

being as for happening." He also said, "Every poem is rooted in imaginative awe." These statements answer, or imply an answer, to the question: Why does one write?

I was startled, indeed horrified, when a writing class in which I have an interest was asked, "Is it for money or for fame?" as though it must be one or the other—and writing were not for some a felicity, if not a species of intellectual self-preservation. Gorgeously remunerated as I am for being here, it would seem both hypocritical and inappropriate to feign that a love of letters renders money irrelevant. Still, may I say, and with emphasis, that I do not write for money or fame. To earn a living is needful, but it can be done in routine ways. One writes because one has a burning desire to objectify what it is indispensable to one's happiness to express; a statement which is not at variance with the fact that Sir Walter Scott, driven by a fanatically sensitive conscience, shortened his life writing to pay what was not a personal debt. And Anthony Trollope, while writing to earn a living, at the same time was writing what he very much loved to write.

Amplifying the impression which Bernard Shaw, as music critic, himself gives of his "veracity, catholicity, and pugnacity,"² Hesketh Pearson says of him as stage manager of his plays, "No author could be more modest than Shaw. He did not regard his text as sacrosanct. He laughed over his own lines as if they were jokes by somebody else and never could repeat them accurately. Once, when an actor apologized for misquoting a passage, he remarked, 'What you said is better than what I wrote. If you can always misquote so well, keep on misquoting—but remember to give the right cues!'"³ Writing was resilience. Resilience was an adventure. Is it part of the adventure to revise what one wrote? Professor Ewing has suggested that something be said about this. My own revisions are usually the result of impatience with unkempt diction and lapses in logic; together with an awareness that for most defects, to delete is the instantaneous cure.

The rhythms of the King James Version of the Bible stand forever as writing, although certain emendations as to meaning seem obligatory. The King James Epistle of Paul to the Philippians, 3:20, reads: "For our conversation is in heaven"; the Revised Standard Version reads: "We are a heavenly body"; each a mistranslation, according to Dr. Alvin E. Magary, who feels that Dr. Moffat got it right: "We are a colony of heaven"—a Roman outpost as it were, in which people conformed their lives to the life of Rome—an interpretation which makes sense as applied to Christianity"; Dr. Magary also emphasizes that the beatitude, blessed are the meek, should have no connotation of subservience, since if rendered more strictly, the word would be, not the meek, but the "begging."

The revisions by Henry James of his novels, are evidently in part the

IDIOSYNCRASY AND TECHNIQUE

I. Technique

IN his inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford,¹ Mr. Auden said, "There is only one thing that all poetry must do; it must praise all it can for

Inaugurating the Ewing Lectures at the University of California, October 3 and 5, 1956.

The Poet's Essay -
Marianne Moore

result of an insistent desire to do justice to first intention. Reverting to pronouncements on Milton and Goethe made previously, T. S. Eliot seems to feel that after-judgment can not merely be taken for granted, and when accepting the Goethe Prize in 1954 he said, "As one's reading is extended [one begins] to develop that critical ability, that power of self-criticism without which the poet will do not more than repeat himself. . ."; then further on: "To understand what Wisdom is, is to be wise oneself; and I have only the degree of understanding that can be obtained by a man who knows that he is not wise, yet has some faith that he is wiser than he was twenty years ago. I say twenty years ago, because I am under the distressing necessity of quoting a sentence I printed in 1939. It is this:

Of Goethe perhaps it is truer to say that he dabbled in both philosophy and poetry and made no great success at either; his true role was that of a man of the world and a sage, a la Rochefoucauld, a La Bruyère, a Vauvenargues."

Mr. Eliot says he " . . . never re-read the passage in which this sentence is buried [and had] discovered it not so long ago in Mr. Michael Hamburger's introduction to his edition and translation of the text of Holderlin's poems." He then goes on to say of Goethe, "It may be that there are areas of wisdom that he did not penetrate: but I am more interested in trying to understand the wisdom he possessed than to define its limitations. When a man is a good deal wiser than oneself, one does not complain that he is no wiser than he is."⁴

Since writing is not only an art but a trade embodying principles attested by experience, we would do well not to forget that it is an expedient for making one's self understood and that what is said should at least have the air of having meant something to the person who wrote it—as is the case with Gertrude Stein and James Joyce. Stewart Sherman one time devised a piece of jargon which he offered as indistinguishable from work by Gertrude Stein, which gave itself away at once as lacking any private air of interest. If I may venture to say again what I have already said when obscurity was deplored, one should be as clear as one's natural reticence allows one to be. Laurence Binyon, reflecting on the state of letters after completing his Dante, said: "How indulgent we are to infirmity of structure . . ."⁵ and structural infirmity truly has, under surrealism, become a kind of horticultural verbal blight threatening firmness to the core; a situation met long ago in *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius*:

Enjoy the good yet sink not in excess.
True scholar stands by his steadfastness.⁶

