

CONCERNING POETRY-A RESUMÉ

“ . . . the monotonous but
not impassive human existence . . . ”

It goes without saying that my intention is not to remind the reader that poetry exists. Everyone knows it. Instead, I propose to show that it is possible, from which it follows that it is inevitable and that, being inevitable, it is justified. It is not enough that a thing exist for it to be legitimate: it could be merely apparent, accidental or insignificant; it could conceal some trick or have only a temporary justification. Even more, the same word—here, poetry—could have successively designated different activities which in the end had no important relationship with each other.

I

In any case, it is proper to start from the fact that poetry does exist and that it existed before the written word. If we term literature any discourse which can survive and be transmitted without alteration, poetry was unquestionably the first form of

A revised text of a lesson given at the Collège de France, November 7, 1974
entitled “The Legitimacy of Poetry.”

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literature. It is not enough that poetry preceded prose: it was the discourse par excellence. When prose appeared, it was initially as inscription of legal texts or commemorative dedications on stone or metal, so that they would acquire by this means a permanence which poetry possessed without the aid of any material support. Otherwise, that is without inscriptions, prose was only a casual discourse—as it was intended to be, in fact—not subject to specific restraints which would make it easy to memorize. It is in the nature of sounds to exhaust themselves and be quickly dispersed, unless some appropriate signs, writing or some system of small symbolic drawings which correspond to them and the things or beings they designate, intervene to save them from a speedy and progressive disappearance. But here I am speaking of a period in which visual aids had not yet been invented.

Where then was hope for stability? And, first of all, was there a need for it? The story-teller, in oral literature, perpetuated the vicissitudes, the denouement, the unrolling of a story, the identity of the protagonists, and not an immutable text, if we except some brief formulas which announced the beginning or the end of an episode. Certain epithets also recurred to establish the physical or moral characteristics of the personages and provide the listener with the pleasure of recognizing them to be as expected: this man is lame, that one is crafty, invincible or knavish; this woman has a voice which soothes pain, this other is the one whose eyes are the color of the sea. Thus on every occasion the identity of the beloved, or hated, admired or scorned protagonists is reaffirmed. A label, rather than a description—and summed up in an epithet.

However, almost all the rest was free, or at least within the limits of a more exacting tradition than at first appears. The restriction applied only to the substance of the story and to intellectual or moral characteristics of the actors or their physical appearance, which the story teller was hardly permitted to change. As for the expression, it could vary. The narrator could demonstrate his talent for the invention of new and interesting details.

On the contrary, poetry is the kind of discourse in which the expression itself is immutable, a word so well fixed in advance that it cannot break loose but, like the written word, must remain where it is. In this way, poetry anticipated the function of writing before writing existed.

By what artifices? Essentially by repetition and originality, by symmetry and rhythm. In a general way through the use of such a well-defined and simple pattern that the ear could easily perceive if some element were lacking or superfluous. The memory is assisted by a number of things: the requirements of meter and cadence, which may be based on the number of syllables, the succession of short or long, the breaking into equal segments each of which forms a whole, the recurrence of the same sounds, a combination of echoes, rhythms, the reprise of final or initial syllables, a variable ensemble of regular returns and exact indications. From then on, substituting one term for another becomes difficult, if not scandalous, and immediately appears as confusion or error. The rules of meter were a guarantee against forgetfulness and alteration. Analogous protections were sought for proverbs, in which the necessary stability was equally obtained by tone, by syntactic similarities or by the balance between groups of expressions. Maxims and sayings are quoted with authority not because of their sense, which is often contradictory, but because their strict and laconic form, with no unnecessary words, appears as the sign of a prestigious permanence which renders them, so to speak, untouchable, as verses are, obeying an evident economy.

All knowledge which is deemed worthy of being perpetuated inevitably borrows (for lack of any other means) the conservative forms of language, that is, restricted means of expression; this is true for myths as well as for incantations or prayers, laws and moral codes, recipes, instructions for use, genealogies. The farmer's almanac and philosophical speculations use these forms too. Thus, in the beginning poetry did not have its own specific domain. It was the obligatory means of expression that permitted the fixing of any discourse whose exact formulation was considered important enough to preserve.

