusion of values, his substitution of emotion for thought, his trust in impulse rather than in experience."⁴ This modern age is in a state of "general moral crisis and imaginative disintegration" which is echoed in poetry. Why this disintegration? Again Santayana sees the answer in the duality of western culture which has been formed by both classic and Christian influences. The conflict between these two contending forces which see the world in contradictory fashion accounts for all the incoherence and indistinctness in modern art.⁵

Whitman is the epitome of this moral disintegration which plagues the modern world. He is the barbarian whom Santayana

² Ibid., p. 92.

³ Ibid., p. 91.

⁴ Ibid., p. 89.

⁵ Poetry and Religion, pp. 168-169.

defines as

the man who regards his passions as their own excuse for being; who does not domesticate them either by understanding their cause or by conceiving their ideal goal. He is the man who does not know his derivations nor perceive his tendencies, but who merely feels and acts, valuing in his life its force and its filling, but being careless of its purpose and its form. His delight is in abundance and vehemence; his art, like his life, shows an exclusive respect for quantity and splendour of materials. His scorn for what is poorer and weaker than himself is only surpassed by his ignorance of what is higher.⁶

Whitman is not only a barbarian, declares Santayana; he is a poet of the first level. His images strike the eye as they might in a sort of waking dream. Utilizing this lowest, most primitive type of perception, Whitman has captured the elementary aspect of things, but for him the surface is all. There is no depth in his portrayals. His world "has no inside; it is a phantasmagoria of continuous visions, vivid, impressive, but monotonous and hard to distinguish in memory." However, Santayana does concede that his vision is rendered with imagination and realism. Again Santayana emphasizes the lack of a selective principle by which a poet is able to criticize his world. Thus Whitman is unable to see the world in contrast with an ordered ideal and the vulgar becomes for him sublime.⁷

In other words, Whitman failed to make the dualistic distinction dear to the heart of Santayana: he failed to

⁶ Ibid., p. 176.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 177-180.

distinguish between the ideal and the material, the human and the natural. The material or the natural are not evils per se, but they become evil when they are all sufficient, when they ignore the realm of the spiritual.⁸

Santayana also discounts Whitman's sympathy for the common man. It was not understanding of the common man which Whitman possessed but a "vicarious satisfaction in their pleasures." The common man, like the primitive, believes in the ideal of perfection. His poet will be the one who portrays these ideals for him. The common man has not the least desire to be primitive; he looks continually for a better life and hopes for a better future. Thus Whitman could never be the poet of the common man, and Santayana concludes tartly that "a poet who loves the picturesque aspects of labour and vagrancy will hardly be the poet of the poor."⁹

But Santayana inserts a declaration that Whitman does possess qualities which are both necessary in their place and offer a value in themselves, even though not of the highest degree. When one wishes to escape the cares of responsibility and conscience, Whitman becomes a delightful and refreshing outlet. This "dream of sense" which Whitman offers arouses a feeling of freshness, images which are "full of light and health and of a kind of frankness and beauty." Man may feel

⁸ George Howgate, "Santayana and Humanism," Sewanee Review, 43 (1935), 55.

⁹ Poetry and Religion, pp. 185-186.

encumbered and weary from the shackles of tradition and reason, and a sense of rejuvenation comes from sinking to this lower level of sense and instinct. In short, Whitman offers all those positive values outlined earlier as belonging to the lowest level of poetry.¹⁰

Earlier in The Sense of Beauty, Santayana had also commented rather favorably on Whitman's conception of democracy, (a political ideal which was always more than a little foreign to Santayana). Whitman's portrayal of everything as a "momentary pulsation of a liquid and structureless whole, stirs the imagination and creates a power that one cannot help but admire. Such levelling as a democracy produces may have unwanted practical effects but the aesthetic effect of such an idea does have its attraction."¹¹

In 1911 in a speech given by Santayana entitled "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," Whitman is also given credit as being almost the lone figure rebelling against the Genteel Tradition. Although Santayana reiterates his same complaint that Whitman's indiscriminate admiration of everything was "unintellectual, lazy, and self indulgent," it was a necessary rebellion, but the problem was that no reconstruction followed, no structure was built on this foundation that had been left after the razing of the traditions of the past. It remained a "passive sensorium for registering impressions." But, asks

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 187.

¹¹ P. 112.

Santayana, could anyone in the nineteenth century have done more?¹² Like Shakespeare, Whitman seems to be damned for what was inevitable: his existence in a particular cultural milieu.

In 1915 Santayana included Whitman as a Genteel American Poet who wished to be impressionistic, personal, and American but the result was, Santayana asserts, that he was simply mystical, rather than articulate. Santayana also remarks that Whitman destroyed old forms without achieving new ones. For Santayana the past must always be a part of the present and the future.¹³

If few of Santayana's contemporaries at the turn of the century were concerned about his judgment of Whitman, they almost certainly were outraged by his denunciation of Browning, their prophet and seer. At a time when Browning's popularity was at a peak and when Browning societies were prevalent, any suggestion that the poet was lacking in a vital element necessary for the superior poet must have been shocking; to further suggest that Browning was a barbarian and to link him with Whitman must have been unthinkable.

Browning's failures were essentially those of the second level poet as Whitman's were those of the first level poet. Both failed to integrate their images into an articulate form which would give expression to a philosophic ideal. For example,

¹² Reprinted in Winds of Doctrine, pp. 202-203.

¹³ "Genteel American Poetry," The New Republic, 3 (May 29, 1915), 95.

in his portrayal of character, Browning fails to portray the character as a whole, portraying merely traits of character instead. Now great characters need not be perfectly virtuous, but the great dramatists have created ideal characters who possessed some element of internal greatness. Or even those characters who in real life would be evil may become a part of the work of art and thus be aesthetically pleasing. Such characters as Iago, Falstaff, or Hamlet, for instance, may utter observations which strike the listener as false, but such characters as these are at least embedded in the poetry and plot of the drama and are viewed by the poet objectively. Browning's characters, on the contrary, are really Browning himself; his is the art of self expression.¹⁴

In other words, Browning's failures, as Santayana sees them, were failures of rationality. He failed to rationalize emotion and is instead submerged in the emotions and passions he presents, unable to idealize these emotions or to reflect upon them. He did not learn the art of detachment and his imagination was merely a "vent for personal preoccupation."¹⁵

Browning's treatment of love, Santayana also sees as illustrative of his inability to form a rational ideal from the materials of passions. No matter the variety of forms in which love is portrayed, it always has the same quality--that of passion. It never rises to the contemplative level but remains

¹⁴ Poetry and Religion, pp. 189, 192-193.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 194.

a personal impulse. Such passions, though depicted in powerful sketches, Browning erroneously takes as the final phase of human experience, but for Santayana the value of such experience is not in the experience itself but in the ideal which it reveals. But for Browning such an ideal did not exist.

"This transformation of sense and emotion into objects agreeable to the intellect, into clear ideas and beautiful things, is the natural work of reason; when it has been accomplished very imperfectly, or not at all, we have a barbarous mind, a mind full of chaotic sensations, objectless passions, and undigested ideas." Life is not measured by intensity of feeling; rather intelligence is, or should be, the highest activity.¹⁶

Perhaps nowhere else is Santayana's revulsion against what he considers the excesses of the romantic mind so apparent as in his considerations of Browning and Whitman. The temperament of Santayana and the romantic impulse are seen in sharp contrast.

A second and related problem which Santayana sees in Browning is Browning's idea of a continued life. That is, that there is an infinite amount of time, in this world and the next, for all activity, for all unfinished business. This concept is the opposite of both rational philosophy and Christian doctrine which regard the end and take care to leave a "finished life" and as near perfect a character as possible. The life

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Ibid., pp. 194-198, 201.

of reason involves a development, a progress, an unfolding of a known ideal which constitutes an intelligible good. On the contrary, Browning's view sees life as an inexhaustible game. Although religion for Browning takes the name of Christianity, it is really more akin to the pagan worship of Thor or Odin. "The zest of life becomes a cosmic emotion."¹⁷

But does it matter, one is tempted to ask, if this exuberance is a sort of pagan worship? Did not Santayana contend that Shakespeare would have been better off had he been frankly pagan and that it is not this system or that system of religion which counts but some system? Santayana would undoubtedly answer that his comment about Shakespeare implied a paganism which saw pagan gods regulating a world in which acts had consequences and ends or goals were honored--a vision quite different from the irrational and indiscriminate enthusiasm he finds in Browning. Santayana does note too that the ultimate business of philosophy and religion is to deal with general principles and final aims. Herein is Browning's weakness; his strength, Santayana does admit, is the depiction of immediate things.¹⁸

Once again Santayana evokes his classic principles and outlines the intimate relationship between philosophy, poetry, and religion: "The same powers of conception and expression are needed in fiction, which, if turned to reflection, would

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 203-204, 206.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 208.

produce a good philosophy. Reason is necessary to the perception of high beauty. Discipline is indispensable to art A failure of reason is a failure of art and taste."¹⁹

However, it must be observed that Browning is a level above Whitman even though they both are poets of the elemental. Whitman's imagination was limited to sensations; Browning's, to the stream of thought and feeling. Browning is the "poet of soliloquy." But both Whitman and Browning must be given recognition as being representative of their age.²⁰

The criticism of Santayana's judgment of Browning and the principles underlying it can take two courses: 1) that Santayana has misinterpreted or misread Browning's works and 2) that the classic principles of reasoned thought and disciplined form and structure are not necessary to great literature or even that such principles may be detrimental to the poetic impulse.

Interestingly, several writers have contended that Santayana has in fact misread Browning or not read him at all! It has again been pointed out that Santayana has confused the dramatist with the dramatized. Browning has offered a wide range of characters, each exhibiting a facet of human experience, each illustrating a stage of development in Browning's law of growth. The poetic characters of Browning are then not necessarily a reflection of the poet himself. Also Browning's

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 209-210.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 211.

characters do learn from experience, for Browning's whole method of learning is through trial and error, and his characters are pictured as engaged in this process. Therefore, the striving which the characters are engaged in does imply a progress, not simply a rise and fall of action denoting no forward movement as Santayana suggests. Such characters as Cleon, Karshish, Luria, Caliban, Bishop Blougram, Pompilia, Colombe, and Childe Roland are all seen at varying levels of spiritual growth. The point is that Browning's investigation of life was through an interpretation of it, not a codifying of laws to govern it.²¹

Another tack might be taken in demolishing Santayana's argument that Browning's heroes are too subjective. That is, what Santayana has found defective in Browning he condones and even praises in himself. When Mario in the Epilogue of The Last Puritan accuses Santayana of having all the characters sound like their author, Santayana readily concedes and replies that "fiction is poetry, poetry is inspiration, and every word should come from the poet's heart, not out of the mouths of other people."²² Obviously every poet must create out of himself, but the point Santayana seems to be raising in the Browning essay is the degree to which the poet revels in what he finds in himself and the degree to which his creative imagination

²¹ Sherwood, Undercurrents of Influence, pp. 329-331.

²² New York, 1936, pp. 600-601.

allows him to transcend his own more limited, personal view. Kenneth Knickerbocker does make a point, though, which cannot be totally ignored. The only difference, he says, between the subjectivity in Santayana and that found in Browning is that according to Santayana he is the proper hero and Browning is not.²³

Santayana, many feel, was also quite confused and misled about Browning's concept of love. Although not explicitly stated, Santayana seems to suggest by the passages he quotes from Browning and by his emphasis on love between man and woman as it is expressed by Browning that such love is the only kind which exists for the poet. Not so. Love included, for Browning, many types of relationships: love of friend for friend, of artist for his art, of patriot for his country, of mother for her child, of man for his god. These all are parts of a universal love which is the creative power of God at work in the universe.²⁴

Moreover, Santayana's contention that Browning is incapable of idealizing such love has also been met by the response that evidently the critic has failed to read his Browning.²⁵ The real and the ideal blend in Browning, as they should if

²³ "Robert Browning: A Modern Appraisal," p. 10.

²⁴ Sherwood, pp. 331-333.

²⁵ Cf. Sherwood, p. 339 and Helen Dryer Woodard, "Santayana on Robert Browning: A Pessimist Criticism," Poet-Lore, XII (Jan., 1901), 105-106.

the ideal is to be of any value, and his personal love poems are examples of such a blending.²⁶ Santayana, however, obviously prefers the sort of idealizing process found in Dante's portrayal of Beatrice in which the poet fused the love of a real girl with his love of religion. Knickerbocker suggests mockingly (and irrelevantly) that one problem with such an idealized love is that the idealizer benefits little from the performance for was not Browning happier than Dante? But Knickerbocker's real complaint is that Santayana in condemning Browning's portrayal of reality was condemning the ingredient which gave not only Browning's but any poetry its power. If Santayana were followed there might be saints but not poets. Knickerbocker interprets Santayana to mean that poetry involving love will always idealize the loved one so that the result bears faint resemblance to the original human object. The result would be absolute monotony. "Beatrice, Giovanna, Elizabeth Barrett, Juliet, Lady Macbeth and Grace Kelly when rendered by the idealizing imagination all come out as indistinguishable from one another." Logically, then, the poet who subscribed to this view would write one poem and be done. Browning, in contrast, wrote many love poems, all distinct and unique, alive and warm. Knickerbocker scathingly concludes that Santayana, like Carlyle, wanted to be a poet but had to content himself with outlining what poetry should be; both came up with im-

²⁶ Sherwood, pp. 329-334.

possible ideals as a result. "Frustrated poets, one concludes, become very fussy critics of poetry."²⁷

In addition, Santayana's comments which suggest that Browning did not write any reflective poetry are considered by Browning lovers to be grossly inaccurate. Such poems as "One Word More" and "A Death in the Desert" are cited as examples of Browning rising to the level of contemplation,²⁸ or "How It Strikes a Contemporary" and "Amphibian" might be referred to as evidence that Browning was concerned with the ideal. Knickerbocker even insists that Browning recognizes the affinity between poetry and religion,²⁹ and Margaret Sherwood asserts that Browning was a thinker, not merely a reveler in emotions.³⁰

Even though it is possible to cite examples that show Browning as more a man of the classic tradition than Santayana would admit, the disagreement between Santayana and Browning is not simply because Santayana has failed to correctly interpret Browning. The real argument stems from the differences between Santayana's philosophy of life and that expressed by Browning. And it cannot be doubted that much in Santayana's outlook is alien to the twentieth century as well as to Browning.