.
Lamb-skin for suavity, trimmed and ornate,
But a good soldier who will get things straight.⁷

In attaining this noble firmness, one must have clarity, and clarity depends on precision; not that intentional ambiguity cannot be an art. Reinhold Niebuhr is not famed as easy reading, but is at times a study in precision as when he says, "The self does not realize itself most fully when self-realization is its conscious aim"; and of conscience says, "We will define it provisionally at least as capacity to view itself and judge obligation in contrast with inclination."⁸ It is not "the purpose [but] the function of roots to absorb water," Dr. Edmund Sinnott notes in his book *The Biology of the Spirit*, in which he discusses the self-regulating properties of protoplasm—digressing, with a shade of outrage, to deplore untidiness in the use of terms. One is corrected when referring to certain African tribes for saying they worship the devil; they propitiate the devil; and if precise, one weeds text of adjective, adverbs, and unnecessary punctuation. As an instance of such concision, we have Mr. Francis Watson's account of Edward Arnold, "the traveler, linguist, and semi-mystic, with whom Matthew Arnold did not like to be confused."⁹ Informing us that Edwin Arnold had been married three times and that two of his wives had died—a lack-luster kind of statement which few of us perhaps would avoid—Mr. Watson says, "after being twice bereaved, he found a third wife from Japan, a land whose culture he extolled in articles. . . ." Paramount as a rule for any kind of writing—scientific, commercial, informal, prose or verse—we dare not be dull. Finding Akira Kurosawa's film *The Magnificent Seven* too reiterative, Bosley Crowther says that "the director shows so many shots of horses' feet tromping in the mud that we wonder if those horses have heads."¹⁰

In his "Advice to a Young Critic" (Golding Bright),¹¹ Bernard Shaw says, "Never strike an attitude, national, moral, or critical"—an axiom he did not observe too fanatically if judged by the telegram he is said to have sent to an actress with a leading part in one of his plays: ". . . wonderful, marvelous, superb . . ." to which the actress replied, "Undeserving such praise"; and he: "I meant the play"; and she: "So did I."

I have a mania for straight writing—however circuitous I may be in what I myself say of plants, animals, or places; and although one may reverse the order of words for emphasis, it should not be to rescue a rhyme. There are exceptions, of course, as when Mr. Oliver Warner, speaking of Captain Cook, the explorer, in commending the remarkable drawings made by members of the Captain's staff, says: "None of Cook's artists worked to preconceived notions. They drew what they saw and wonderful it was."¹² To say

"and it was wonderful" would have been very flat. We have literature, William Archer said, when we impart distinctiveness to ordinary talk and make it still seem ordinary.

Like dullness, implausibility obscures the point; so, familiar though we are with "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," by Mark Twain,¹³ allow me to quote a line or two. "It is a rule of literary art in the domain of fiction," Mark Twain says, "that always the reader shall be able to tell the corpses from the others. But this detail often has been overlooked in the *Deerslayer* tale. [Cooper] bends 'a sapling' to the form of an arch over [a] narrow passage, and conceals six Indians in its foliage." Then, "... one of his acute Indian experts, Chingachgook (pronounced Chicago, I think) has lost the trail of a person he is tracking ... turned a running stream out of its course, and there, in the slush of its old bed, were that person's moccasin-tracks. ... " Even the laws of nature take a vacation when Cooper is practicing "the delicate art of the forest."

What has been said pertains to technique (*tekhnikos* from the Greek, akin to *tekto*: to produce or bring forth—as art, especially the useful arts). And, indeed if technique is of no interest to a writer, I doubt that the writer is an artist.

What do I mean by straight writing, I have been asked. I mean, in part, writing that is not mannered, overconscious, or at war with common sense, as when a reviewer of *The Evolution of Cambridge Publishing*, by S. C. Roberts, refers to "a demure account of Cambridge's flirtation with the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*."¹⁴ At the risk of seeming to find every virtue in certain authors and these authors in a certain few books or critiques, let me contrast with the unreal manner, W. D. Howells' *My Mark Twain* and a similar uninfected retrospect by the Duke of Windsor. "Of all the literary men I have known," Howells says of Mark Twain, "he was the most unliterary in his make and manner. ... His style was what we know, for good or for bad, but his manner, if I may difference the two, was as entirely his own as if no one had ever written before. [He] despised the avoidance of repetitions out of fear of tautology. If a word served his turn better than a substitute, he would use it as many times on a page as he chose. ... [There] never was a more biddable man in things you could show him a reason for. ... If you wanted a thing changed, very good, he changed it; if you suggested that a word or a sentence or a paragraph had better be struck out, very good, he struck it out. His proof sheets came back each with a veritable 'mush of concession,' as Emerson says." "He was always reading some vital book ... which gave him life at first hand," Howells continues. "It is in vain that I try to give a notion of the intensity with which he compassed the whole world. ... "

The other instance of straight writing to which I referred is "My Garden," by the Duke of Windsor.¹⁵ Prosperity and royalty are always under suspicion. "Of course they had help," people say. "Someone must have written it for them"; as they said of the shepherd made judge, in the fable of the shepherd and the King, "... he is given the credit; we did the work; he has amassed riches; we are poor."¹⁶ So let me say, I have in the following narrative an impression of individuality, conviction, and verbal selectiveness.