II

Everything changed when writing furnished a more certain and more convenient means of preservation. As soon as writing was invented, poetry began to wane. From that time on, the

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written text became the standard of reference rather than the memory of a narrator, even an authorized one. The qualities proper to prose were acknowledged and cultivated: precision and clarity, the absence of ambiguity in description, of fraud or error in reasoning. Prose gradually became the exclusive language of philosophy and jurisprudence, history and politics, scientific knowledge, as well as the imaginative stories in which exactness was never important or required.

Everywhere the development of literature, except, of course, among peoples without writing, tended to restrict the domain of versification more and more. In a way, it is a miracle that verse survived. In fact some have proclaimed verse a mere survival dating from the early days of humanity, the toy of its infancy, doomed to disappear when it reached the age of reason. Inversely, others have considered versification a superior means of expression, sensibly or fundamentally different from prose to which was reserved, but not for long, the name of poetry.

This point of view reflected more than one source of confusion. From the fact that the use of writing and, later, printing rendered the mnemonic function of meter, rhythm and sound obsolete, the poet found himself obliged to ascribe to poetry, if he desired to legitimize its use, a different, specific function, a new efficiency, this time an irreplaceable one. This function would be superfluous to a non-restricted discourse, that is, prose, but would not be derived in any way from the obligations imposed by meter, which were held to have become frivolous or useless. There were several consequences of the paradox which thus arose. In the first place, sooner or later, meter would appear as an unbearable yoke which, far from favoring poetry, only stifled it and forbade its uprising. On the contrary, it seemed to invite rhetoric, monotony and at times declamation. It was a curse that poetry should find itself bound up with the conventions of versification and, as these appeared to be only encumbering and old-fashioned obligations, poets felt compelled to free themselves from this bond if they were to achieve independence and spontaneity.

However, it was not entirely satisfactory that verse, liberated from its shackles—which, after all, were its *raison d'être*—should not differentiate itself from prose otherwise than by the artifice of incomplete lines or the division of the phrase into flexible and

unequal units, taken from emotional upheavals or respiratory rhythms. Poetry needed a special characteristic which was less external, less purely typographical, and which answered the persistent need which caused such expression to be preferred over that of prose.

Hence, the attempt to make of poetry a discourse which, this time, was no longer restricted but on the contrary more relaxed than ordinary usage called for. Hence the birth of a completely disjointed and disarticulated kind of discourse: a form without punctuation or syntax, almost reduced to enumeration; at first tolerating and then insisting on obscurity and incoherence, communicating nothing at all, offering neither intelligible meaning nor imaginable representation, both being considered the prerogative of prose. Thus, the poetic faculty came inevitably to be measured in an almost exclusively negative way because of the stupefaction and confusion into which it precipitated the reader, who soon forced himself to try to find some meaning. From then on, the only problem was to perfect a way of finding a text which would remain undecipherable. The undertaking rested on the assumption, soon verified, that there is no enigma which is not a challenge. The enigma par excellence and the most difficult challenge are those which are designed from the start to have no conceivable solution; their author deliberately tries to state the problem in such a way that it will obviously have none. This is not so easy as it seems: the faculties for homologation of the intellect and the imagination can be almost indefinitely extended. Furthermore, they are irrepressible and never admit defeat.

The adventure would probably not have succeeded if poetry did not contain one essential element which does not adapt itself to the metric "strait jacket," so that its autonomy cannot be excluded even when versification is repudiated. If such an element did not manifest itself except in the difference in form between verse and prose, the question would be quickly decided in a way that has been often suggested: poetry would have had its day as soon as these formal differences had been abandoned as troublesome and detrimental. But if on the contrary poetry is a force which answers a basic human need, if this need has always existed and if it accommodated itself to verse only because verse was the obligatory vehicle of lasting expression, then the question merits

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further examination and leads us to go back to the situation which existed before writing appeared.