For example, the idea that perfection is attainable and

²⁷ "Robert Browning," pp. 7-8.

²⁸ Sherwood, p. 334.

²⁹ Pp. 9-10.

³⁰ Pp. 326.

not only attainable but clearly defined and conceived by the intellect and that progress is moving regularly upward toward this final goal seems rather naive and outdated.³¹ To Browning progress was a real concept, but it differed from Santayana's in that the ideal was not clearly defined but rather was unfolded and realized through the actual pursuit of it. Development also involves the emotions as well as the intellect (Santayana would concede this point, but he would allow that the emotions are a foundation only, while undoubtedly Browning would want them to play a more integral part in man's total life). The achievement of virtue involves more than an intellectual notion of it. Also the term "finished life" is simply one that is not in the present vocabulary. What Santayana does not realize is that now the world is interpreted in terms of life; he is limited by his idea of the stationary, the permanent, as Browning was limited by his over confidence in change and growth.³²

Browning sees a greater place for action in the universe, actions which are not only ideal but which are in conformity with nature. Santayana, on the other hand, sees man's duty

³¹ The place of the ideal is discussed in more detail in the chapter "The Ideal versus the Real." As is noted there, perfection or the ideal, for Santayana, does not always seem attainable, but rather it exists as something which does not affect the real world. In his discussion of Browning, however, Santayana seems to imply that one should at least strive toward perfection. See Poetry and Religion, p. 204.

³² Sherwood, pp. 324-326, 328.

not so much to act as to reason. It is only by reason that he may exist in an alien universe; he should act as little as possible, making sure that such action is rational. Browning sees a moral obligation to actualize one's ideals, and Santayana is in error when he considers that Browning advocates action for its own sake. Thus Browning emphasizes the value of ideals as much as Santayana does.³³

Browning sees a limitation on what man can know; Santayana sees a limitation on what man can do. Browning urges that even the vaguest or blindest of aspirations be followed if they lead to action since man is protected by Providence, a Providence which Santayana, of course, does not recognize. To Browning any action is better than no action and man's worth is measured by his willingness to act. Browning, as Santayana recognizes, does not seek perfection or completion because there would then be nothing beyond. If Browning is contemptuous of rationality and perfection, it stems from his idea that man is just starting on his course of development.³⁴

As Santayana sees the value of some action, Browning sees the value of some thought (necessary in old age or the next life). Both have their goal or their ideal of the good: Santayana calls his knowledge; Browning calls his love. Both philosophies are in a sense extremes.³⁵

³³ Woodard, "Santayana on Browning," pp. 98-100.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 100-103.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 105.

There is also simply a difference in temperament between the critic and the poet. Santayana had not Browning's sense of sympathy or humanity for the sinner, the figure not mentioned by history. He underestimates in both Browning and Whitman the moral worth which lies in a warm understanding and love for this human animal.³⁶ Santayana was able to intellectually understand and even appreciate the romantic impulse, even that of the "barbarian," but he could not really feel them. This difference in temperament and in philosophy has been admitted by even the Browning partisans. Knickerbocker alleges, "A vibrant Browning did not have a chance when measured against the narrow criterion invented by this curiously austere critic." Santayana, he contends, was simply disturbed by the energy radiated by Browning and appalled by his exuberance.³⁷ In fact, Browning might not have objected to Santayana's calling him a barbarian. And Miss Sherwood wonders whether Santayana did not in reality simply object to spontaneous lyric poetry and dramatic poetry, both of which may express emotion or demand a self-surrender to feelings, but whose purpose is to reveal life, not dictate it.³⁸

Those of the classic temperament will agree with Santayana;³⁹

³⁶ Howgate, George Santayana, p. 147.

³⁷ "Robert Browning," pp. 3-4.

³⁸ Howgate, George Santayana, p. 147; Sherwood, p. 339.

³⁹ Marvin Mudrick, for example, agrees that Santayana's evaluations of Browning and Whitman were correct and that the

those of the romantic disposition will prefer Browning. The conflict between the two is one which not only concerns a conception of what are the proper elements for poetry, but also involves contradictory views of life and what is to be of paramount value in that life: shall it be the thoughtful reflection about what constitutes the good or shall it be the enthusiastic engagement in life's activities? There is no a priori reason for advocating one over the other.

advantage of the perspective of another half century supports Santayana's views. ["The Life of Reason," The Hudson Review, 10 (Summer, 1957), 276.]

The Aesthetic or the Philosophic: A Compromise?

Santayana's comments on Shakespeare, Whitman, and Browning must be taken as strong evidence that the critic places great importance on philosophic content when evaluating the merits of literary works. Santayana has been called the philosophic critic and in view of his letter advising more philosophy in criticism, he probably would have been delighted by the appellation. Is philosophy then the essence of creative literature?

Even in The Sense of Beauty when the focus appears to be on the aesthetic elements in art there is a suggestion that Santayana recognizes that literary art merits special consideration. For instance, he remarks, when discussing social attributes in relation to aesthetic effects, that in poetry effect depends more on what is related than on the simple sensuous effects. Such poetic themes as deal with patriotic or parental feelings or themes which deal with love furnish a subject matter which catches the attention so that the aesthetic response may then come into play. However, in the same book, although he notes that the main effect of language is in its meaning or ideas expressed, still language is "primarily a sort of music," and the resulting beauty comes from the form or structure which it gives to an experience. A particular form or manner of phrasing may give an entirely new view or insight into the experience rendered. Naturally poets may lean to one effect or the other: they may be musicians or psychologists, the latter achieving their effects "not by the

intrinsic mastery of language, but by a closer adaptation of it to thing."¹ The dramatic poet is an example of the psychologist poet.

Santayana also observes that too exclusive an aesthetic response produces an effect of "closeness and artificiality," and that human nature being what it is man is often most interested in things practical or passionate. Thus in both nature and art effects which are solely aesthetic are rare.² Or again in Reason in Art Santayana comments that should art become interested only in itself (i.e. technique) and not in its subject matter the result is shabby and melancholy. "Literature that calls itself purely aesthetic is in truth prurient"³

The answer seems to be a middle path. There are two extremes in language: that which approaches music, which is concerned solely with sensuous sound effect, and the opposite such as mathematical reasoning or a telegraphic style. Between the two should lie the domain of poetry or imaginative expression. The aesthetic medium is important, but it must incorporate facts and in expressing those facts or ideas, this content then receives elaboration and heightened meaning.⁴

It must be reiterated, too, that harmony of interests is

¹ Pp. 62, 167.

² The Sense of Beauty, pp. 207-208.

³ Pp. 152-153.

⁴ Reason in Art, p. 75.

still the key to Santayana's philosophy. Artistic interests must be harmonized with the practical interests of life. Artistic interests cannot be isolated ones, and all aesthetic values are ultimately moral values. These ideas are best summed up in a passage from Santayana's essay "What is Aesthetics?" Here three key ideas are incorporated: that art is an essential ingredient in the total life of man (not a mere frivolous or superficial activity); but that this art must harmonize with man's other interests; and that this art, though it may have a spontaneous immediacy, is ultimately rational.

Now a part of man's ideal, an ingredient in his ultimate happiness, is to find satisfaction for his eyes, for his imagination, for his hand or voice aching to embody latent tendencies in explicit forms. Perfect success in this vital, aesthetic undertaking is possible, however, only when artistic impulse is quite healthy and representative, that is, when it is favourable to all other interests and is in turn supported by them all. If this harmony fails the aesthetic activity collapses inwardly by inanition--since every other impulse is fighting against it--while for the same reason its external products are rendered trivial, meretricious, and mean. They will still remain symptomatic, as excrements are, but they will cease to be works of rational art, because they will have no further vital function, no human use. It will become impossible for a mind with the least scope to relish them, or to find them even initially beautiful. Aesthetic good is accordingly no separable value; it is not realizable by itself in a set of objects not otherwise interesting. Anything which is to entertain the imagination must first have exercised the senses; it must first have stimulated some animal reaction, engaged attention, and intertwined itself in the vital process; and later this aesthetic good, with animal and sensuous values embedded in it and making its very substance, must be swallowed up in a rational life; for reason will immediately feel itself called upon to synthesize those imaginative activities with whatever else is valuable. As the underlying sensuous good must be necessarily merged in the imaginative (their product being what

we call aesthetic charm), so in a cultivated mind ulterior rational interest, never being out of sight, will merge in the same total and immediate appreciation"⁵

The life of reason whose essence is this harmony of interests becomes in itself aesthetic.

Art then serves the whole man; there is no inevitable chasm between the capacity of art to delight as well as to increase man's knowledge. "If art is that element in the Life of Reason which consists in modifying its environment the better to attain its end, art may be expected to subserve all parts of the human ideal, to increase man's comfort, knowledge, and delight."⁶

However, in a later essay in 1922 entitled "On My Friendly Critics," Santayana included a rather unexpected comment which many of his explicators were quick to pounce on. Here Santayana indicates that his early stress on philosophic content in poetry which would express the "moral burden of life" and which must be "rich in wisdom" was only the product of his youthful desire to find a rational justification for poetry. He serenely reflects, "Age has made me less exacting, and I can now find quite sufficient perfection in poetry, like that of the Chinese and Arabians, without much philosophic scope, in mere grace and feeling and music and cloud-castles and frolic." An expression of the profound experiences of man indeed add a "great

⁵ P. 35.

⁶ Reason in Art, pp. 16-17; the italics are mine.

tragic sublimity" to a work but "the mystic cry" is enough for any work which is to be described as intrinsically poetic.⁷ Although Irving Singer sees these last comments as a completely contradictory standard as compared to Santayana's earlier one⁸ and Major takes them as the expression of a great and beneficial broadening of Santayana's critical perspective,⁹ these remarks are those of a man who, in the most human fashion, has simply become less demanding as he has grown older. His earlier writings recognize the poetry of the "mystic cry" simply as lesser poetry, a category which the critic was not so tolerant of. Now at the age of 59 this type of poetry delights him more; he has realized, evidently, the exclusiveness of his earlier, more limited view. The standard has not changed; rather the sympathy for those works which did not measure up has expanded.¹⁰ Nonetheless, intriguing as it is to hypothesize on what Santayana's later judgments of literary works might have been in view of these later comments (although it might be remembered that his view of Shakespeare changed little), the fact remains

⁷ In Soliloquies, p. 254.

⁸ Santayana's Aesthetics, p. 178.

⁹ "Santayana on Shakespeare," p. 479.

¹⁰ Evidently Santayana also mellowed in his conception of "barbarian." He comments in 1928 that it had always been a sorrow to him not to fully understand the "wild poetry" and the strength of the barbarian impulse. After all, such impulses which create rebellions against the existing nature of things may be the beginnings of fresh civilizations. These habits of mind seem wasteful and crude only in their beginnings. (Santayana as quoted by Cory, The Later Years, p. 30.)

that nearly all his literary criticism was written during his early years, and it is on these writings that Santayana as a literary critic must be judged. Anything else must be conjecture.

Granting then that for Santayana the noblest of poetic works is philosophic in vision, is such a standard anything but a much too idealistic dream? Can poetry be philosophic? Santayana himself admits that the supreme poet is in limbo still.¹¹ This standard has also led Santayana, (and would undoubtedly lead others who might adopt it) to some aberrations in taste. His total appreciation of Shakespeare, for instance, is certainly not as rewarding as it might be to those who read his remarks for a broader understanding of the great bard. Even more peculiar are some of his pronouncements on the relative merits of Petrarch, Michelangelo, and Lorenzo de Medici as poetic artists. Petrarch is "musical, ingenious, learned, and passionate, but . . . weak. His art is greater than his thought." Intellectually there is nothing noteworthy about Petrarch's poetry and his love brings him little wisdom or consolation. In short, Petrarch's problem is that he has failed to idealize his love. Not so with Michelangelo or Lorenzo de Medici. Although Michelangelo's verses are "laboured and rough," they are intelligible, they idealize love, and thus this love is merged with the love of God. Furthermore these poems are impersonal, evidently an attribute of idealized

¹¹ Three Philosophical Poets, p. 215.

love (a love which is also the essence of platonism in poetry). Lorenzo de Medici, like Michelangelo, "rises to the purest sphere of tragedy and religion." Even though his metaphors may be thin, one can feel the "austerity and firmness of reason." Santayana's judgments of these three are rather confusing. He admits, agreeing with the judgment of time, that Petrarch is a greater poet but that the latter two poets are greater men: they had a greater vision. So far many would agree, but Santayana is talking about their poetry, not simply the characteristics which make them great individuals. In spite of his admission that Petrarch is the greater poet, he obviously prefers the poetry of the other two.¹²

Perhaps a philosophic vision such as Santayana demands is not compatible with the poetic imagination or fine art. T. S. Eliot, for instance, argues that when the functions of the poet and the philosopher reside in one man the result can only be disastrous to both endeavors. Better the philosopher and poet be two separate men. He cites as an example Coleridge, who he feels practiced one function only at the expense of the other. True, poets may borrow a philosophy but to intangle their own philosophic conceptions, as Shelley did, with those borrowed causes deterioration of the poetic insight. And Goethe, who might be cited as both philosopher and poet, Eliot believes, succeeded in neither capacity.¹³ R. P. Blackmur also is con-

¹² Poetry and Religion, pp. 130-135.

cerned by this union of philosophy and poetry and maintains that both may express moral value but that poetry "enacts or represents in the flesh what [philosophy] reduces to principle or raises to the ideal." Neither philosophy nor poetry can fully satisfy the demands of the other.¹⁴ Singer sees the need for philosophic insight in poetry but sees the need to use the word "philosophy" in a much broader sense than Santayana uses it. Poetic vision cannot be philosophical in the sense that it must be discursive or analytical, laborious or overly intellectual. However, poetry can and should be philosophic in the sense that it should express a contemplative insight into the universal order; not that poetry should convey information but that it should use the ultimate vision of philosophy which can be poetic and imaginative. Poetry may use the discursive parts of philosophy as a base material from which the poetic imagination springs. It can be said then that Shakespeare had philosophic scope, for what is necessary for the great artist is that he understand the world and approach the human plight with sympathetic insight. In short, a rigorous system of metaphysics is not required.¹⁵ Robert Bridges, on the other hand, seems to be most sympathetic to Santayana's demands. Bridges insists that the function of

¹³ Eliot, The Use of Poetry, p. 99.