"I think my deep enjoyment of gardening must be latent," the Duke begins. "At least it was not inherited. ... The gardens at Sandringham and Windsor ... made a fine show in summertime [a word with flavor, for me], but people did not really live with them. A garden is a mood, as Rousseau said, and my mood was one of intimacy, not splendor." Of his present gardening at The Mill, not far from Paris, he says, "... French gardens can be remarkably beautiful things. They look like continuations of the Savonnerie of Aubusson carpets in the great chateaus rolled outside the windows onto the lawns, perfectly patterned and mathematically precise. ... I wanted an English type of garden, which means green grass and seemingly casual arrangement of flowers, and here I had the perfect framework." Commenting on one of the color photographs which supplement the account, he says, "The main entrance to the property has an old covered gateway with ancient oak doors and a cobbled drive which leads to the main building. There is a big sundial above the front door, put there when The Mill was restored about 1732. In the foreground is Trooper, one of our four Pugs." Technically an oversight, perhaps—the f-o-r-e ground and f-o-u-r pugs in close proximity—this clash lends authenticity, has the charm of not too conscious writing. Unmistakably all along, the article embodies a zeal for the subject, a deep affection for flowers as seen in the complaint, "The mildest stonemason turns scourge when it comes to plant life." The piece smiles, whereas saturninity is a bad omen. "We do not praise God by dispraising man."¹⁷

II. *Idiosyncrasy*

In considering technique, I tried to say that writing can be affirmative and that we must, as Dr. Nathan Scott says, "reject the attitude of philosophic distrust." The writer should have "a sense of upthrusting vitality and self-discovery"¹⁸ without thinking about the impression made, except as one needs to make oneself understood.

We are suffering from too much sarcasm, I feel. Any touch of unfeigned gusto in our smart press is accompanied by an arch word implying, "Now to me, of course, this is a bit asinine." Denigration, indeed, is to me so disaffecting that when I was asked to write something for the Columbia

Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa Class Day exercises, I felt that I should not let my sense of incapacity as an orator hinder me from saying what I feel about the mildew of disrespect and leave appreciation to Mr. Auden, to salute "literary marines landing in little magazines." I then realized that what I was so urgent to emphasize is reduced in the First Psalm to a sentence: Blessed is the man who does not sit in the seat of the scoffer.

Odd as it may seem that a few words of overwhelming urgency should be a mosaic of quotations, why paraphrase what for maximum impact should be quoted verbatim? I borrowed, at all events, Ambassador Conant's title *The Citadel of Learning*, taken for his book from Stalin: "[Facing us] stands the citadel of learning. This citadel we must capture at any price. This citadel must be taken by our youth, if they wish to be the builders of a new life, if they wish, in fact, to take the place of the old guard."¹⁹

Blessed is the man

who does not sit in the seat of the scoffer—

the man who does not denigrate, depreciate, denunciate;

who is not "characteristically intemperate,"

who does not "excuse, retreat, equivocate; and will be heard."

(Ah, Giorgione! there are those who mongrelize

and those who heighten anything they touch; although it may well be that if Giorgione's self-portrait were not said to be he,

it might not take my fancy. Blessed the geniuses who know

that egomania is not a duty.)

"Diversity, controversy; tolerance"—in that "citadel of learning" we have a fort that ought to armor us well.

Blessed is the man who "takes the risk of a decision"—asks

himself the question: "Would it solve the problem?

Is it right as I see it? Is it in the best interests of all?"

Alas. Ulysses' companions are now political—

living self-indulgently until the moral sense is drowned,

having lost all power of comparison,

thinking license emancipates one, "slaves whom they themselves have bound."

Brazen authors, downright soiled and downright spoiled as if sound and exceptional, are the old quasi-modish counterfeits,

mitin-proofing conscience against character.

Affronted by "private lives and public shame," blessed is the author

who favors what the supercilious do not favor—who will not comply. Blessed, the unaccommodating man.

Blessed the man whose faith is different

from possessiveness—of a kind not framed by "things which do appear"—

who will not visualize defeat, too intent to cower;

whose illumined eye has seen the shaft that gilds the sultan's tower.