Lacking letters and signs, man lived in a changing universe of sensory perceptions and qualities in which science, or the sum of empirical observations that stood for science, could only consist, like poetry, of recognizing obvious or chance analogies: similarities of forms, of colors, of sounds, of odors, or resemblances among the multitude of emotions, actions, events, joys and sorrows, glories and humiliations.

In the beginning, that is, before the advent of the quantitative, the two activities were equally metaphorical and shared a common domain, but with the coming of numbers that science was incontestably defined. However, comparisons of a qualitative nature, which stem from relations that are probably more fleeting but still do have a certain stability, also provide a specific type of satisfaction, and, at the same time, a kind of explanation which casts some light on the obscurity of feelings and emotions. By the correspondences it suggests, metaphor holds a monopoly on the enrichment of perception and feeling. In fact, the use of comparison opens the eyes or the mind to a relationship, true or false, which was not apparent before. A science of qualities and emotions, uncertain, fluid, personal, but nonetheless communicable, is remarkably adapted to its objective because of these very insufficiencies. It attempts an uncertain cartography of the universe in which human existence, monotonous but not impassive, develops and exhausts itself, from birth to death. In this difficult reconnaissance imagery furnishes almost the only means of establishing landmarks. Hence the role it has nearly always played, whether or not it was supported by prosody, in the mode of expression I like to call the poetic side of language. Otherwise, how could we explain the constant pre-eminence given to the image even though, subjected to metric constraints, it complicated the poet's task rather than making it easier if it appeared to him exact, imperious, indispensable. For my part, I am certain that it sprang up naturally, as it does today with children, in a world of appearances where pleasure and interest, knowledge, and at times a kind of happiness came from correlations proposed but not verified. We should ask ourselves, rather, why it tended to disappear from casual discourse, in which it would be quite at home. The fact is

that prose, which is supported by writing and not by memory, soon turned towards precision and certainty. To give unequivocal designations became a new and primordial task, as soon as the scientific processes required that constant and measurable relationships—which figures translate better than words—be substituted for deceptive and variable appearances.

Just as printing, like writing before it, had reduced, then abolished the usefulness of meter, the necessary use of a lexicon, protected against the pitfalls of reasoning as well against the snares of etymology and semantics led to a second discrediting of poetry. This time the target was not its form, but its aspirations. Poetry was threatened with being considered entertaining but without consequence or scope, since it appeared that truth lay only in the discovery of the underlying mathematical structures of the universe, where metaphor is fallacious by definition.

III

However, man, though he is part of the system and suffers from it, does not live on the scale of its rigorous architecture, which conveys nothing to his emotions. He suffers extremes in temperature, fire burns his flesh, cold paralyzes him, he rejoices in beauty, in reds and purples, in the fact that a note is in tune—and not in its wavelength. He enjoys a pleasant flavor and refuses a bitter one, unaware of the reactions provoked by one substance or another on the irritability of his tastebuds. All these harmonies or discords involve numbers and valences, it is true, but they are exalted, better experienced and known from the fact of having a name. They can be evoked, related or opposed to others. They can be placed in a series of accessory harmonies which echo and amplify them. An appropriate image brings these latent connections to life: it brings to our consciousness a limited and ephemeral light in which we can perceive the intimation of a hidden whole.

At the level of daily experience—perceptions and emotions—is a complex network of relationships which are not necessarily arbitrary or accidental and which are invented rather than revealed by the poet and by the imagery he uses to make them perceptible. Such a network is neither fundamental nor elementary, as is the

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one that interconnects the general or specific structures and mechanisms of the universe, which the various sciences study in order to determine their laws.

Metaphorical connections are capricious and fluctuating. They proceed from a subjective view of things. If they are not infinitely varied (in which case each would be lost as soon as it appeared), it is only because communicable constants exist, in our immediate sensibility, which go beyond the individual and the anecdote. They could not in any case lead to the creation of a technique for dominating nature. It is even doubtful whether these relationships by analogy are anything other than an unpredictable collection of fragmentary and vain discoveries, more or less pleasant or convincing, assembled by each individual imagination. Hence the distrust of the nature of poetic imagery that some people quite justifiably feel, and the even stronger distrust of its excessive powers, which its most ardent defenders attribute to it when its enchantment leads their credulity astray and they equate their bedazzlement with some supernatural light.