¹⁴ The Double Agent, Essays in Craft and Elucidation, (New York, 1935), p. 281.

¹⁵ Santayana's Aesthetics, pp. 174-177, 183-185.

poetry is to emotionalize philosophy. Great poems can and will be aesthetic expositions of a "complete theory of human life." But poetry will use philosophy, not be used by it.¹⁶

Another problem which has bothered many is Santayana's tendency to discuss philosophic content apart from the medium or language in which it is clothed. Katherine Gilbert analyzes Santayana's concept of expression as a separate third element in the aesthetic and concludes that such a separation is not only illogical but absurd. For example, Santayana contends that if one would remove the medium of a drama (e.g. Othello) or lift from the tragedy the mere facts and events nothing would remain. Therefore, argues Santayana, such an experiment as this would be proof that what delights is the medium and not the painful emotions portrayed.¹⁷ But any transcription of content from simple plot summaries to glowing interpretative accounts is something much less than the work itself. As Blackmur says, there is no vicar for poetry on earth. Furthermore, argues Gilbert, Santayana's idea that art springs from pure feeling or animal impulse and that control, form, or idea is grafted on implies a jump in the artistic process which is not allowable. As Gilbert views the process there is expressiveness (and beauty) inherent in even the earliest or lowest aesthetic impulses: both cohere and develop simultaneously.¹⁸

¹⁶ As quoted by Harold A. Larrabee, "Robert Bridges and George Santayana," The American Scholar, I (March, 1932), 177-178.

¹⁷ The Sense of Beauty, p. 226.

F. R. Leavis attacks Santayana on essentially the same grounds but uses Santayana's essays on Shakespeare as his point of departure. Leavis contends that Santayana obviously does not understand the poetic use of language (exemplified by Shakespeare); in poetry a mastering theme controls and commands the words and their significance. The two elements are inseparable.¹⁹

However, aside from Santayana's comment on extracting the plot from a drama, which is an unaccountable blunder, his separation of significance from the other aesthetic qualities of language such as sound and form appears to be primarily for analytical purposes. As early as 1918 in a letter to Logan Pearsall Smith Santayana clearly states that he understands that style cannot be separated from thought. "The form in which a thought is cast is part of its quality, and . . . the quality of the idea itself is only a deeper sort of style of expression"20

The above criticisms all have merit in that they all point up some essential weakness or strength in Santayana's literary philosophy. Clearly, poetry of the highest order must deal with significant human problems be they man's relationship

18 "Santayana's Doctrine of Aesthetic Expression," The Philosophical Review, XXXV (May, 1926), 221-223.

19 The Common Pursuit, (New York, 1952), pp. 123, 126.

20 Letters, p. 165.

with himself, with other men, with his god, or with a cosmic order or power which is beyond his own limited powers. Also such philosophic poetry is clearly within the realm of the possible, if not in that most perfect form outlined by Santayana, at least in a form which foreshadows perfection. Santayana's own Goethe, Lucretius, and Dante serve as noble examples. Poetry which expresses only the delightful, fanciful play of the imagination has a recognized value but it ultimately must be a secondary value. Still, great poetry need not render a complete and total cosmic consciousness. For one thing, the twentieth century does not generally produce the sort of mind which sees such totalities; the world has become increasingly too complex. Also man now tends to regard his own wisdom as tentative rather than absolute. Moreover it is obvious that the greatest insight poorly expressed will fall much lower than a limited view which is conveyed with precision and brilliance. However, such categorizing becomes dangerous since, except for the crudest analytical procedures, language and thought are inseparable in creative literature, and the form and perception which it conveys are molded by each other.

The Ideal versus the Real

Poetry then for Santayana should be philosophic and as already indicated in the previous chapters the philosophic embodies the ideal. The question is: what happens when the ideal conflicts with the real? Is a poet to ignore a realistic aspect of the world if it is not compatible with his ideal scheme of things? Can he not picture the unpleasant, the ugly, the sordid, since ideally such would not exist? Or if the function of art is the portrayal of the beautiful what place do these unaesthetic elements have? This conflict between the ideal, in itself a thing of beauty, and a realistic description of the human predicament which often is neither ideal nor beautiful is a second major point of tension and conflict in Santayana's literary theory.

First, however, the ideal needs to be more clearly defined. The ideal as portrayed in poetry does not mean simply an image in the imagination nor does it mean an imaginative utopia. It does mean, to Santayana, a consistent moral attitude toward all things in the world. The poet must judge and coordinate his interests thereby establishing a hierarchy of goods and evils. Santayana cautions that persons and events are placed on this scale by their true merit and worth; personal interest or mere instinctive responses as the determining factors will not suffice (though just how true merit and worth are to be determined is not clear). The ideal becomes not merely an

idle vision, but a powerful force. In other words, persons and events must be rendered significant and this significance is portrayed by the poet who does not allow personal sentiment to color his judgment but determines his standard from a wide experience and a comprehensive and sympathetic insight.¹

Much later in life Santayana was still expounding this same view. In 1930 he was again attacking Browning by maintaining that it was Browning's "moral equivocation" and his "forced optimism" which were repellent to him. Even the cruel and the sordid were portrayed as the model and standard of what ought to be. Browning failed in his duty as a moralist: failed to select from the world what there was to be loved and failed to renounce that which was bad.² It is not Browning's love of life that Santayana objects to; it is the fact that Browning did not love life for the good that is in it.³

It is precisely because Santayana sees this sort of idealism in Dickens that Dickens fares so well under his critical eye. Many have been amazed at what might seem unduly high praise of Dickens, especially coming from one of such demanding and aristocratic tastes, and temperamentally the two do seem worlds apart.⁴

¹ Three Philosophical Poets, pp. 95, 129.

² "Brief History of My Opinions," in George P. Adams and William Pepperell Montague, Contemporary American Philosophy, Personal Statements, (New York, 1930), p. 246.

³ Letters, p. 187; to William Lyon Phelps, Sept. 8, 1929.

Santayana, discerning as usual, is not insensible to Dickens' shortcomings and takes pains to clear these out of the way. Dickens was, for instance, oblivious to the greater themes of religion, science, politics, or art. He had no real ideas, he was not a thinker; but what he had was a "sympathetic participation in the daily life of mankind." Nor did he understand the upper classes, their manners or feelings. He conformed to proprieties and public prejudices and had little understanding of complex characters. What then is left for the artist? Everything, answers Santayana, that is important in daily life, everything which determines if it shall be worth living or not, "because a simple good life is worth living, and an elaborate bad life is not." There remain such things as eating and drinking, the glow of the hearth, the traffic of the ports and cities.⁵

Most important, though, Dickens had an eye for the distinctions which the moralist must make in the world. "He glided through the slums like one of his own little heroes, uncontaminated by their squalor and confusion, courageous and firm

⁴ It is interesting to note, however, that the Dickens essay was written during World War I when Santayana was residing in England. He comments, "Not being able to fix my thoughts on abstract matters I had read Dickens, and learned to love that humbler side of English sentiment and virtue." [The Middle Span: Persons and Places II, (New York, 1945), p. 90.] Perhaps in a sense Dickens was for Santayana at that time a means of escape.

⁵ "Dickens," in Soliloquies, pp. 59-62; first published in The Dial, 71 (Nov., 1921), 537-549.

in his clear allegiances amid the flux of things, a play angel at the Carnival, his heart aflame, his voice always flute-like in its tenderness and warning. This is the true relation of spirit to existence."⁶

Surprisingly Santayana disagrees with many Dickens critics by insisting that Dickens did not exaggerate but had a true vision of human existence. For Santayana the world is in fact comic and absurd and Dickens' humor comes from his piercing the illusion that the world is anything else. It takes courage and universal kindness, both of which Dickens had, to see the world truly. Dickens saw the absurdity in life but realized that for those living it, life was quite a serious matter. He was a "good philosopher."⁷

Dickens' works are the "perfection of morals" because he made a clear distinction between good and evil and because he felt this distinction was important. He had a sympathetic understanding yet an understanding which did not impair the severity of his judgments, for he makes an "uncompromising distinction between white and black." Though his villains are admirably drawn, surly and despicable, there is no sentimental apology for them, no romantic glorification of them.⁸

Santayana has praised Dickens for much the same reasons the twentieth century has condemned him.

⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 71-72.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 65-70.

If the ideal then is a moral hierarchy, unpleasant reality or evil does have a distinct place. It may appear in art if it is shunned and rejected. The poet is one with the moralist. (It almost sounds as if the poet is one with the preacher, although undoubtedly Santayana would reject such a notion.) The poet becomes a creator of human values.

The evil present in tragedy, as noted earlier, was of special concern to Santayana and he took great pains to justify its existence. Santayana is aware that the emotions called up by tragedy are complex. First the audience must react to the suffering presented, must identify itself with the suffering hero; therefore the audience suffers with the hero but this pain, which can never be aesthetic, must be balanced by a feeling of pleasure. It is this conflict of emotions which gives depth to the feelings thus aroused. Paradoxically, a certain fascination with the terrifying often provides the necessary pleasurable element.⁹

Other pleasurable elements come from having nobility and virtue or a glorification of life presented even though they are eventually destroyed, for one of the most agreeable things about tragedy is the suggestion of what it might have been if it had not been tragic. Too wicked a character repels because a sufficient expression of good is not present. The storm scene in Lear illustrates this point. In the midst of the miseries of the characters and their suffering a beautiful

⁹ The Sense of Beauty, p. 225.

effect is achieved by the presence of good, for example, the dumb fidelity of the Fool or the sublime humanity of Lear.¹⁰

Santayana takes a rather traditional view of the role of catharsis in tragedy. It is the "liberation of the soul" of the hero and the audience which consoles the hero for his misfortunes and the audience for their feelings of terror and pity. The audience is reassured that there is "liberation beyond, and an ultimate peace." A tragic situation also transfers one's feelings to a larger object and a person is able to grasp the essence of the "finished life"; the mind is purged of stifled energies and a glimpse of "ultimate destinies" is achieved, but catharsis is also the consciousness of how evil things can be.¹¹

However, the fact remains that tragedy (and comedy) please in spite of the evil or unpleasantness presented and not because of it. There is no aesthetic value in the presentation of evil as such and therefore the tragic is never "pure."¹²

Santayana goes on, though, to expand his definition of the ideal. The ideal is not only a moral hierarchy; in addition it must reconstruct the materials gained from experience into something that is better, purer, than reality can ever be. The poet must reconstruct his concept of life in order that

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 228-229.

¹¹ The Sense of Beauty, pp. 238-239; Poetry and Religion, p. 281; Reason in Art, p. 65.

¹² The Sense of Beauty, pp. 258-259.

it be "nearer the heart's desire."¹³ This idea, first suggested in The Sense of Beauty, is elaborated in Poetry and Religion:

The great function of poetry . . . is precisely this: to repair to the material of experience, seizing hold of the reality of sensation and fancy beneath the surface of conventional ideas, and then out of that living but indefinite material to build new structures, richer, finer, fitter to the primary tendencies of our nature, truer to the ultimate possibilities of the soul. Our descent into the element of our being is then justified by our subsequent freer ascent toward its goal; we revert to sense only to find food for reason; we destroy conventions only to construct ideals.

Such analysis for the sake of creation is the essence of all great poetry.¹⁴

The ideal then is a composite of what is considered good in the world.¹⁵

No poet could better illustrate the workings of the ideal than Shelley, for he looked at the landscape and saw there what he wanted to see. His imagination perceived a spirituality there rather than the grosser substance of reality. Thus Santayana calls him a "musician of the landscape."¹⁶

Shelley's poetry is distinctly poetical for it is divinely inspired, and taking Arnold to task, Santayana notes that Shelley is no more ineffectual than any angel should be. Like an angel Shelley did not understand reality, but he reveled in the world of the imagination, in the world of ideas. Santayana also

¹³ Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁴ Poetry and Religion, p. 270.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁶ Three Philosophical Poets, pp. 58-59.

refutes Francis Thompson by noting that if Shelley's vision disintegrates the world, it is only to build it again "nearer to the heart's desire," to make "some more Elysian home for love, or some more dazzling symbol for that infinite beauty which is the need--the profound, aching, imperative need--of the human soul." Shelley's idealism was that of Plato: the good like a magnet will draw all life toward it and ideals exist as eternal realities, forever pure and unchanging.¹⁷

But a love of the ideal, a knowledge of what ought to be has a necessary counterpart in the condemnation of the actual which does not measure up to that ideal. These are the two dimensions of Shelley's genius, for his moral feelings were as abashed and torn by his horror at the evil which existed in the world as they were elevated at his vision of what was good. However, Santayana is not about to condone Shelley's pictures of crime and torture which he describes as the "quintessence of distilled badness." To exaggerate good is to heighten the moral sense of things; to exaggerate the bad is to make worse what is already bad enough, and there is no benefit in that. Though Santayana does not linger on this defect in Shelley, nevertheless he is firm and decisive in his denunciation.¹⁸

¹⁷ Winds of Doctrine, pp. 156-157, 159, 163; Santayana's essay on Shelley (although Shelley is discussed in passing in other essays) came out of "poetry bees" at which Santayana met weekly in 1889 and again in 1910-11 with friends to read Shelley almost exclusively. (The Middle Span, pp. 102-103.)