I had written these lines about denigration as treason, and was assembling advice for some students of verse, when I found that Rolfe Humphries, in his little treatise entitled "Writing the Lyric,"²⁰ has thrown light on the use of consonants. "Take the letter s," he says, "one of the most insidious sounds in the language, one which will creep in, in a sibilant reptilian fashion like the original serpent in the garden, and if you are not careful, not only drive you out of Paradise, but hiss you off the stage; . . . see if you can write a quatrain without using it at all." Pondering my "Blessed is the man who does not sit in the seat of the scoffer," I could only say that another's expertise might save one considerable awkwardness. Initiate John Barry came to my rescue by citing the *Aeneid* (II, 8):

Et iam nox umida caelo

praecipitat suadentque cadentia sidera somnos.*

Convinced that denigration is baneful, one readily sanctions the attack prompted by affection. In fact nothing is more entertaining than the fraternal accolade in reverse; as when *The London News Chronicle* of November 16, 1954, published a cartoon, and lines entitled "Winniehaha,"²¹ concerning Mr. Churchill—Prime Minister then—after a cousin of his, Captain Lionel Leslie, had referred to the drop of Indian blood inherited by Sir Winston through his grandmother, Clara Jerome. The complimentary cast of the sally—a parody of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*—which was written before Mr. Churchill had been knighted, when the date of his retirement was a subject of speculation, is apparent from even a line or two:

In the center of the village

In the wigwam of the wise ones,

Where the head men of the nation

Come to talk in solemn council,

Squats the old chief, Winniehaha,

*And now the night calls dew down from heaven

And the falling stars urge us to sleep.

Also known as Sitting Bulldog; . . .
 Some there are with minds that wander
 From the purpose of the powwow;
 Minds that wonder will he give us
 Just an inkling, to be candid,
 Of the date of his retirement?
 Not that we would wish to rush him,
 Wish to rush old Winniehaha,
 Rush our splendid Sitting Bulldog
 From the headship of the head men
 In the center of the village,
 In the wigwam of the wise ones.
 Still, it's just a bit unsettling
 Not to know when Winniehaha
 Will give place to handsome Pinstripe.
 Will he tell us? Will he tell us?

In connection with personality, it is a curiosity of literature how often what one says of another seems descriptive of one's self. Would-be statesmen who spike their utterances with malice should bear this in mind and take fright as they drive home the moral of *The Lion*, *The Wolf*, and the Fox: "Slander flies home faster than rumor of good one has done."²² In any case, Sir Winston Churchill's pronouncement on Alfred the Great does seem appropriate to himself—his own defeats, triumphs, and hardihood: "This sublime power to rise above the whole force of circumstances, to remain unbiased by the extremes of victory or defeat, to greet returning fortune with a cool eye, to have faith in men after repeated betrayals, raises Alfred far above the turmoil of barbaric wars to his pinnacle of deathless glory."²³

Walter de la Mare found "prose worthy of the name of literature . . . tinged with that erratic and unique factor, the personal . . ." reminding one of the statement by Mr. F. O. Matthiessen, in his study of Sarah Orne Jewett, that "style means that the author has fused his material and his technique with the distinctive quality of his personality . . ." and of the word "idiolect" used by Professor Harry Levin as meaning "the language of a speaker or writer who has an inflection of his own." In saying there is no substitute for content, one is partly saying there is no substitute for individuality—that which is peculiar to the person (the Greek *idioma*). One also recalls the remark by Henry James: "a thing's being one's own will double the use of it." Discoveries in art, certainly, are personal before they are general.

Goya—in *The Taste of Our Times* series,²⁴ reviewed by Pierre Gassier somewhat as follows—should afford us creative impetus. After surviving a lethal threat, severe illness at Cadiz in 1792, Goya was left with his right

side paralyzed, with dizzy spells, a buzzing in his head, and partial blindness. He recovered, only to find himself irremediably deaf. On returning to Madrid, he began work at once, painted eleven pictures for the Academy of San Fernando, and sent them with a letter to the director, Don Berardo Iriarte. "In order to occupy an imagination mortified by the contemplation of my sufferings," he said, "and recover, partially at all events, the expenses incurred by illness, I fell to painting a set of pictures in which I have given observation a place usually denied it in works made to order, in which little scope is left for fancy and invention." Fancy and invention—not made to order—perfectly describe the work; the *Burial of the Sardine*, say: a careening throng in which one can identify a bear's mask and paws, a black monster wearing a horned hood, a huge turquoise quadracorne, a goblin mouth on a sepia fish-tailed banner, and twin dancers in filmy gowns with pink satin bows in their hair. Pieter Bruegel, the Elder, an observer as careful and as populous as Goya, "crossed the Alps and traveled the length of Italy, returning in 1555 to paint as though Michelangelo had never existed," so powerful was predilective intention.²⁵ In a television interview after receiving the National Book Award for *Ten North Frederick*, John O'Hara was asked if he might not have to find, as a background for fiction, something different from small-town life in Pennsylvania, to which he replied, "There is in one room in one day of one man's life, material for a lifetime." The artist does not—as we sometimes hear—"seek fresh sources of inspiration." A subject to which he is susceptible entices him to it; as we see in the epics of Marko Marulic (1450-1524), the fifth centenary of whose birth Yugoslavia has celebrated, in honor of his Latin epic *Judita* (1501), enhanced by woodcuts such as *The Muster at Dubrovnik*: trumpeters, men at arms in an elephant-castle; dog; king, queen, and attendants. The New York Yugoslav Information Center says, "What is important is that in following the classics, Marulic did not transplant . . . mechanically . . . but depended on his own poetic abilities," his novelty consisting in "comparisons taken from his own field of experience, in language abounding in speech forms of the people." An author, that is to say, is a fashioner of words, stamps them with his own personality, and wears the raiment he has made, in his own way.