Each metaphor may be defined as the simultaneous evocation of two dissimilar data of the sensory universe, between which there is some kind of bond. The problem is to know what conditions the proposed relationship must fulfill in order to satisfy not only the imagination, which can be easily deceived for a moment, but also a more lasting, exacting demand. If the identity is obvious, that is, if the surprise and challenge do not immediately prevail or do not get in the way of acquired habits; then the image does not work: it does not provide the astonishment which is expected of it and which, once accepted, becomes the supplementary information it is intended to convey. Inversely, if the two terms of the metaphor contain nothing which is not contrary to the admission of compatibility between them, whatever point of view may be adopted, if they are brought together by chance or by provocation with no innate reason which demands their coupling, the image appears to be arbitrary and as such is again inoperable. It is vain for a poet to compare a tangerine to an orange, a tiger to a jaguar, a crocodile to an alligator. This is a matter for the logician or scholar, to determine the related genus and the difference in species. But it is also vain for the poet to compare a flower to a chair, unless the encounter is

prepared and called for in the context through a mediation which would be in this case the idea of welcome and repose, precisely as suggested by Rimbaud's poem, in which the reader finds himself summoned, as it were, to accept the identification.

The fertile image keeps an equal distance between banality, which renders it useless, and gratuity, which deprives it of effectiveness. Since its domain comprises the data of the universe as well as the invisible world of emotion, desire and dream, the poet frequently draws from the visible to give a form to the ineffable or to have a familiar and eloquent reference for the invisible, thus giving it a shape and making it easier to grasp.

When Mallarmé defined death as *a shallow, calumniated brook*, he captured it and made it less frightening. It may even be that the writer pretends to describe an object that anyone can see by relying on his imagination. Then he is using a rhetorical trick. Apollinaire marvels as he contemplates *fruits round as souls are*. He knows that souls are neither round nor of any other shape, but he also knows that they evoke an incorporeal perfection which no accident or fault can affect, so that the fruits for which they stand surety are immediately provided with an absolute and supernatural spherical form, worthy of the legendary garden in which they ripened. In Saint-John Perse, the snow falling on the mainland is envisioned in the following manner: "[...] *l'aube muette dans sa plume, comme une grande chouette fabuleuse en proie aux souffles de l'esprit, enflait son corps de dahlia blanc.*" (The silent dawn in its plumage, like a huge legendary owl, breathed upon by the spirit, inflates its white dahlia body). An imperceptible transition, faultlessly clear, between the snow flakes, the down and feathers of the nocturnal bird bristling with ecstasy or fright, and the circles of an immense corolla, infatuated with itself.

Imagery is proper to poetry: it is the poetic risk par excellence, a way of exploring the world of the senses which is particular to it. With the kind of discourse that aims at a correct designation it shares all the rest, including a concern for the harmony of syllables and the balance of a sentence. It may happen that the poet still wishes to fulfill the original obligation to leave nothing to chance in the phonetic, syntactic and rhythmic structure of the text. He deliberately chooses to submit to the old constraints

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of prosody, though he is no longer asked to observe them. He cannot resolve himself to giving up the fantastic privilege of enslaving memory. He will not consent to let his message be deformed by individual caprice, nor does he want it to be necessary to restore its precious exactitude by verifying it in a book which may have to be borrowed from a library. It is a much more powerful form of possession to haunt the memory, so that the captive mind is unable to free itself from the sorcery of a verse.