Still Shelley's belief that all suffering and misery in the world could be destroyed, in short, his belief in perfectibility, has had a tremendous effect on poetry. Shelley's idealism, according to Santayana, has been enormously influential in pointing the way for both the subject matter and the spirit and quality of poetry from that time on.¹⁹

True, much of Shelley's poetry such as "Hellas," "Adonais," even "Prometheus," and "Epipsychidion" is removed to a mystical, metaphysical region. Yet Shelley was not content with the "intangible realms of poetry or religion;" he sought to create an earthly paradise, and it is in this respect that Shelley did not understand the world. Santayana, the disillusioned, sees that Shelley was under an illusion, for earthly paradises are fantasies of the mind. But Santayana's own poetic prose minimizes this defect. "Shelley . . . did not understand the real constitution of nature. It was hidden from him by a cloud, all woven of shifting rainbows and bright tears." Poets who have the courage to paint the truth have not yet appeared and all modern schools of poetry, once they are out of fashion, are seen to be sentimental and romantic. For Santayana Shelley's excellence then lies in the fact that his illusions were simply better than those of other poets because they were "so wonderfully fine, subtle, and palpitating; that they betray passions

18. Winds of Doctrine, pp. 160, 164.

19. Ibid., p. 165.

and mental habits so singularly generous and pure," and because Shelley did not believe in the necessity of the vulgar (sometimes called fact or custom).²⁰

Hence it seems from Santayana's comments on Shelley that the depiction of evil has little place in poetry nor does a direct transcription of reality. The ideal seems ethereal and spiritual and reality gross by contrast. But Santayana states elsewhere that reality does play its part in the creation of this ideal. The ideal must have a link with reality and the two meet when the ideal is conceived by observing what is pleasing in nature. Furthermore the ideal would be irrelevant fancy if it did not have this contact with reality.²¹ Although it might appear from the remarks on Shelley that the ideal is an irrelevant thing, such is not the case. If the ideal is irrelevant it is only irrelevant in the most pragmatic, practical sense. Life is more than simply existence, and it is in this added dimension that the ideal plays its part. Man's hopes, aspirations, his vision of the good, even if not immediately realizable or realizable at all still have significance and value for him.

A sort of selective realism then must be the foundation on which the ideal is built. The poet chooses what "is pertinent to ultimate interests and can speak eloquently to the

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 168-170.

²¹ The Sense of Beauty, p. 124.

soul." These elements which are chosen and recombined to form the ideal then become symbols for the ideal world and the ideal life.²²

Santayana defends this ideal in a rather intriguing essay on Cervantes, the only piece of literary criticism on one of his own countrymen. Amid his reasoned praise for Cervantes' masterpiece comes a stirring denunciation of those who would see Don Quixote as a satire on human idealism. Not so, cries Santayana. Even though Quixote may in some sense be a portrait of Cervantes' own chivalrous ideas and their disappointing conflicts with the world, there is no suggestion of malice or bitterness in the portrait. In addition, Cervantes left the impress of his own nobility on the character of Quixote, for Quixote's mind is occupied with the lovely, the happy, the beautiful, and his madness is a product of his spirit. He is courageous and intelligent as well as mad.²³ Even in

²² Reason in Art, pp. 113-114; Three Philosophical Poets, p. 58.

²³ Santayana, in the last year of his life, published an article comparing Don Quixote with Tom Sawyer because he wanted "to understand whether the love of adventure in Tom Sawyer [was] a romantic passion, with a corresponding idealistic faith (as in Don Quixote, who was mad) or only a love of mischief, of risk, of swagger as in every school boy." ["Letters from Rome," Commonweal, LVII (Oct. 24, 1952), 62.] Both Quixote and Tom do share a disinterestedness and a romantic imagination which lead to a mixture of chivalry and charity, but Santayana concludes that Tom's fantasies were those of adolescence, and "not as in Quixote, a settled vital demand for supremacy of the spirit." Tom did not have a serious ideal but only a vague humanitarianism. ["Tom Sawyer and Don Quixote," Mark Twain Quarterly, 9 (Winter, 1952), 3.]

the character of Sancho grossness and absurd gullibility are relieved by wit.²⁴

Cervantes' avowed purpose was to bring fiction back from the extravagances found in the books on chivalry to a study of real life. In so doing his purpose was to amuse, not to chastise or admonish. If there is no disenchantment or despair, it is because Cervantes was all his life not only chivalrous but also deeply Christian. He would have been indignant, Santayana argues, had he imagined anyone would construe his work as an attack on religion or even on chivalry itself. The moral of the work is that idealism is empty and absurd when not in touch with reality. Idealism should not be surrendered in either literature or life, but simply a better adjustment with reality must be made.²⁵ If this is Cervantes' theme in Don Quixote, it is also Santayana's philosophy of poetry.

However, Santayana weakens his argument by adding rather lamely that in such a parable as Don Quixote where the transcription of life is so direct, it is possible to have innumerable interpretations. After all for every man to be able to see in a work his own personal experiences is the greatest praise which can be given a poet.²⁶ Such an observation hardly sounds like the Santayana who usually makes his pronouncements with conviction and his judgments in tones of the absolute.

²⁴ "Cervantes," in The Library of the World's Best Literature, VI, ed. Charles Dudley Warner, (New York, 1897), pp. 3453-3454.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 3455-3457.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 3457.

Neither does the idea that a work may be variously interpreted seem to entirely agree with Santayana's dictums that clarity of meaning be paramount. He does, of course, note that such multiple interpretations come not from vague suggestiveness but rather because the portrayal of life is so real. Still, Santayana is usually against letting the reader supply any more than is absolutely necessary in a literary work.

Santayana also praises in Cervantes what he might have been expected to condemn. He admits that the episodes are tacked together without a great deal of coherence or continuity, that the plot is not developed in any sense,²⁷ and that the book has the quality of "improvisation." Yet for Santayana these characteristics are far from flaws in the work. On the contrary, the very sense of the impromptu gives an aura of reality. He remarks that the episodes have the same incompleteness and even abruptness that the events of a real journey might have. Also this form of writing, as Santayana calls it--that of the novelist before the novel, is a product of the time and must be admired for being the best of its kind.²⁸ When Shakespeare is caught by limitations imposed upon him by his age, he is condemned for succumbing to them, or at least

²⁷ Santayana always insisted that plot was a vital element in literature, yet its absence is overlooked in Cervantes. More significantly, though, any mention of the structural looseness in Dickens' novels is conspicuous by its absence. Dickens' lack of a tightly knit plot evidently did not bother Santayana.

²⁸ "Cervantes," p. 3455.

with Shakespeare limitations are clearly seen as imperfections. Here the reverse process seems to hold.

The problem with Santayana's poetic ideal is that in his explication of it, it often exudes an aura of other-worldliness. In spite of his assertions that the ideal must keep in touch with the real, the ideal still smacks of the ascetic, alone and aloof in his ivory tower, cut off from the teeming activity of the world. Santayana's emphasis on impersonality, as essential to the ideal, suggests a coldness, a lack of immediacy.²⁹ His insistence that art is a recasting of the world which in reality cannot be so remolded is like waving a red flag in front of those who believe in the possibility of a better life either for themselves or for their children or grandchildren. Santayana continues to irritate when he contends that the transformation of the world which is presented in art is a better picture of real possibilities than the "miserable experiments . . . now executed on . . . reality."³⁰ So that no one will feel slighted, he also declares, on the other hand, that the passions, ideas, or ideals found in poetry are arbitrary and subjective and can be regarded as true only when taken as mere human expression.³¹ If these statements are intended as praise of creative literature, such praise

²⁹ Poetry and Religion, p. 129.

³⁰ Reason in Art, pp. 172-173.

³¹ Winds of Doctrine, p. 171.

sounds more like damnation.

Santayana also thinks that the real charm in art is its ability to take the mind away from worldly distractions.³² In the mid-twentieth century when even the contemplative mind is usually immersed in a round of challenging pursuits, the idea of creative literature as a sort of glorified escapism is one which should be held only by the most boorish. And Santayana further asserts, "Philosophy [an essential element in poetry] is a more intense sort of experience than common life is, just as pure and subtle music, heard in retirement, is something keener and more intense than the howling of storms or the rumble of cities Poetry is an attenuation, a rehandling, an echo of crude experience; it is itself a theoretic vision of things at arm's length."³³ Though the man on the street may think that literature is for those who have nothing better to do, the serious student of literature, at least, wants to cry out that Santayana is simply out of touch with the present, and that, as one student did remark, Santayana is irrelevant in today's world.

It is only fair, though, to include here, for Santayana's defense, a more modern-sounding statement made in Reason in Art to the effect that mature interests are concerned with ideals that are capable of realization, and for the poet to

³² The Sense of Beauty, p. 262.

³³ Three Philosophical Poets, p. 124.

dwell on private, subjective experiences which are without ulterior value is a waste of time. Fiction then becomes an "incompetent whimper."³⁴ The problem is that if such a pronouncement works in Santayana's favor in an evaluation of his poetics, it does not contribute to any merit he might receive for consistency. In fact Reason in Art tends generally to place utilitarian values high, which results in a corresponding distrust of the so-called fine arts.

A return to the ideal versus the real conflict also reveals a further note of discord. If the unpleasant real has a place in art when a moral hierarchy is portrayed, or if it does have a place as a touchstone for the composition of the ideal, it nevertheless has a most subservient place. Truth, defined as a correspondence to external facts, seems, on closer examination, to have really little if any place in art or poetry. True, Santayana does recognize the psychological demand for truth, but he seems to suggest that such a demand is simply an unfortunate attribute of being human. In fact, correspondence between art and personal experience accounts for the appreciation and popularity of much that is trivial and transient, intones Santayana. Thus if realism and truth do have artistic value their value is an indirect one since it is merely that their absence would cause displeasure (and pleasure or happiness, it must be remembered, are the goals of beauty and art). Perhaps the place of truth can be more easily understood when

³⁴ Pp. 101-102.

art is compared to science: the function of science is to relay information, thus truth is necessary; but the essential function of art is to entertain and stimulate the senses and the imagination, thus truth is only occasionally necessary. Anyway, how can a mind be happier by perceiving unhappiness, asks Santayana, for the mind cannot understand unhappiness unless to some extent it shares in it.³⁵

The striking fact is that the unpleasant real or what Santayana would consider an indiscriminate picture of reality is simply not art's special concern, and one is again faced with Santayana's basic belief that the function of art is not to reveal truth but to portray beauty. The artist's special concern is to lift out of the discord and chaos, the ideal elements; the more barbarous an age the more violent will be the sundering of the ideal from the real: the more terrible the real, the more powerful art must be. Santayana does suggest that perhaps the sordid, the tragic, the absurd, the pathetic are unavoidable in life, that they inevitably press in upon man. Therefore art or poetry serves man by rendering these elements more palatable or at least more tolerable.³⁶ But this idea of literature again makes it seem more like an avenue for escape, a sugar pill for digesting reality.

Further minimizing the importance of truth in art, Santayana

³⁵ The Sense of Beauty, pp. 21, 202, 229-231.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 221, 227.

maintains that even should poetry contain a truthful picture of life, such a portrayal would simply be extraneous. Lucretius, for instance, revealed the truth found in nature, a truth which incidentally has its melancholy side, but supposing that Lucretius has been quite wrong in his conception of the natural world, poetically it would make no difference. True, the portrayal would "lose its pertinence to our lives and personal convictions" but its "imaginative grandeur" would still be present for one could still envision such a world. Dante, too, can be cited as a similar example. No one will reproach him for his bad science or bad history, or intricate theology. The magnificence and poetic grandeur of the Divine Comedy remain unblemished.³⁷ The point is well made. The question cannot be avoided: is truth only a requisite when one is reading the works of his contemporaries? when one cannot disassociate himself from the pressing psychological need for truth?

Still expressing this view in 1920, Santayana explains in a letter to Robert Bridges that "correctness" has nothing to do with philosophy in literature. Here he cites further examples: Homer's geography and Virgil's agriculture are both scientifically obsolete. Their poetic works lose nothing by that fact. Santayana's contention is restated that had these poets no geography, astronomy, theology, agriculture, their stature would be considerably less for otherwise they would

³⁷ Three Philosophical Poets, pp. 36-37, 103.

not be fully expressing their world as they saw it.³⁸ But these poets thought they were expressing the truth, incorporating reality, in their poetry. Perhaps truth is not necessary for the critic, but it obviously must be for the poet.

But Santayana goes one step further and alleges that poets may even lie, for they have not attained the level of truth and falsity.³⁹ This idea seems in harmony with his statement that the poets of truth are yet unborn but to some degree in discord with his argument that the earliest poets were the best. The idea of the falsity of poetry is also supported by a notation by Santayana which appeared in Nation in 1910 as a refutation to a review of his Three Philosophical Poets. Here Santayana replies that the reviewer should have said, "We are to know hard facts of life and then we are to weave around them our ideas as in a play and imagine these ideas to be not true."⁴⁰ Truth then is evidently not necessary for the poet either.

It could be argued that Santayana does on occasion seem to favor reality in poetry, but when this occurs Santayana is using the word "real" in the Platonic sense of the ideal. For instance, he asserts that the highest ideality is the depiction of the real but then goes on to add that poetry is not of the

³⁸ Letters, p. 183.

³⁹ Reason in Art, p. 100.

⁴⁰ Nation, XCI (Nov., 1910), 471.

highest kind when it describes a further possible experience. Rather it may depict an impossible experience if that experience gives an insight into experiences already had. For example, religion depicts the impossible but by doing so gives an insight into the real.⁴¹ The impossible in poetry (and religion) then is real in that particular sense. In an early letter Santayana also confirms that art is more real than the actual world.⁴² In other words, poetry when conveying the real is conveying ultimate truths, and incidentally poetry can convey these truths better than prosaic analysis.⁴³ Cory concurs in this interpretation by quoting Santayana as saying that it is absurd to confine truth to scientific verification. This remark Cory takes as a corollary of Santayana's established idea that poetry is truer than science.⁴⁴

In sum all the evidence points to the conclusion that Santayana feels that truth, at least truth which corresponds to the facts of reality, is simply an unnecessary element in poetry or great art; though at times truth may enhance poetry at other times it may detract from it. It is only in two later essays, "Tragic Philosophy" (1936) and "Penitent Art" (1922),

41 Poetry and Religion, pp. 284-286.

42 Letters, p. 9; to Henry Ward Abbot, Dec. 12, 1886.

43 "The Idler and His Works," Saturday Review, XXXVII (May 15, 1954), 49.