Psychoanalysis can do some harm "taking things to pieces that it cannot put together again," as Mr. Whit Burnett said in a discourse entitled "Secrets of Creativeness." It has also been of true service, sharpening our faculties and combating complacency. Mr. Burnett drew attention to the biography of Dr. Freud by Ernest Jones, and to what is said there of genius as being not a quality but qualitative—a combination of attributes which differs with the person—three of which are honesty, a sense of the really significant, and the power of concentration.

Curiosity seems to me connected with this sense of significance. Thoreau, you may recall, demurred when commended for originality and said that it was curiosity: "I am curiosity from top to toe." I think I detect curiosity in the work of Sybille Bedford—in her novel *A Legacy*—in the statement, "... no one in the house was supposed to handle *used* [banknotes]. Everybody was paid straight off the press. The problem of change was not envisaged"; sententiousness in the writing, being offset by the unsteretyped juxtaposing of a word or two such as querulous and placid. Grandma Merz, for instance, "was a short bundle of a woman swaddled in stuffs and folds . . . stuck with brooches of rather gray diamonds. Her face was a round, large, indeterminate expanse . . . with features that escaped attention and an expression that was at once querulous and placid."²⁶ In Marquerite Yourcenar's "Author's Note" to her *Memoirs of Hadrian*²⁷—a study which does "border on the domain of fiction and sometimes of poetry," as has been said—one sees what concentration editorially can be. And Paul Delarue's "Sources and Commentary" appended to the *Borzoï Book of French Folk Tales*²⁸ are similarly impressive—besides affording an exciting knowledge of variants. In "The White Dove" (the story of Bluebeard, abridged by Perrault), the ninth victim's pretexts for delay become specific—in this early version—"to put on my petticoat, my wedding-gown, my cap, my bouquet." And we learn that "The Ass's Skin," enshrined for us by La Fontaine in "The Power of the Fable,"²⁹ is the "Story of Goldilocks," and of Madame d'Aulnoy's "Beauty and the Beast" (1698). The presentment here of obscure minutiae, demonstrating that tales of all nations have a common fabric, makes the most artful of detective stories seem tame.

Creative secrets, are they secrets? Impassioned interest in life, that burns its bridges behind it and will not contemplate defeat, is one, I would say. Discouragement is a form of temptation; but paranoia is not optimism. In an essay entitled "Solitude" (the theme chosen by the *Figaro* for an essay contest), Maxime Bennebon, a boy of seventeen, visualizes "Michelangelo's Moses, head in hands, the attitude of the child who prays with eyes closed; of the pianist—his back to the audience; they must be alone that they may offer what is most treasurable, themselves."

The master secret may be steadfastness, that of Nehemiah, Artaxerxes' cupbearer, as it was of the three youths in the fiery furnace, who would not bow down to the image which the king had set up. "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing that thou art not sick?" the King asked. Nehemiah requested that he be allowed to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and the King granted his request; gave him leave of absence and a letter to the keeper of the forest that he might have timber for the gates of the palace—subject to sarcasm while building, such as Sanballet's, "If a fox go up, he shall break down

their wall." Summoned four times to a colloquy, Nehemiah sent word: "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down." Then when warned that he would be slain, he said, "Should such a man as I flee?" "So the wall was finished."³⁰ A result which is sensational is implemented by what to the craftsman was private and unsensational. Tyrone Guthrie, in connection with the theater, made a statement which sums up what I have been trying to say about idiosyncrasy and technique: "It is one of the paradoxes of art that a work can only be universal if it is rooted in a part of its creator which is most privately and particularly himself."³¹

Thomas Mann, fending off eulogy, rendered a service when he said, "Praise will never subdue skepticism." We fail in some degree—and know that we do, if we are competent; but can prevail; and the following attributes, applied by a London journal to Victor Gollancz, the author and publisher, I adopt as a prescription: we can in the end prevail, if our attachment to art is sufficiently deep; "unpriggish, subtle, perceptive, and consuming."³²

¹ *Makings, Knowing and Judging: An Inaugural Lecture by W. H. Auden Delivered before the University of Oxford on 11 June 1956* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press).

² Michael Tippett, "An Irish Basset-Horn," *The Listener*, July 26, 1956.

³ Heskest Pearson, "Bernard Shaw as Producer," *The Listener*, August 16, 1956.