IV

Thus the use of imagery appears to be the distinguishing process of the poet. Through versification he assures himself of his empire, but versification alone is hardly more than a crutch. The image still requires a guarantee. If everyone could accumulate images through his imagination, they would be dissipated in a common insignificance as quickly as a routine, unconstrained or provocative caprice had deliberately created them. I have already stated that the imagery was due to the intuition, that it resulted from a decision freely taken by the poet, and that it was always a kind of wager. However, I quickly specified that it would have value only if it expressed a truth that every man could recognize and share. When all is said and done, the problem of poetry may be nothing more than that of the inequality of its imagery, or more precisely, that of the possibility of effective imagery, which is also the problem of its ultimate justification. To use the words of strength and beauty in this connection would be merely to push the problem one step further back: this power or charm must come from some hidden but essential property of the universe.

The world contains countless data; those of the imagination are no less innumerable. Opportunities for extracting and coupling them in a revealing and enriching way are practically limitless. However, the multitude of insects or fish, marbles or crystals, plants and trees has not prevented science from reducing matter, which takes on such a disconcerting variety of appearances, to a small number of chemical components.

At the other extreme of universal alchemy, singular qualities

and irreplaceable spectacles fascinate and discourage us by their immense gleaming reflections of wings, leaves, gems, silks and stars. To which is added the tumult of feelings, emotions, sentiments, speculation, mirages, giddiness. The mechanisms and processes of the universe are finite. Everything overlaps and is repeated in resonances, common or rare. At the root of this overwhelming mass, science attempts to define and count the tiny number of components—bodies or energies—which endlessly ramify, with no respite. Poetry inherits the sparkling surface of the world, the ever-spreading foliage of an abundance of contrasts.

If the world were infinite, if absolutely independent elements, not part of the closed series that interface with each other, could be added to it, and if, generally speaking, it were possible for unpredictable and radically different additions to appear; if on the other hand, human passions did not repeat themselves; if, at the same time, the phantasms of the imagination, like the structure of language and styles in art, did not recur with history, social conventions and circumstances in a complete and countable series of basic patterns, then poetry would become as useless as would science and its laws.

I suggest that, in spite of appearances, unlimited poetry would reveal itself to be as incoherent as a science obliged to account for an anarchic and inconstant universe or, what is the same thing, a universe without interruption, woven of imperceptible and unmarked transitions. Fortunately, this is not the case. But if it is easy to see that an ordered whole is the condition for the success of a rigorous undertaking which strives to discover, simplify and further reduce the list of the system's driving forces, it seems, inversely, that an adventurous exploration whose area coincides with a fully-exposed world could only benefit from being able to draw freely from reserves not only inexhaustible for man, as in fact they are, but really infinite, since they would be continually changing and renewing themselves. Here I am not referring to what is numerically incalculable: there might be repetitions and redundancies of simple, concrete data in an incessant state of metamorphosis. I am speaking of an accumulation of such contrasting qualities that it could in no way be conceived of as a whole, but at the most as a labyrinthine

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edifice whose possible unity is guaranteed (if we may say so) only by the hypothesis of periodic laws and a dubious complicity, flickering at intervals.

Without the comfort of solidarity glimpsed or guessed at in an apparently disorderly world, the metaphor would not be impossible, but I wonder if it would not lose its *raison d'être* or, in any case, a part of its pertinence if not its revelatory powers. It would become incidental and would not have behind it, to give it credibility, the vast network of tangled relationships which make up the texture of the world. Nothing would then exist but wild images, without connection, senseless, identical to those which a wandering mind likes to fabricate, not to look for but to cast aside whatever may sound out a hidden identity.

Enveloping the dense core of numbers and abstract concepts is a pulp, a diffused atmosphere which embraces the visible, the sensory and even all that part of the intelligible which is not the object but the savor of the intellect. Man who himself has appeared at this level of universal development particularly reflects what is scattered there, because he is both included in this dispersal and a party to it. He recognizes both within himself and around him the same labyrinths, avenues and cross-roads which lead him astray and obsess him: a complex network where all the channels and lines of force are recurrent and interconnected. The search for poetry implies such a quest, in which grace, patience, skill, aptitude and luck are all necessary for success. The reward is always small and questionable because each time it is made up of only a few images of unequal brilliance. However, the most modest attests to the unity and order of the universe. It prolongs them and adds itself to them. The soul, if I dare give this name to the tropism which in the partial is magnetically drawn to the whole, is soothed for a moment. An *image* which at first disconcerts is exalting in its strangeness once the *imagination* has found it apt, because it establishes an unforeseen complicity between terms which, in their turn, confirm that forms and feelings are repeated in the universe: no monster, prodigy or dream exists which does not have a counterpart.