44 The Later Years, p. 73.

that there seems to be any deviation from this earlier position. It will be remembered that in "Tragic Philosophy" Santayana seemed more receptive to Shakespeare's "disillusioned philosophy" because it was the truth of the real world, and also that he insisted that one cannot experience complete satisfaction in a work of art, if one does not ascribe to the philosophy and the facts presented. In the latter essay in which Santayana is describing the penitent artist (the artist, like the aging old lady who on occasion regrets her vain attempts at retaining youth, repents yet cannot give up her old ways), he declares that this artist is content to depict only rhythms and echoes and his poems remain a cry, his stories a dream. But even here Santayana suggests that art is inevitably concerned with an illusion, an illusion that it is the business of science to pierce.⁴⁵

If old age made Santayana more receptive to truth or reality in art, it was simply that he recognized the greater human attraction and desire for such a truth, not that he personally relished it more or that his basic assumptions had in any substantial way changed.

Furthermore, it is quite easy to find a personal bias for Santayana's abhorrence for the unpleasant truth. Although in his broader philosophical concepts he was an announced skeptic and a disillusioned materialist, there is no doubt that Santayana

⁴⁵ In Obiter Scripta, p. 161.

was much more at home in the world of ideas and ideals. He admits that as a boy he had an "unwilling acceptance of reality" which continued to pervade his life and his philosophy, not as "a Maxim but as a sentiment." He continues, ". . . according to my youthful heart, existence was profoundly ugly and wrong. The beautiful remained imaginary That the real was rotten and only the imaginary at all interesting seemed to me axiomatic. That was too sweeping; yet allowing for the rash generalization of youth, it is still what I think. My philosophy has never changed." He concedes that he "breathed more easily in the atmosphere of religion than in that of business, precisely because religion, like poetry, was more ideal, more freely imaginary, and in a material sense falser."⁴⁶

This turn of mind was outwardly manifest in his inability to enjoy art which delved into the too emotionally unpleasant. He admits that he could not appreciate many of the passages in Dickens, such as the death of little Nell,⁴⁷ or some of the scenes in Lear.⁴⁸

It is probably Santayana's slighting regard for truth as an essential element in art, particularly in literature, that has created the greatest concern among his critics. Obviously,

⁴⁶ Persons and Places, The Background of My Life, (New York, 1944), pp. 148, 172, 174.

⁴⁷ "Dickens," p. 67.

⁴⁸ As quoted by Van Meter Ames, Proust and Santayana, The Aesthetic Way of Life, (New York, 1937), p. 68.

it is no longer necessary to argue that "realism" is the sole criterion by which art is to be judged;⁴⁹ still Santayana's insistence and emphasis on the ideal and the beautiful as the essence of art seem one-sided. Even a cursory view of history will reveal that the arts in nearly every culture or civilization have been more concerned with the meaningful and the significant than with the strictly beautiful,⁵⁰ and this concern with the meaningful and significant has not always suggested the sort of ideal which Santayana advocates: that is, the depiction of harmony or order. Swift's "Modest Proposal," for instance, can hardly be described as beautiful or harmonious or orderly. Its purpose is to shock, to provoke thought, about a significant human predicament. Many modern works aim at a similar function. The reader must be jolted into a perception or new insight of an important human question. Nearly any twentieth century author could be cited. Perhaps the most obvious of those using the shock treatment to stir the reader are the modern dramatists such as Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and Arthur Miller. The structure of poetry or literature is also little concerned with the sort of form that Santayana seems to have in mind. A planned structure is used but often it is one which is constructed to suggest or simulate the chaos or lack of order found in the real world. For instance, the stream of conscious-

⁴⁹ Boas, "Santayana and the Arts," p. 248.

⁵⁰ Arnet, Santayana and the Sense of Beauty, p. 46.

ness technique is such a device; though consciously worked out by the artist, it attempts to suggest the not always consciously worked out thoughts of the mind (although relationships are often present between seemingly unrelated thoughts). Furthermore, any suggestion of ideal perfection, except in a negative sense, is rarely found.

Although Santayana obviously understands his own responses to art (and many might say that his literary criticism is indeed nothing but a public confession of his likes and dislikes), he has clearly not understood many of the reactions of other men. For instance, it seems apparent that men are often actually attracted by the macabre, the depressing, the pessimistic. Santayana would undoubtedly dismiss such reactions as perverse and of no value or would chalk off modern pessimistic literature as evidence of the present "moral confusion." But even granting Santayana such evaluations, such pronouncements are the expression of an ideal, not a literary criterion.⁵¹

A more damaging criticism is that even more than Santayana is willing to acknowledge, many men do find pleasure and satisfaction in the recognition of the truth even though that truth itself may be unpleasant or even if the vehicle which carries this truth is not beautiful or harmonious. This emotional response evoked at the recognition of truth may be aesthetic in the same sense that the responses to simple beauty or harmony

⁵¹ Arnet, p. 44.

are aesthetic.⁵² Moreover, this aesthetic response is not impure, as Santayana maintains, and depends not so much on the material or formal elements as on the "lesser" element of expressiveness.⁵³

Santayana also seems to minimize the impact literature may have upon the individual. Literature is not to be regarded as scientifically real, contends Santayana, nor is it to impinge on the world of practical affairs. Few would disagree on the former point and few would argue that literature can or should influence practical affairs in a didactic or propagandistic sense, but many believe that the indirect influence of literature can be tremendous.⁵⁴ Literature can be a means of perception. An author's insight into people may be transferred through his works to the reader and thus the reader's knowledge, perception, or insight may be enlarged. This perceptivity or knowledge may in turn affect that person's reactions to specific situations or even his total response to the world in which he lives.

Santayana sees the artist as a creator of values, in a sense a creator of truth, when he embodies the ideal in his creations. Undoubtedly the artist does or at least can mold

⁵² An aesthetic response is a pleasure that is immediate, intrinsically and ultimately good, and focused on an external object. (Santayana's definition, The Sense of Beauty.)

⁵³ Singer, Santayana's Aesthetics, p. 88; Howgate, George Santayana, p. 97.

⁵⁴ See S. I. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, (New York, 1939), pp. 130-136.

human values, but the problem is, does the creative mind first conceive an ideal and then give it concrete form in a work of art? Excluding the artist who has a particular axe to grind, apparently more often the artist has a glimpse of what he wishes to express and as he grapples with the medium of words both content and form take shape together and the ideal emerges. As often as not the finished product is quite a modification of the original idea.⁵⁵

Also Santayana's disregard for truth can make poetry too ethereal. T. S. Eliot in commenting on Shelley remarked that the ideas of Shelley are those of adolescence and an enthusiasm for Shelley is also an affair of adolescence.⁵⁶ Santayana's view of poetry is similar. It is a view that is beautiful in conception, that is lovely, that offers perfection, but in its extremes may well be unworkable. It also may not really be a discussion of literature as it is known today. It is all very well to describe what ought to be if the what ought to be has a relationship to what is and thereby has a chance of modifying that which exists. But when a normative standard becomes a description of something non-existent, when two different entities are being discussed, the normative loses its value. Occasionally, Santayana's poetics are like this.

However, lest this critique fall into the same sort of

⁵⁵ Singer, Santayana's Aesthetics, p. 118.

⁵⁶ Eliot, The Use of Poetry, p. 89.

one-sidedness as it is accusing Santayana of, it must be remembered that a realistic work, which has philosophic scope in the sense that it concerns itself with the meaningful and significant, would recognize the ideals which prompt men to act. An idealistic work, on the other hand, would need to show that the ideals represented were relevant to actual conditions. Realistic art which does not take into account man's ideals leaves out a portion of the true picture of man and reveals an insensitivity to value, while an idealistic work which completely ignores the actual becomes childish or fantastic.⁵⁷ In short, art and thus literature must involve itself with both the real and the ideal.

But Santayana must be given the last word. The most important things, it must be remembered, are not those which make life possible but those which make it worthwhile, and though the pragmatists may disagree, to Santayana those worthwhile things are the ones which incorporate the beautiful and the loveliness of the ideal; these are the summa of man's existence. One cannot listen to Santayana's defense without being caught up in it:

The divination of poets cannot, of course, be expected to reveal any of these hidden regions as they actually exist or will exist; but what would be the advantage of revealing them? It could only be what the advantage of criticising human life would be also, to improve subsequent life indirectly by turning it towards attainable good, and is it not as important a thing to improve life directly and in the present, if one had the gift, by

⁵⁷ Singer, Santayana's Aesthetics, p. 186.

enriching rather than criticising it? Besides, there is need of fixing the ideal by which criticism is to be guided. If you have no image of happiness or beauty or perfect goodness before you, how are you to judge what portions of life are important, and what rendering of them is appropriate?⁵⁸

Poetry, then, for Santayana again seems to have a place in life more analogous to that of music. Music stimulates the emotions and provokes an aesthetic response which enriches and nourishes life but does not directly contribute to life's immediate existence. Such then should be the function of poetry.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Winds of Doctrine, p. 183.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 182.

Problems in Form

It is apparent from the preceding chapters that form is an important, if not the most important, ingredient in poetry. It is obvious, too, that for Santayana form means a determinate shape, a well defined organization, a logical structure. Santayana devoted considerable space to a discussion of form and the corresponding evils of the indeterminate, the vague, the blurred, the fuzzy, the merely suggestive.

Form constitutes a unity, a wholeness, but a unity composed of many parts for form is, by definition, the manner in which those parts are combined. Santayana's basic premise, of course, is that literature is rational and the function of reason is to form a synthesis, a unity out of the chaos of experience.¹

According to Santayana it is only the impoverished mind which delights in the indeterminate, the suggestive. An artist of little technical skill is able to camouflage this lack by hinting at rather than directly expressing his sentiments, by sketching an idea rather than by painting it in bold colors, by stimulating the passions rather than informing the mind. Obviously art or poetry can never render the world in its completeness or even express a single idea exhaustively. There will always be some suggestion not completely developed. In fact, the more profound the truth to be expressed or the greater completeness by which it is conveyed, the greater will be the

¹ The Sense of Beauty, pp. 95-96.

feeling of inadequacy and the corresponding necessity for the reader to complete the representation. However, a completion by the reader of what is really the poet's task must come only after the poet has exercised his talents and resources to convey the most complete picture possible. Inarticulateness on the part of the poet is a sure sign that he has simply not learned how to write, not that his thoughts are too profound for expression, for to such a writer even the simplest thing becomes unutterable.²

Furthermore, in poetry when something must be supplemented by the reader, something which is only hinted at in the poem rather than stated, the poem may appear beautiful or meaningful only to those capable of making it so. This process, says Santayana, is like asking a man without any skill to complete another's composition. But even the mind which is able to complete the composition does not really benefit, for no new object is presented for thought because a person can respond only to such incomplete forms which incorporate something already known.³ True, a creative mind under the influence of

² Ibid., p. 132.

³ Santayana makes a revealing observation in a letter to Robert Shaw Barlow in 1936 on this problem of the indeterminate and its appearance in the writings of modern authors. He comments that he has just finished Faulkner's Sanctuary and continues by saying, "Like all modern writers, [Faulkner] is too lazy and self-indulgent and throws off what comes to him in a sort of dream, expecting the devoted reader to run about after him, sniffing at all the droppings of his mind. I am not a psychological dog, and require my dog-biscuit to be clearly set down for me in a decent plate with proper cer-

such indeterminate forms may conceive a new idea or grasp a new perception, but, maintains Santayana, the seed of such ideas or perceptions comes not from the indeterminate art but from somewhere else or from latent potentialities already in the mind (if the latter they too must have sprung from the study of definite forms). The indeterminate then does have a function for it provides a stimulus for further spontaneous and imaginative activity and often therefore seems more beautiful and sublime than the unchanging determinate forms. There may seem to be an infinity in the incomplete, but what delights is this very possibility of many determinate forms seen in the indeterminate. Thus such emotion as has been aroused is an illusion, for this emotion is one of desire rather than satisfaction. Such vague indeterminateness, thinks Santayana, is the characteristic of the romantic mind which produces only sentimentalism in the reader. The romantic indulges in confused

emony. But Faulkner, apart from those competent melodramatic or comic bits, has a poetic vein that at times I like extremely; in describing landscape or sheer images. This matter of images is very interesting, but confused. The image-without-thought poets often jump from the images supposed to appear to a particular observer, as in a dream, to images visible only to another observer, to the author in his omniscient capacity, as if they were the substance of the physical world common to all sane people. But there are no common images; there are only common objects of belief; and confusion in this matter of psychological analysis renders these modern writers bewildering, because they are themselves bewildered." (Letters, p. 313.) However, Santayana adds in a later letter to Barlow the same year that all of his remarks about Faulkner were not quite fair as Faulkner's poetic side is not unintentional, and that the comments about "droppings" were really more applicable to others such as Ezra Pound. (Letters, p. 314.)

suggestions, and beauty seems simply unutterable.⁴

Santayana does think that the lack of definite form is not quite so objectionable in such arts as architecture or music where meaning is not being conveyed. However, in literature meaning is more important than the simple sensuous quality of the materials and hence, indeterminateness is disastrous for meaning can only be conveyed through form or arrangement of words, not solely by the meaning of the words themselves. A sentence gives form to words, and a book gives form to sentences and while few will be oblivious to form at the sentence level it is equally important on the higher levels. To Santayana, the symbolists were examples of those who gave up form and hid meaning behind individual words. There is still an effect created for lack of form does not destroy the materials or the beauty of sound; beauty of sound may even be enhanced. But such writing reveals the tendency to give up language as an instrument of thought. Ambiguity breeds meaninglessness.⁵

Again in his discussion of form Santayana seems to be making pronouncements on the good in art, on the beautiful, which are not mere preferences on his part, but observations which describe something inherent in art and beauty. However, those who would allow him his preferences are still reluctant

⁴ The Sense of Beauty, pp. 144-146, 148-151.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 143-144.

to allow him such a categorical position. First, it might be pointed out that the writers who seem to catch fleeting glimpses of a scene, or who, like Thomas Wolfe, pile episode upon episode in apparent random fashion, simply have viewed life at that moment in that way. Moments, for one such as Wolfe, were to be soaked up as a sponge soaks up water. Life simply did not come parceled in neat packaged form as the classicist envisions life. Again the point is that normally such artists who portray a "formlessness" are doing so because they see it as a reflection of the way the world is actually constituted.