⁴ "Discourse in Praise of Wisdom," reprinted "Goethe as the Sage."

⁵ *The Dalhousie Review*, January 1943.

⁶ Translated by Ezra Pound (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁸ *The Self and the Dramas of History* (New York: Scribner, 1955).

⁹ "Edwin Arnold and 'The Light of Asia,'" *The Listener*, June 14, 1956.

¹⁰ *The New York Times*, November 20, 1957.

¹¹ *The Listener*, June 14, 1956.

¹² "In Honor of James Cook," *The Listener*, June 14, 1956.

¹³ *The Shock of Recognition*, edited by Edmund Wilson (New York: Doubleday, 1943).

¹⁴ Unsigned review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, March 2, 1956.

¹⁵ *Life*, July 16, 1956.

¹⁶ *The Fables of La Fontaine*, translated by Marianne Moore (New York: Viking, 1954), Book Ten, IX.

¹⁷ Dr. Alvin E. Magary.

¹⁸ Maxwell Geismar, *The Nation*, April 14, 1956.

¹⁹ As "freely translated" by Charles Poore, reviewing James B. Conant, *The Citadel of Learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), in the *New York Times*, April 7, 1956.

²⁰ *In Writers on Writing*, edited by Herschel Brickell (New York: Doubleday, 1949).

²¹ Anonymous. Reprinted in the *New York Times*, November 17, 1954.

²² *The Fables of La Fontaine*, Book Eight, III.

²³ *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, Vol. I: *The Birth of Britain* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1956).

²⁴ "Essay on Prose," *The National and English Review* (in three sections, concluded in March 1955), quoted by Arts (New York).

²⁵ Fritz Grossmann, *The Paintings of Bruegel* (New York: Phaidon Press, 1955).

²⁶ Sybille Bedford, *A Legacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957).

²⁷ Translated from the French by Grace Frick (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1954).

²⁸ Translated by Austin E. Fife (New York: Knopf, 1956).

²⁹ *The Fables of La Fontaine*, Book Eight, IV: "The moment The Ass's Skin commences, Away with appearances; I am enraptured, really am."

³⁰ Nehemiah 2, 4, and 6.

³¹ *The New York Times Magazine*, November 27, 1955.

³² *The Observer*, March 11, 1956.

Idiosyncrasy and Technique. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958;
A Marianne Moore Reader.

EDITH SITWELL, VIRTUOSO

GREAT in far greater ways, Dame Edith Sitwell is a virtuoso of rhythm and accent. She has given me immense pleasure, intensifying my interest in rhythm, and has also encouraged me in my rhythmic eccentricities. I can scarcely read the Bible without forsaking content for rhythm, as where the Apostle Paul speaks of the shipwreck on Malta and says, "when the ship could no longer bear up into the wind, we let her drive"—a better rhythm than "and were driven."

Façade, Dame Edith—or Miss Sitwell as she was then—insists, was but apprenticeship; of virtuoso quality with wit, one observes, as in "The Higher Sensualism" when Queen Circe said,

"Young man, I will buy
Your plumaged coat for my pig to try—

Then with angels he'll go a'dancing hence
From sensuality into sense!"

"I used to practice writing," Dame Edith says, "as a pianist practices music." She says that she would take a waltz or a polka or the music of the barrel organ beneath her window and translate it into words, as she has done in this phrase from "Country Dance":

But Silenus
Has seen us.

Dame Edith then considered the long line and its possibilities. William Carlos Williams has said in his book, *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, "I found I could not use the long line because of my nervous nature." An adagio, moreover, "is hard to sustain at concert pitch," as the *Times Literary Supplement* noted. We have it, however, when Edith Sitwell writes

archipelagoes
Of stars and young thin moons from great wings falling
As ripples widen.

How pleasing, the dactyls, *porphyry, basilica, Babylon*; and *babioun* (*babioun* borrowed from Ben Jonson, as she says). How neat, the rhyme "Noctambulo" with "folio":

The public scribe, Noctambulo
Where moonlight, cold as blades of grass
Echoes upon deserted walls,
Turning his dusty folio;

and this: "old Bacchantes black with wine, / Whose very hair has changed into a vine." We have something of the self-impelled ease of Leslie Brooke's "Johnny Crow's Party":

The snake
Got entangled
With the rake.
The sheep
Fell asleep
And the armadillo
Used him as a pillow.

Dame Edith's irregularities in set meter are hyper-skillful, as in creating a pause after *any* in "anybody": "Mary Stuart to James Bothwell" (Casket Letter No. 2):

Leaving you, I was sundered like the sea!
Departed from the place where I left my heart
I was as small as any body may be.

That is to say, with the accent on *body*.
There is no melody in Pope, Dame Edith says, because there is no irregularity. "To have melody, there must be variations in the outward struc-

I May, I Might, I Must

If you will tell me why the fen
appears impassable, I then
will tell you why I think that I
can get across it if I try.