V

I do not at all claim that imagery is the only instrument of poetry nor that poetry is not embodied in the whole of literature, even less that it is opposed to it, as some claim who attribute to it a kind of almost supernatural vocation because of which it would be incompatible with literary fabrication, sordid and always adulterated. We can conceive of a poetry with little imagery—with little power to evoke—which would only strive to render more transparent, through a perfect and unnatural limpidity, the movements, fits and starts of the soul. It simply seems to me that wherever an image arises there also arises the chance for poetry even if it is clumsy or quite commonplace, as it can be in sentimental songs. However, the power of poetry is such that it cancels out this vulgarity or even uses it as a spring-board.

In fact, poetry appears to be as contaminated as the rest of literature, in the same way and for the same human reasons. It is an art of language and, as such, not less, perhaps even more, dependent on the resources of each idiom, on each stage of a culture, on manners and the evolution of genres, schools and fashions, than are the other forms of literature. It has been rightly said that one does not become an artist by looking at nature, but by looking at the work of other artists. And so with the poet, who begins by reading verse before writing his own. He imitates their fortunate discoveries before finding his own style. Poems, like all the works of man, are largely dependent on society, education, preferences, the ambitions and vanity of the author; and like all works of which words are the substance, they are strongly affected by the wealth but also the precision of the vocabulary; by the flexibility but also the strictness of the syntax and by the rhetorical resources of a language.

So, depending on geography, historical periods and the vicissitudes of civilizations, we have seen poetry pass from the world of gods and heroes to the lament of the slave, *eyeless in Gaza*, with the horrible image of blinded prisoners turning the water-wheel under the whip until they were exhausted. The peremptory incantation of the sorcerer alternates with the tremulous prayer of the banished man. Lullabies and songs for pulling on the

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oars or for weaving cloth answer the couplets of the mystagogue, the cyclic stanzas of the metaphysician, the virtuoso's games. But one question, always the same remains.

The rough texts, born of misery, anger or despair, and the texts refined by the chemists of the language: what do they have in common? Verses provoked by chance or delirium; others obtained at the end of a strict grammatosophy; what brings them together? From puzzling genealogies to weighted subtleties and aesthetic expertise: what does this astonishing discourse contain that a truthful and direct statement does not seem able to cover?

To one who patiently studies the problem, poetry appears all through its history to have as a constant characteristic a certain affinity with mystery but not at all with the inexpressible, as is too often claimed. It is rather a matter of reserve, a voluntary reticence, a certain manner of keeping silent on the essential so as to entice only the imagination, to give it time to expand the message in its own way. Behind the letter of the message, something unexpressed seems to await the time to reveal a secret, a secret known from the beginning and needing only to be awakened.

Recourse to the restraints of prosody, as well as the calculated risks of metaphor, assuredly contributes to the impression of a shadowy but inhabited world. However, the true reason for this impression does not lie in the opposition of meter—always somewhat hieratic—to prose, closer to spoken language, nor in the preference given to evocation over designation. It seems to me to stem more from the particular domain which falls to poetry. Poetry is a means of precise denomination and exact communication, in a realm where exactness is often a delusion. It legitimately assigns to words a more emphatic and hazardous task, calling on their resonances, their secondary meanings, the echoes which they awaken in memory, in experience and desire.

Through this expedient and because an image is essentially a crossroads, poetry possesses (perhaps alone at the language level) a quality of encounter and collision, which astonishes and sometimes suffocates. Inspiration, erupting in imagery, does not come from any supernatural breath; it is only another name for a constant and ingenuous awareness on the part of the poet's

sensitivity. Among the many episodic or fundamental comparisons, keys or mirages which make up a world of recurrent elements, its unsleeping vigilance makes its daily rounds to bring new courage and lucidity to the soul groping in the shadows. The emotions it experiences then receive a name, an emblem, a durable designation which finally distinguishes them, which makes them intimate and immense at the same time. Depending on whether they are happy or painful, their intensity is increased or their sting soothed. No poetry, anywhere, in my opinion, has failed in this vocation.