Singer, taking a scholarly, philosophical approach to the problem, has noted that even in the so-called indeterminate some form must exist in order for the work to be perceived. Material cannot be separated from form as Santayana seems to imply and there will always be some organization of these materials in order for there to be a conscious awareness of them.⁶ It seems likely that Santayana would probably agree that in one sense what is determinate and what is indeterminate are a matter of degree, but deny that such an argument in any way invalidates his thesis.

Singer continues, though, to point out that romantic art succeeds because it is not restricted by conventional patterns. In addition, there is no absolute way of determining in advance

⁶ Santayana's Aesthetics, p. 180.

which form is going to be the most satisfactory for which materials or ideas. Some form may be most suitable for one work while not for another. In evaluating a particular work, then, the critic must take into account the total aesthetic effect, what the artist has attempted to do, and finally whether all elements have produced the most satisfying or pleasing effect possible under the circumstances.⁷

For Santayana, the writer who exemplifies to a large degree this indeterminate quality is Emerson. Of course, it has been seen that Browning and Whitman are also illustrative examples of romantic indeterminateness, but Emerson, whose works are a collection of significant fragments, comes in for more sympathetic treatment.

Santayana wrote three essays on Emerson in his early life but seems to have continued to read Emerson throughout his life.⁸ The first essay, interestingly, was written when Santayana was still a senior at Harvard and was an unsuccessful try for the Bowdoin Prize of 1886 written under the pseudonym Victor Cousin. Since this work is clearly that of the student, including rhetorical flourishes and some rather broad generalizations about life,⁹ it is both unfair and irrelevant to examine it closely as a product of Santayana's serious literary

⁷ Ibid., pp. 182-183.

⁸ See Cory, The Later Years, p. 186.

⁹ Maurice F. Brown, "Santayana on Emerson: An Unpublished Essay," Emerson Quarterly Review, # 37 (4th Qt., Part 2, 1964), 60.

criticism. It should be noted, however, that in many respects this early work is similar to Santayana's principal essay on Emerson written in 1900. He attacks Emerson on philosophical ground by arguing that Emerson's optimism is a product of his own temperament and not a part of his philosophical system, and that evil which is viewed under his law of compensation as being really an aspect of the good was a flagrant disregard of reality and differed from pessimism only in name.¹⁰

Santayana begins the essay on Emerson included in Poetry and Religion by noting again that Emerson was revered for his person rather than because his writings or opinions were understood or accepted. Emerson's contemporaries felt that his teachings somehow exuded a sense of the inexpressible, the unutterable, a truth of a higher world, too rare and refined for common ears. But they were misled for Emerson was not in possession of an unutterable truth or the secret of the universe. In fact he had no doctrine at all. The more he tried to grasp fundamental concepts the vaguer and more elusive they became for him. Philosophy was for him "a moral energy flowering into sprightliness of thought" rather than a consistent, defined, well-formed body of thoughts.¹¹

Such vagueness and formlessness in Emerson's thought leads

¹⁰ "The Optimism of Ralph Waldo Emerson," (Harvard Archives) reprinted in The Emerson Quarterly Review, #47 (4th Qt., Part 2, 1964), 64-65.

¹¹ Pp. 217-218, 223.

away from the realm of reason and sometimes leads to mysticism.¹² Fortunately, however, Emerson surrendered to mysticism only on one or two subjects, although the mystical tendency is pervasive throughout his works. Ironically, those subjects that float away into mystical vagueness are the most mystical because they are the only subjects Emerson treated with any sustained effort. One of these subjects is the unity of all minds in a single soul. The second is the question of evil and its absorption into the cosmic harmony. In the case of the former proposition, Santayana simply observes that 1) if the differences between men were removed they obviously would be alike or that 2) men can understand one another through common experiences. Both these interpretations would retrieve Emerson's idea of the single soul from the realm of the mystical, but they would also make his concept thin and commonplace. With the case of evil, Santayana contends that Emerson has simply forgotten evil, rather than explained it. The differences, nearly always so dear to Santayana, between good and evil, better and worse, are abandoned by Emerson and with them the life of reason as far as Santayana is concerned; mysticism has taken over.¹³

Emerson's redemption lies in the redemption that is char-

¹² Mysticism occurs, according to Santayana, when one realizes that reason and understanding are human faculties and are therefore flawed. Then one searches for a higher faculty, abandoning reason and relying on intuition. However, to be consistent one must abandon all avenues of knowledge as they are all open to the same criticism. (Poetry and Religion, p. 255.)

¹³ Poetry and Religion, pp. 227-228.

acteristic of all that is indeterminate. The indeterminate frees the mind to wander unimpeded through all categories of thought, thereby providing a stimulus for new and untried ideas and fancies. Emerson's power was in his temperament, his wisdom which was a product of the imagination rather than reason. His mind had a plasticity, a spontaneity and liberty of movement. Santayana compares him to a young god experimenting with creation, blotching his work and then beginning anew every day on a newer and better plan. Such vision must necessarily be fleeting, though, for the mind has already settled into the general forms in which experience has allowed itself to be described.¹⁴

Interestingly, Santayana remarks that the disorganization which accompanies the highly imaginative is a trait which plagues all but the greatest minds (and Emerson was not a "star of the first magnitude"). But ironically, it is that destructive quality, the destruction of rational thought, which enables Emerson to stimulate new thoughts. The startling effect of his writings often comes from the contradictions to tradition and to common sense.¹⁵

As he did with Shakespeare, Santayana attempts to explain Emerson on historical and cultural grounds. He observes that Emerson, although rejecting Puritanism for Unitarianism, is actually a Puritan mystic, a soul who had not become completely extricated from tradition. But he was a Puritan whose religion

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 218-219.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 224.

was all poetry, and a poet whose sole pleasure was thought. Finally, though, Emerson cannot be classed as a prophet for his age or country or a spokesman for the past or present; he belonged rather to a mystical company of souls such as the Hindus, Persians, Platonists, and Stoics who claim no particular moment in history or any geographical or cultural home.¹⁶

In 1903 Santayana published another essay in the Boston Daily Advertiser which dealt only with Emerson's verse. Here Santayana's praise of Emerson seems more genuine and he seems less concerned with Emerson's lack of organized philosophical content. Paul Wermuth has commented that Santayana's dismissal of Emerson's philosophy as insignificant is a modern view of Emerson but one that was contrary to the judgments of Emerson's contemporaries.¹⁷

In this later essay Santayana notes that one of Emerson's virtues is his sincerity and that even though his poetry is mystical it is spontaneous and ingenuous. Santayana even concludes by citing Emerson's verse as having "'high thought, enthusiasm, terseness, snatches of lyric beauty'."¹⁸ However, this essay differs little from the one of 1900. The later essay is simply softer in tone, and the imaginative qualities

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 230-233.

¹⁷ "Santayana and Emerson," Emerson Quarterly Review, #31 (2nd Qt., 1963), 37.

¹⁸ "Emerson's Poems Proclaim the Divinity of Nature, With Freedom as His profoundest Ideal," as quoted by Wermuth, "Santayana and Emerson," p. 37.

of Emerson's mind are to Santayana less objectionable in his verse than they are in his philosophy.¹⁹

In 1900 in an address entitled "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" Santayana again makes reference to Emerson and again essentially the same points are made. The fact is stressed that Emerson had no system and no doctrine. His sincerity and spontaneous fancy are once more praised, but here Santayana suggests that because Emerson did not have a system or doctrine, in short, a determinate form, was to his credit rather than vice versa. Had Emerson's ideas settled into a system and then into dogma they would have been as "thin and forced" as were the other systems of transcendentalism.²⁰

If Santayana's critique of Emerson's writings rests primarily on his contention that these writings lack determinate form, it is a criticism based largely on an analysis of the philosophical import of Emerson's writings rather than on the superficial structure (although Santayana hints that such a structure is also lacking). However, Santayana does take time to discuss a few of the more technical aspects of form, commenting on such literary devices and methods as the creation of character and plot, the merits of the heroic couplet and the sonnet, as well as the fundamental structure of comedy, wit, humor, and the grotesque. Poetry and prose are also discussed with respect to their formal characteristics as well

¹⁹ Wermuth, "Santayana and Emerson," p. 38.

²⁰ Pp. 196-200.

as to their respective values.

The creation of characters, it will be recalled, is a lesser function than the creation of plot but evidently the drawing of character interested and fascinated Santayana for he gave it extended attention, and he does observe that the construction of plot is called invention but the construction of characters is called creation. Again, the problem in character construction is one of totality or wholeness. The author can put only a part of himself into his characters; thus character by necessity must take a subordinate position. Anyway, it is not the character itself which is truly absorbing, but rather its causes and effects. Homer's characters, for instance, are properly subordinated to the total movement and meaning of his works. Therefore, the background, the scene of events, that influence and condition the characters, must be rendered.²¹

Further analyzing the construction of character Santayana says that the form which character takes is actually that of a type. That is, similar characteristics of various people are fused, the differences obliterated, and in the resulting composite character the traits most pleasing or interesting are enhanced. Character is not a single image presented to the senses, but rather a rational synthesis of acts and feelings. Still this type is not to be taken as an average. A Hamlet, a Don Quixote, or an Achilles is far from average, nor are

²¹ The Sense of Beauty, p. 176; Poetry and Religion, pp. 272-273.

they simply a synthesis of the traits of a particular class of men. Rather they seem to be individuals, persons. Santayana mentions that Goethe is said to have observed no originals when he conceived Gretchen. On the other hand, many think they see some likeness to Gretchen in real girls. The fiction has become the original rather than vice versa, bearing out the axiom that poetry is often truer than fact. Why, paradoxically, does such fiction often seem more natural than the real? The answer, replies Santayana, is that the standard of what is natural is in the observer. A real person impresses one as being natural when a single definite image is stamped on one's mind. The same process occurs with well-constructed fictional characters. Thus the artist is able to remain true to reality without simply copying it, for were he to simply copy an existent character he would be plagued by an infinity of unaesthetic details. Here again one can see Santayana's attempt to combine reality with idealization and beauty, keeping both in touch with the other. Such characters become more significant than mere photographic copies yet the characters remain individuals. Imaginary forms such as fictional characters then are important, are beautiful and natural, not because of their closeness to fact or reality, but because the composite traits which they contain can be grasped by the mind as a unity.²²

²² The Sense of Beauty, pp. 176-177, 182; Singer, "Introduction," p. xxi. Santayana mentions that the greatest char-

Surprisingly, Santayana does find that occasionally there can be too much of a good thing. In the heroic couplet he sees a specific form which can create by its very definiteness and uniformity a monotony and a too confining restraint on the subject matter to be related. The heroic couplet by its compactness is an excellent form for the epigram and perhaps even for satire, but its unvarying rhythmic quality makes it a form too thin for the epic and not at all adequate for the lyric. Santayana's preferred form is the sonnet, which he himself often used. Here is a form which forces a real unity on the thought being expressed. The sonnet is the "non plus ultra of rhyme . . . the most classic of modern poetical forms." It is more classic in spirit than blank verse which lacks the all important power of synthesizing thought and "making the unexpected seem the inevitable."²³

Comedy, like tragedy, is a form which includes impure elements. Santayana is much sterner, though, in his treatment of the comic than he was with tragedy. While tragedy may elevate the soul in spite of its impure or evil components, comedy has no such redeeming grace since first, a person's sympathies are usually not wholly engaged in a comic rendition,

acters have not been those created by any one man but rather are those characters created by slow evolution, i.e. the gods or deities which are much more interesting and have an appearance of objective reality which simple fictional characters cannot approximate. (The Sense of Beauty, pp. 185-186.)

²³ The Sense of Beauty, pp. 106, 108, 173.

and second, if there is identification between the spectator or reader and the comic, that person is not lifted beyond himself by identifying with something greater in scope as is the case with tragedy. With the comic, a person simply identifies with something lesser or smaller. If there is any excellence in comedy it is that it allows the mind to stroll along "some by path of fancy."²⁴

What elements make up the comic? Santayana answers by saying that although incongruity and degradation are usually classed as the chief elements of amusement, almost anything at all may amuse. Amusement may stem from no idea at all, being simply a contagious emotion caught from others, or amusement may involve a simple repetition of something which at first was not at all amusing, or it may be simply the shock of surprise which strikes one as comic, the mere interruption which such a shock creates.²⁵

So far Santayana's analysis of the comic deviates little from other interpretations of the comic effect, and the elements he describes are certainly those often found in the comic. However, Santayana becomes rather stuffy when he maintains that all these comic effects are somehow vulgar since a person cannot have had much on his mind if he is so easily distracted and so much delighted by such trivialities. After all, he reasons, the comic is absurd and man is a rational creature and therein lies a contradiction. Moreover, fun is fine only

²⁴ Ibid., p. 245.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 247.

if there is nothing better around at the moment. Absurdity is best in that which is already absurd. For instance, the ridiculous in the mouth of a fool will amuse while it would not were it to come from the mouth of a gentleman, a fact which further reveals that incongruity has little to do with the comic.²⁶

Santayana also observes that man is often caught by what seems to him to be humorous because man is a little cruel by nature. Hence the less sympathy a person has for his fellow man the more another's folly seems humorous and delightful. Santayana defines humor and the humorous character by saying, "The essence of what we call humour is that amusing weaknesses should be combined with an amicable humanity. Whether it be in the way in ingenuity, or oddity, or drollery, the humorous person must have an absurd side, or be placed in an absurd situation. Yet this comic aspect, at which we ought to wince, seems to endear the character all the more."²⁷

It is noteworthy that the above comments on the humorous and comic come from Santayana's early book The Sense of Beauty. It is also apparent that his estimation of comedy changed quite definitely in his later years. For example, it is already obvious from his discussion of Dickens that the comic element there was much more appealing than his notes in The Sense of Beauty would have ever suggested. It is in the last volume of his autobiography, though, that a complete reversal seems

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 247-249.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 254.

to have taken place. Comedy seems to have been exonerated and divine reason brought down from her pedestal.