To a Chameleon

Hid by the august foliage and fruit of the grape vine,
Twine,

Your anatomy

Round the pruned and polished stem,

Chameleon.

Fire laid upon

An emerald as long as

The Dark King's massy

One,

Could not snap the spectrum up for food as you have done.

The Paper Nautilus

For authorities whose hopes
are shaped by mercenaries?
Writers entrapped by
teatime fame and by
commuters' comforts? Not for these
the paper nautilus
constructs her thin glass shell.

Giving her perishable
souvenir of hope, a dull
white outside and smooth-
edged inner surface
glossy as the sea, the watchful
maker of it guards it
day and night; she scarcely

eats until the eggs are hatched.

Buried eight-fold in her eight
arms, for she is in
a sense a devil-
fish, her glass ramshorn-cradled freight
is hid but is not crushed.
As Hercules, bitten

by a crab loyal to the hydra,
was hindered to succeed,
the intensively
watched eggs coming from
the shell free it when they are freed,—
leaving its wasp-nest flaws
of white on white, and close-

laid Ionic chiton-folds
like the lines in the mane of
a Parthenon horse,
round which the arms had
wound themselves as if they knew love
is the only fortress
strong enough to trust to.

Part of a Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play

The Steeple-Jack

Dürer would have seen a reason for living
in a town like this, with eight stranded whales
to look at; with the sweet sea air coming into your house
on a fine day, from water etched
with waves as formal as the scales
on a fish.

One by one, in two's, in three's, the seagulls keep
flying back and forth over the town clock,
or sailing around the lighthouse without moving the wings—
rising steadily with a slight
quiver of the body—or flock
mewing where

a sea the purple of the peacock's neck is
paled to greenish azure as Dürer changed
the pine green of the Tyrol to peacock blue and guinea
grey. You can see a twenty-five
pound lobster; and fishnets arranged
to dry. The

whirlwind fifteenth drum of the storm bends the salt
marsh grass, disturbs stars in the sky and the
star on the steeple; it is a privilege to see so
much confusion. Disguised by what
might seem austerity, the sea-
side flowers and

trees are favored by the fog so that you have
the tropics at first hand: the trumpet-vine,
fox-glove, giant snap-dragon, a salpiglossis that has
spots and stripes; morning-glories, gourds,
or moon-vines trained on fishing-twine
at the back

door; cat-tails, flags, blueberries and spiderwort,
striped grass, lichens, sunflowers, asters, daisies—

the yellow and the crab-claw blue ones with green bracts—
toad-plant,
petunias, ferns; pink lilies, blue
ones, tigers; poppies; black sweet-peas.
The climate

is not right for the banyan, frangipani, the
jack-fruit tree; nor for exotic serpent
life. Ring lizard and snake-skin for the foot if you see fit,
but here they've cats not cobras to
keep down the rats. The diffident
little newt

with white pin-dots on black horizontal spaced
out bands lives here; yet there is nothing that
ambition can buy or take away. The college student
named Ambrose sits on the hill-side
with his not-native books and hat
and sees boats

at sea progress white and rigid as if in
a groove. Liking an elegance of which
the source is not bravado, he knows by heart the antique
sugar-bowl shaped summer-house of
interlacing slats, and the pitch
of the church

spire, not true, from which a man in scarlet lets
down a rope as a spider spins a thread;
he might be part of a novel, but on the sidewalk a
sign says C. J. Poole, Steeple-jack,
in black and white; and one in red
and white says

Danger. The church portico has four fluted
columns, each a single piece of stone, made
modest by white-wash. This would be a fit haven for
waifs, children, animals, prisoners,
and presidents who have repaid
sin-driven

senators by not thinking about them. There
are a school-house, a post-office in a

store, fish-houses, hen-houses, a three-masted schooner on
the stocks. The hero, the student,
the steeple-jack, each in his way,
is at home.

It could not be dangerous to be living
in a town like this, of simple people,
who have a steeple-jack placing danger signs by the church
while he is gilding the solid-
pointed star, which on a steeple
stands for hope.

The Student

"In America everybody must have a degree," the French man
says, "but the French do not think that all can have it; they don't
say everyone must go to college." We
may feel as he says we do; five kinds of superiority

might be unattainable by all, but one degree is not too much.
In each school there is a pair of fruit-trees like that twin tree
in every other school: tree-of-knowledge—
tree-of-life—each with a label like that of the other college:

*lux, or lux et veritas, Christo et ecclesiae, sapient
felici, and if science confers immortality,
these apple-trees should be for everyone.*

Oriental arbor vitae we say lightly. Yet you pardon

it as when one thinking of the navy does not know not to infer
dishonorable discharge from a D. D. It is a
thoughtful pupil has two thoughts for the word
valet; or for bachelor, child, damsel, though no one having heard

them used as terms of chivalry would make the medieval use of
them. Secluded from domestic strife, Jack Bookworm led a
college life says Goldsmith. He might not say
it of the student who shows interest in the stranger's resumé

by asking "when will your experiment be finished, Doctor Einstein?"
and is pleased when Doctor Einstein smiles and says politely
"science is never finished." But we're not
hypocrites, we're rustics. The football huddle in the vacant lot

Reinforcements

The vestibule to experience is not to be exalted into epic grandeur. These men are going to their work with this idea, advancing like a school of fish through

still water—waiting to change the course or dismiss the idea of movement, till forced to. The words of the Greeks ring in our ears, but they are vain in comparison with a sight like this.