For the rest, poetry is disconcertingly varied, at times intermittent, rarefied, made of flashes, at times a sustained reflection which only gradually uncovers the clarity it liberates. If it sometimes poses as or is taken for the confused expression of the unknowable or the arrogance of the arbitrary, this is unjust. It lends itself to exactness and precision, but in a different way from science and for another realm: the vast strata of the world where nothing is perfectly superimposable, where research would be continually stifled by details of impressions, of fleeting and reborn feelings, innumerable and ephemeral, always new and always the same. Science is forced to go farther afield in its search for basic structures. Yet these are the impressions and sensations which fill our existence as vulnerable and transitory beings. To poetry belongs the concrete science of the concrete facts of nature.

The universe begins with atoms and particles: it ends with foliage, history and dreams, pleasure and pain, all requiring some kind of science to encompass, identify and separate them, as well as to transmute and perpetuate them. In the density of the world the immutable anonymous reactions of acids and molecules are interchangeable. But through all the days of our lives *not* the thousand personal shocks which affect us and the events which crush us: not one is identical with another. However, no one remains untouched by the evocation of the least of them, because all men are made from the same clay. Otherwise, poetry would be inconceivable.

Scattered, dispersed, with neither coherence nor progress: such is poetry with its confidences that become intangible as soon as they are expressed, rebelling at the least alteration. It is

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dedicated to the outer shell of the universe, to a continual but unvarying metabolism: in this lies its profundity and its permanence. Like the discoveries of the sciences whose attributes and ends are laws and figures, those of poetry demand toil, lucidity, imagination. The only difference is that instead of exact calculations and irreproachable reasoning, there is quickened sensibility and the acuity of the analogical discovery.

VI

A RÉSUMÉ OF THE RÉSUMÉ

I have endeavored to specify the constant means employed by poetry to satisfy its ends. First, prosody, meaning by that all restraint or supplementary condition which the poet accepts (or invents) in order to seize the memory, offering it a text whose words are so strongly joined to each other that they can hardly be replaced by others or set in a different order. In this respect, poetry is a linguistic art and thus is part of literature. Second, it prefers evocation to designation so as to lead the mind to find for itself the concordances or recurrences which exist between the data of the universe and which, if named or only suggested, implant seeds in the imagination, bringing to it, because of their unexpected rightness, a liberating and fruitful joy. In this respect, poetry appears as a function of emotion and does not belong solely to literature. In fact, a poetry exists which is peculiar to things or to what feelings confer on them.

The domain of poetry also reveals itself—by means of a variety of genres, modes, traditions—as essentially that of the sensory qualities of the world, a domain which truly nothing can limit, because there is nothing which comes to man other than through feeling, sentiment or emotion, not excepting the evidence of the intellect. Poetry at the same time is based on the need to experience better, and experience more intimately, each of our opportunities for thrill or admiration, and first of all, on the power to prolong them by increasing their flavor and even their number, by fixing them in their evanescence, by shedding light on whatever obscure and secret aspects they may contain. Here expansion comes before comprehension, it being understood that

in the whole realm of the senses, to define and comprehend are not negligible processes either for enlargement or for perpetuation.

I do not have the impression that I have done useful work. I desired to put together a few obvious facts and to formulate a small number of conjectures, some of which seem to me to have probability. We often hear it said that poetry is indefinable. I note that the same may be said of intelligence. Perhaps because both are applicable to everything—true, not to the same things in the same degree—and also correspond to a different means of approach. I am not certain that I have established the possibility of poetry, as was my design, and perhaps it still carries within it a doubt, a risk which is inherent in it. Going backward, rather in spite of myself, I have tried at least to show that poetry is irreplaceable, consequently to persuade the reader that it is legitimate, that is, based on reason, not only on fact.