The happy presence of reason in human life is perhaps better exemplified in comedy than in tragedy. In comedy we see no terrible sub-human or super-human fatality to render reason vain. Reason therefore can make its little runs and show its comic contradictions and clever solutions without disturbing the sound vegetative substance and free flowerings of human society. In comedy we laugh at our foolish errors, correct them with a word, and know no reason why we shouldn't be happy ever after.²⁸

Wit, on the other hand, fares much better than the comic even in Santayana's early writings. Wit arises from a transformation or substitution of ideas or in the quick association of similarities. The substitution or similarity, however, must be valid and real, even if hitherto unforeseen. In fact, unexpected justness makes wit since wit often penetrates into the depths of things. Wit belittles one thing and dignifies another and thus its comparisons are as often flattering as they are ironical. Wit actually is akin to the highest inspiration, for the same faculty which sees new analogies and likenesses in unlike things is called not "wit" but "inspiration" when it is overcome with emotion and excitement and when the analogies are exalted and noble.²⁹ One might think, for instance, of Shakespeare's "Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth." Here is certainly an inspired thought which sees the likeness between the body and the house, the soul and the tenant, and

²⁸ My Host the World, Persons and Places, III, (New York, 1953), pp. 101-102.

²⁹ The Sense of Beauty, pp. 250-253.

the paradox in the couplet by its very nature illuminates in a flash a truth which is reinforced by contemplation.

So shalt thou feed on Death, that feed on men,
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then.

The grotesque, also analyzed by Santayana, is formed by taking a type and exaggerating one of its elements or by combining it with another type. The grotesque also makes use of incongruity but such incongruity may in time also become a type in itself as have the centaur or satyr. However, if one cannot catch sight of some form and unity in the midst of this incongruity, what remains is simply chaos. One must have an idea of some unity of character before the grotesque can appear. "Good wit is novel truth, as the good grotesque is novel beauty," but beware, warns Santayana, that all mutilation is not taken as wit or the grotesque as creation of new forms.³⁰

Although Santayana does not formally treat satire or mockery, and they are obviously related to wit and the comic, he does uphold their distinctive value. In Persons and Places (again, of course, a later work) he observes that there is a kinship between the comic and the tragic for the same facts which make one laugh can also make one weep. He even concludes that no "whole-hearted man, no sane art" can exclude either.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 256-258. Clearly the grotesque most often appears in plastic form rather than in literature. However, there are exceptions. Shirley Jackson's famous short story "The Lottery" in which a seemingly common community gathering turns out to be a preplanned, highly organized murder ritual could only be called grotesque by Santayana's definition.

Observing himself, Santayana comments that it is his very disillusioned philosophy which makes him laugh so profoundly. Though one might think that the skeptic will be embittered and morose such is not the case.³¹ Santayana seem to suggest here that laughter has a therapeutic value since it relieves man and the poet from despair or rage at life's futilities. Even early in life Santayana indulged in mockery, wit, and satire as a principal contributor of cartoons to the Lampoon, and also many of his verses are satiric yet rarely can either be said to be ill-humored.

In considering the forms of discourse, Santayana has focused on the essential differences which separate prose from poetry. Devoting a separate chapter to this subject in Reason in Art, he explores what seems to him the fundamental weaknesses and strengths of each form. Again, however, Santayana appears to be using the term "prose" in the sense of discursive or non-fictional prose which clearly is outside the domain of literary criticism or literary theory. However, the comparison being made does by contrast reveal what Santayana feels to be ideally the most important characteristics of poetry.

Santayana begins by saying that poetic phrases become prosaic when they have been worn down and are no longer emotive symbols, but simply transparent and instrumental symbols for conveying thought. (According to Santayana the earliest ages

³¹ p. 60.

and the youngest people are the most poetic, and there is a strong suggestion that perhaps language is evolving toward the prosaic.) Succinctly summing up, Santayana says, "In poetry feeling is transferred by contagion; in prose it is communicated by bending the attention upon determinate objects; the one stimulates and the other informs."³²

Noting what sadly enough often seems to be true, Santayana observes that the mature mind, especially the mind of the man of action, usually prefers to express itself in prose. But surprisingly Santayana sees such a preference as a sound one for he feels that it is only inexperienced youth who can find depth and significance in what is half-seen, the inexpressible, the "supra-mundane," in impractical ideals, for in poetry the language, as opposed to its cognitive content, can become all-pervasive.³³ In case these remarks should seem to be too widely out of character with Santayana, poetry here should be interpreted as what might be called purely aesthetic poetry or poetry on the first or second levels, not Santayana's highest philosophical poetry.

The defect of prose, on the other hand, is its abstractness. Prose in its extreme becomes merely instrumental, and in proportion to its efficiency it becomes more and more simply a set of signals. Thus the sensuous stimulus is reduced but

³² Reason in Art, pp. 98-99.

³³ Ibid., pp. 101, 104-106.

it is precisely this sensuous stimulus which makes one retain a consciousness of the form of a particular thought.³⁴

At this point Santayana does consider what he terms "literary prose," presumably that which would also be commonly recognized as creative prose or simply literature and which is apparently one with Santayana's third level of poetry. This mode of discourse then comes between the two extremes of poetry and prose. This form of language must convey thought or intelligence but such thought must be clothed in a garment which itself has value and is itself a delight.³⁵

To further clarify, Santayana states that clearly one must distinguish prosaic form from prosaic substance. That is, novels, essays, even philosophical works may be couched in prosaic language with every phrase economically worked, but the ideas embedded there may be poetical (defined here as "ideas . . . irrelevant to all ulterior events [expressing] . . . nothing but the imaginative energy that called them forth"). Conversely, a work which has an ornamental covering, language highly wrought in rhythm and imagery, may really be prosaic and discursive in substance. To Santayana the Hebrew poets are an example of a poetic exterior with a prosaic interior.³⁶

The ideal mode of discourse then would have a prosaic substance and a poetic form. Then truth would be rendered,

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 102-103.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 104.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 103-104.

no misrepresentation would be involved, yet the transporting power of the poetic medium could work its magic. The poetic medium or the beauties of language are independent of the subject matter and "the ideal or the emotional atmosphere which is its soul depends on things external to language, which no perfection in the medium could modify."³⁷ The result is rational poetry. But Santayana realistically notes that though such an ideal is not impossible, it is rare because man desires more than the present world has to offer and thus impossible things are imagined. Even the most rational of poets have elements of impossible fancy. Homer had his mythology; Dante, his allegories and mock science; Shakespeare, his romanticism; Goethe, his symbolic characters and artificial machinery.³⁸

Santayana's literary career exemplifies his views on poetry and prose. As a young man his reputation was first established as a poet, but he soon gave up poetry for philosophic prose and in later life wrote a novel. He noted in 1925 (at the age of 62) in the preface to a collection of his poems that probably everything he had said in verse he had said better in his later prose writings, but he remarked also that he had had no real choice in the matter for at the time he composed his poems his thoughts inevitably took the form of verse. In his own works he observes what he had already pointed out in his other writings: that somehow poetry is closer to the "fountain-head"

³⁷ Ibid., p. 107.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 107-108.

of ideas, emotions, and thoughts.³⁹ Again Santayana stresses that the medium of prose can be as poetical as that of poetry⁴⁰ and no one would disagree that the language of Santayana's own philosophical writings is poetic.

However, it was not Santayana's maturity alone which made him turn from poetry to prose. He comments on several occasions that the age is now more congenial to prose and that versifying is becoming a dead art. True poetry can now only be written in prose form. "Indeed," he says, "except when meter remains instinctive, like good manners, a fresh graphic phrase, a profound original metaphor, slips more easily and freely into liquid prose than into the meshes of verse." More specifically, Santayana even maintained that the novel is currently the only living art form.⁴¹

Again in his discussion of poetry and prose as literary forms, Santayana reiterates his well worn themes that literary art should be philosophic but encased by a beautiful outer clothing of verbal ornamentation. Here the pendulum seems to have swung back away from literary art as pure delight to a demand that literature incorporate a serious function. But again he seems to naively think that the medium can be separated

³⁹ Poems, (New York, 1925), pp. vii-xi.

⁴⁰ Ames, Proust and Santayana, p. 76.

⁴¹ Corliss Lamont, ed., Dialogue on George Santayana, (New York, 1959), p. 29; "Apologia," p. 598; Letters, p.207; to Henry Ward Abbot, Dec. 12, 1923. .

from the substance in poetry. Perhaps he means only to imply that such separation is simply a theoretical tool of analysis, for he often suggests, as in his comments on his own poetry, that certain thoughts and emotions at certain periods are irrevocably and inevitably destined to be expressed in one form and not another.

Three Philosophical Poets

It should be illustrative, after analyzing Santayana's poetics in some detail, to examine the three poets who when taken together exemplify the characteristics of Santayana's supreme poet. But not only do Goethe, Lucretius, and Dante provide examples of the philosophical idealism Santayana so loves in a poet, they individually also express many of the failures which can mar literary art. These essays also show Santayana at his best as both literary interpreter and critic.

In Goethe's Faust Santayana sees the essence of the romantic mind, but here again Santayana makes clear his assertion that the romantic philosophy has its place and is necessary in the scheme of things.

Santayana opens his discussion by remarking that Goethe was no philosopher in the technical sense: he was not systematic. It is interesting that the Three Philosophical Poets, in which Santayana includes his principal comments on Goethe, was published in 1910 only 16 years after his essay on Shakespeare and yet here he seems to be less concerned that a systematic, developed philosophy be present in order for a poet to be truly called "philosophical." What Goethe did have was a feeling for the significant persons and events of his time, for the parade of history moving before him, for the great ideas, scientific and philosophical, which passed before him. Yet Faust offers a solution to the moral problem of existence

as truly as do the poetic works which offer a more systematic approach to life.¹

Santayana takes care to assert, though, that the apparent moral in Faust, that is "he who strives strays, yet in that straying finds his salvation," is only a superficial ornament attached to the work. Such a moral is not true to the spirit of the poem which offers a kaleidoscope of images and ideas which amuse, thrill, inform, and delight. " [Goethe] stuffed [Faust] with every enthusiasm that diversified his own life, from the great alternative of romantic or classical art, down to the controversy between Neptunism and Vulcanism in geology, and to his fatherly admiration for Lord Byron." Faust is "a rebellion against convention; a flight to nature, to tenderness, to beauty; and then a return to convention again, with a feeling that nature, tenderness, and beauty, unless found there, will not be found at all." Like Browning and all romantics, Goethe never reveals the ideal which his hero is pursuing. It is the pursuit itself which counts, for to the romantic mind an ideal obtained is an ideal which is then disenchanting. Dissatisfaction is perpetual and the romantic is always on the verge of being utterly bored.²

¹ Three Philosophical Poets, pp. 139-142.

² Ibid., pp. 140-143, 152, 155, 181-182. Howgate (and undoubtedly other critics) disagrees strongly that Faust was not saved, or that such salvation is impossible. "To represent Faust as changeless and intractable seems to me to miss the point of Goethe's whole conception." (George Santayana, p. 160.)

Santayana also sees a second characteristic common to the romantic soul in Faust, for true to the romantic spirit, Faust sees the world as a subjective phenomenon, an object created solely for his pleasure. The romantic believes that since he is a part of all experience, all experience is similar to his own. Hence, the romantic also disowns all authority save that which comes from a mysterious intuitional voice. Ideally then the romantic should be both a civilized man and a primitive, for the latter then would be restrained by the former and yet the primitive is necessary in order that the poet may still see the world in a fresh, child-like fashion.³

Santayana compares Goethe's Faust with other portrayals of the Faust figure. He points out, for instance, that Marlowe's Faustus was actually a Renaissance man and a martyr to everything which the Renaissance valued. He is a hero who is essentially a good man but who is browbeaten by the devil and not allowed to repent. Unlike Marlowe's Faustus, Goethe's Faust has no faith, no fear, and there is no question of his selling or even risking his soul. He is already damned, but being damned from the point of view of the church, he seeks salvation in another quarter. A further contrast is provided by The Wonder-working Magician of Calderon where faith is the true victor and doubt submits to faith for Calderon gloried in the movement from paganism to Christianity while Goethe

³ Three Philosophical Poets, pp. 143-145, 157.

revels in the return to paganism from Christianity.⁴

Santayana also scrutinizes Mephistopheles and sees in him another phase of the romantic spirit. Mephistopheles also favors the experiences of life over those of the mind, but unlike Faust, he knows that these too will in the end turn to ashes. Mephistopheles is one-half of the earth spirit, the destructive element which opposes the forces of creativity, not a devil from a subterranean hell. Representing the everlasting no, the night, the blackness, the nothingness which to him is really the good for the night is more fundamental than the light, Mephistopheles is nevertheless interested in the living man, not in the damnation of his soul.⁵

How Santayana would have liked this poem to be constructed is easy to imagine. Faust might have built on his experiences. When after the death of Gretchen he resolved to pursue only the good experiences, instead of all experiences, he should have made that necessary distinction between good and bad, between the beautiful and the ugly; he might have established a moral society. Nothing of the sort happens.⁶

The problem which Santayana finds here is the same one he sees in all the romantics. Such indiscriminate seeking of experience, such inexhaustible lust for activity, has not the needed standard to guide it; it has no steadfastness of

⁴ Ibid., pp. 146-151.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 179-181.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 158, 161-165.

purpose. It does not learn from its past experiences. But at least Faust does remain true to the romantic philosophy. There is no improvement in his character, he is sinful to the end. Neither will heaven be any different for the romantic: it will simply be a continuation of the adventures carried out here on earth.⁷

The spirit of nature, though, is like that of the romantic. Nature lives spontaneously, without meditation or forethought, for the sake of the moment, for the instantaneous joy of living, rather than for the achievement of any goal. In this sense Faust is an expression of a naturalistic philosophy.⁸

Santayana concludes by extolling the particular virtues of romanticism by avowing once more that it puts man back at the beginning of his experiences, gives him a fresh start and thus restores immediate perception by dissolving conventions which are confining and confusing. It is cathartic, liberating. But always there is Santayana's qualification: "It follows that one who has no sympathy with such a philosophy [romanticism] is a comparatively conventional person. He has a second-hand mind It follows also, however, that one who has no philosophy but this has no wisdom; he can say nothing that is worth carrying away; everything in him is attitude and nothing is achievement. The mind has become free and sincere, but it has remained bewildered."⁹

⁷ Ibid., pp. 183, 187-188.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 172-189.

In 1916 Santayana published the essay "Hints of Egotism in Goethe" in which he further described the romantic spirit as he saw it in Goethe. For instance, he asserts that Goethe's attempt to incorporate the Greek and classical spirit was an artificial imitation. The mere attempt at revival of something indicates that it has not been absorbed. The true inheritors of classicism continue the tradition instinctively. Goethe's Iphigenie and Helena are then paradoxically the most romantic in all of Goethe. How much better was Goethe when he remained true to that romantic spirit which he knew and understood, when he ranged over the interests of the whole world.¹⁰ Essentially, though, this second essay offers no divergence from the discussion of Goethe in the Three Philosophical Poets.¹¹

⁹ Ibid., pp. 196-197.

¹⁰ In Egotism in German Philosophy, rev. ed., (New York, 1940), pp. 46-48; first printed in 1916.

¹¹ Santayana in a letter written only a year before his death again comments on Goethe and his inclusion in the Three Philosophical Poets. Santayana affirms that the "sworn allegiance to Life, bring it what it may bring" was a concept which the Germans made into a romantic philosophy, being a justification for egotism as a philosophy. Santayana continues that he "had not got to the bottom either of the animal courage or of the irrational obedience to impulse that romantic passion implies and lives out dramatically," and that as a result his treatment of Goethe in the Three Philosophical Poets was superficial. At this time Santayana argues that he would not hesitate, as he did when he wrote the Three Philosophical Poets, to state that Goethe's morality is altogether inferior to Dante's. The implication here is that he was much too kind to Goethe in order that he not appear prejudiced. (Letters, pp. 425-426; to Corliss Lamont, Nov. 28, 1951.) Be that as it may, the

It is not surprising that Santayana should have chosen Lucretius for one of his philosophical poets for the self-proclaimed materialist would naturally feel a bond with the Latin poet. With Lucretius true naturalism finds expression, and such naturalism may in the end be the only conception of the world fit to inspire serious, philosophical poetry. To Santayana, naturally, such a conception of the world is preferable to moral mythology.¹²

Santayana devotes much of this essay to simply explaining the materialism found in Lucretius' poem and to tracing its sources back to Democritus and Epicurus. The strength of Santayana's explication is that under his pen materialism takes on the suspense of an exciting discovery. It becomes that philosophy which is most fundamental, reaching down to the substance of things, which is cosmic, taking in the flux and recurrences of all things, which is a unity, observing behind time's inexorable change the oneness of all things. Even though such a philosophy has its melancholy side, it "satisfies and exalts the rational mind, that craves truth as truth, whether sad or comforting, and wishes to pursue a possible, not an impossible, happiness."¹³

Three Philosophical Poets does in fact leave little doubt in any reader's mind that to Santayana Goethe's philosophy, like that of all the romantics, though it has its place, is nonetheless inferior.

¹² Three Philosophical Poets, p. 10.

¹³ Ibid., p. 25.

In spite of the fact that materialism can neither command nor give advice because it is only a system of description, nonetheless its advocates, being human, will still have human preferences. Epicurus, for instance, hated life and attempted to retreat from its clutches. Thus his philosophy, which was followed by Lucretius, was one of negation and retreat from the world. Such an attitude, Santayana points out, is not an inherent part of materialism. He continues by examining the weaknesses in Lucretius' account of the Epicurean arguments against the evils of death. Santayana maintains that it is not a fear of the after life or even a fear of the pain of dying, both of which Epicurus logically demolishes, that causes men to shun death. Rather it is the love of life or simply the animal lust for survival which makes men fear death. If one fears or hates life as Epicurus did, then death would hold no terror and any arguments against such a non-existent terror are obviously superfluous.¹⁴

A second problem in the philosophy of De Rerum Natura is that Lucretius failed to consider two themes which could have been poetically rich: the themes of piety and friendship. Religion with its piety and ethics is not, as Santayana points out, incompatible with materialism (after all, Santayana himself built such a superstructure on his own brand of materialism, discounting the literal validity of religion but not its moral worth). The theme of friendship could also have contributed

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 32, 44-56.

greatly, even if it too would inevitably have had a melancholy tone. Horace, in most aspects a lesser poet than Lucretius, treated this theme with delight and joy. In short, Lucretius was too consistently serious, austere, and unbending and revealed few of the possible pleasures of life.¹⁵

In spite of these limitations in this most unpoetical of philosophies, the genius of the poet himself must be allowed. The greatest attribute, says Santayana, of this genius is its "power of losing itself in its object, its impersonality." One seems "to be reading not the poetry of a poet about things, but the poetry of things themselves. That things have their poetry, not because of what we make them symbols of, but because of their own movement and life, is what Lucretius proves once for all to mankind." Thus, it is not necessary to indulge in the pathetic fallacy when observing the spectacle of nature. Lucretius is the true poet of nature, not merely of the landscape, but a poet of matter, the source of the landscape. Lucretius can be contrasted with Wordsworth, who is a poet of the landscape. Wordsworth sees only a part of Nature, the part which influences human purposes and which brings moral inspiration to them. Wordsworth is the poet of human life rather than a true poet of nature, for he considered only man who is only a portion of nature. Lucretius may treat human life and human idealism in a colder, more remote fashion than

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 62-67.

Wordsworth, but his view is more comprehensive, more universal, "saner and maturer." Although he does not say so, Santayana obviously means to imply that Lucretius' view is the greater of the two.¹⁶

Dante, then, is the third and highest poet in this literary hierarchy. In all Santayana's writings no poet seems to come so near the pinnacle of supreme literary achievement as the author of The Divine Comedy. Perhaps the great regard which Santayana had for Dante accounts for some weaknesses in this essay, for it is largely undulating waves of praise. Still, Santayana's remarks on Dante do illustrate again exactly what Santayana seeks in poetry which is to be ranked as the best.

Dante becomes the archetype for the poet who is not only profound and philosophical, serious and moral, but also universal in scope. Of course, the materials for Dante's poetic vision were an integral part of his tradition and his age. He took from both the Hebrew and Greek traditions which made up Christian theology of that time and added to them his own theories, likes and loves, combining perfectly all elements into a moral and poetical unity. Even his politics and his love were purified in the process and became a part of this philosophic religion. The fact was that Dante's philosophy and his science did not have to be put into verse to become poetic. When one lives among what he believes to be significant

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 34, 59-62.

and if these things are drawn together by a magic called love, the conception is already poetry.¹⁷

Using the many levels of allegory in The Divine Comedy as illustrative of the many levels of meaning in this poetic work, Santayana states that this whole panorama becomes a story not only of the supernatural world with its rewards and punishments, but also of this world with its dramatic human passions; it becomes a theory of church and state and a personal story of exile. Such layers of meaning, of course, are the key to The Divine Comedy's totality, its encompassing scope. "The subject-matter of the Divine Comedy is accordingly the moral universe in all its levels--romantic, political, religious."¹⁸

Santayana does observe that such a work as Dante's in which a "classification worked out by a systematic moralist guided the vision of a great poet" is probably unique in the world and not apt to recur.¹⁹

No work by a human hand is perhaps ever perfect and Santayana does note that The Divine Comedy is flawed occasionally by the too subjective, personal presence of Dante. Although the poem would have suffered had Dante not placed himself in the center of his stage, he sometimes goes beyond the necessary subjective element to let his private passions and resentments color his judgment. Yet such occasions are rare and

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 83-85, 102-103.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 106.

it is Dante's unalterable voice of judgment which keeps this panorama of events from becoming a mere "carnival" of images.²⁰

No summation, however, of Santayana's praise for Dante can equal his own inimitable words.

Thus Dante, gifted with the tenderest sense of colour, and the firmest art of design, has put the whole world into his canvas. Seen there, that world becomes complete, clear, beautiful, and tragic. It is vivid and truthful in its detail, sublime in its march and in its harmony. This is not poetry where the parts are better than the whole. Here, as in some great symphony, everything is cumulative: the movements conspire, the tension grows, the volume redoubles, the keen melody soars higher and higher; and it all ends, not with a bang, not with some casual incident, but in sustained reflection, in the sense that it has not ended, but remains by us in its totality, revelation and a resource for ever. It has taught us to love and to renounce, to judge and to worship. What more could a poet do? Dante poetized all life and nature as he found them. His imagination dominated and focused the whole world. He thereby touched the ultimate goal to which a poet can aspire; he set the standard for all possible performance, and became the type of a supreme poet.

. . . .

Here, then, we have the most complete idealization and comprehension of things achieved by mankind hitherto. Dante is the type of a consummate poet.²¹

The hierarchy of poets is complete yet it is a scale to which some reservations must be added. True, Lucretius and Dante have that magnificent totality which Santayana so admires and demands, but Goethe brings to his level, albeit the lowest, an immediacy which Lucretius, for instance, does not have. Lucretius' vision may be purer and more exalted but it is also a little empty, a little cold. Dante, on the other hand, has

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 130-132.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 132-133, 135.

a view of nature that is shot through with myths. But taken together these three poets constitute that ideal poet. The ideal poet is that man who would be in immediate contact with experiences of the world as was Goethe; but he should simultaneously understand nature, the ground of that experience as did Lucretius; and finally he must understand the moral and ideal aspirations of man as did Dante.²² An impossible ideal? Perhaps. But even the impossible may be necessary if it provides a directive or a goal toward which the artist may work.

Out of the Three Philosophical Poets comes also Santayana's most fundamental principle of criticism: that it is necessary for man and for the poet to look beyond himself, to recognize that outside himself there is a world he must contend with. There will always be change, good and evil, joy and misfortune, birth and death, and the necessity of meeting these bewildering moments of life. Philosophy, religion, and poetry (in their highest forms all are synonymous) are the instruments by which man approaches life and reconciles himself to it.²³

²² Ibid., pp. 203-215.

²³ See Ibid., p. 69. In reference to modern writers and their portrayal of man as something less than the rational being who meets the problems of life with intelligence, Santayana comments, "The absence of moral judgments or sentiments helps to produce this impression of conscious automata, wound up, and running round and round in their cages. I think there is biological truth in that view, but we have also a third, a vertical dimension. We can think: and it is in that dimension that experience becomes human." (Letters, p. 314; to Robert Shaw Barlow, June 22, 1936.)

Such an ideal for poetry, such a vision of it, is hard to repudiate or refute. It is an ideal grand in design, and though this ideal may be realized only on rare occasions, that ideal is itself poetry.

Little needs to be said by way of conclusion. Clearly Santayana's criticism is both conservative and classic. The romantic impulse is recognized by Santayana but, for great or distinctive art, it must be incorporated into a larger unity which is controlled by reason. Reason becomes that faculty which sees goals or ideals, which observes its ends as well as means. Literary art then must not only be in harmony with life's other pursuits but it must also reveal what man's goals or ideals are to be; it must portray the life which is most conducive to man's happiness as well as provide that pleasure for man generated by the work itself. If literature becomes a separate, isolated activity for man it need not for it does not necessarily have to be--in fact should not be--at odds with man's other activities if all are guided by reason.

Reason accordingly requires the fusion of two types of life, commonly led in the world in well-nigh total separation, one a life of impulse expressed in affairs and social passions, the other a life of reflection expressed in religion, science, and the imitative arts. In the Life of Reason, if it were brought to perfection, intelligence would be at once the universal method of practice and its continual reward. All reflection would then be applicable in action and all action fruitful in happiness The Life of Reason is the happy marriage of two elements--impulse and ideation--which if wholly divorced would reduce man to a brute or to a maniac. The rational animal is generated by the union of these two monsters. He is constituted by ideas

which have ceased to be visionary and actions which have ceased to be vain.²⁴

Literature then in its highest form would be a product of this rational animal. If Santayana's demand for religion seems unreasonable or dated, it must be remembered that he is looking back on the centuries of man's existence and has thus seen religion as man's frame of reference, as the structure which contained man's goals and ideals. Religion may be false if taken as an accurate description of the natural world, but it is not false when seen as the guide for man's hopes and aspirations.

The real problem with Santayana's criticism is not really the points of confusion or inconsistency for these are hurdles which can be surmounted; the real problem is that his philosophy of the good life which is inextricably tied to his criticism is one which is seldom expounded in the mid-twentieth century and even more rarely advocated. For many today religion reeks of something primitive; not being scientifically verifiable, it is discarded completely. Frenzied activity has replaced reflection, and goals, if present at all, are shadowy and vague; nor is their lack of clarity an apparent matter of concern. Literature, in turn, being a reflection of man's thoughts, has mirrored these attitudes and activities. Those who have attempted to evaluate literature have also been caught

²⁴ Reason in Common Sense, (New York, 1936), pp. 5-6; first published in 1905.

in the same net. Criticism, rather than being philosophical, is fragmented. Technique often seems of more importance than content, and content in turn needs only reflect a personal vision.

Thus, if Santayana is not read today or commended today, it is largely because he has become a critical anomaly in the same century in which he lived.

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