The pulse of intention does not move so that one can see it, and moral machinery is not labeled, but the future of time is determined by the power of volition.

The Fish

wade
through black jade.
Of the crow-blue mussel shells, one
keeps
adjusting the ash heaps;
opening and shutting itself like
an
injured fan.
The barnacles which encrust the
side
of the wave, cannot hide
there for the submerged shafts of the
sun,
split like spun
glass, move themselves with spotlight swift-
ness
into the crevices—
in and out, illuminating
the
turquoise sea
of bodies. The water drives a
wedge
of iron through the iron edge
of the cliff, whereupon the stars,
pink
rice grains, ink
bespattered jelly-fish, crabs like
green
lilies and submarine
toadstools, slide each on the other.
All
external
marks of abuse are present on

this
defiant edifice—
all the physical features of
ac-
cident—lack
of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns
and
hatchet strokes, these things stand
out on it; the chasm side is
dead.
Repeated
evidence has proved that it can
live
on what cannot revive
its youth. The sea grows old in it.

Black Earth

Openly, yes,
with the naturalness
of the hippopotamus or the alligator
when it climbs out on the bank to experience the
sun, I do these
things which I do, which please
no one but myself. Now I breathe and now I am submerged;
the blemishes stand up and shout when the object
in view was a
renaissance; shall I say
the contrary? The sediment of the river which
encrusts my joints, makes me very gray but I am used
to it, it may
remain there; do away
with it and I am myself done away with, for the
patina of circumstance can but enrich what was
there to begin
with. This elephant skin
which I inhabit, fibered over like the shell of
the coconut, this piece of black glass through which no light
can filter—cut
into checkers by rut
upon rut of unpreventable experience—
it is a manual for the peanut-tongued and the
hairy toed. Black
but beautiful, my back
is full of the history of power. Of power? What
is powerful and what is not? My soul shall never
be cut into
by a wooden spear; through-
out childhood to the present time, the unity of
life and death has been expressed by the circumference

A Grave

Man looking into the sea,
taking the view from those who have as much right to it as you have
to it yourself,
it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing
but you cannot stand in the middle of this:
the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave.
The firs stand in a procession, each with an emerald turkey-foot
at the top,
reserved as their contours, saying nothing;
repression, however, is not the most obvious characteristic of the sea;
the sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look.
There are others besides you who have worn that look—
whose expression is no longer a protest; the fish no longer investigate
them
for their bones have not lasted:
men lower nets, unconscious of the fact that they are desecrating
a grave,
and row quickly away—the blades of the oars
moving together like the feet of water-spiders as if there were no
such thing as death.
The wrinkles progress upon themselves in a phalanx—beautiful
under networks of foam,
and fade breathlessly while the sea rustles in and out of the seaweed;
the birds swim through the air at top speed, emitting catcalls as
heretofore—
the tortoise-shell scourges about the feet of the cliffs, in motion
beneath them
and the ocean, under the pulsation of lighthouse and noise of
bell-buoys,
advances as usual, looking as if it were not that ocean in which
dropped things are bound to sink—
in which if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition nor
consciousness.

Those Various Scalpels

Those
various sounds consistently indistinct, like intermingled echoes
struck from thin glasses successively at random—the
inflection disguised: your hair, the tails of two fighting-cocks head
to head in stone—like sculptured scimitars re-
peating the curve of your ears in reverse order: your eyes,
flowers of ice
and
snow sown by tearing winds on the cordage of disabled ships: your
raised hand
an ambiguous signature: your cheeks, those rosettes
of blood on the stone floors of French châteaux, with regard to
which the guides are so affirmative:
your other hand
a
bundle of lances all alike, partly hid by emeralds from Persia
and the fractional magnificence of Florentine
goldwork—a collection of half a dozen little objects made fine
with enamel in gray, yellow, and dragon fly blue; a lemon, a
pear
and three bunches of grapes, tied with silver: your dress, a
magnificent square
cathedral of uniform
and at the same time, diverse appearance—a species of vertical
vineyard rustling in the storm
of conventional opinion. Are they weapons or scalpels?
Whetted
to
brilliance by the hard majesty of that sophistication which is su-
perior to opportunity, these things are rich
instruments with which to experiment but surgery is not tentative.
Why dissect destiny with instruments which
are more highly specialized than the tissues of destiny itself?

What are Years?

What is our innocence,
what is our guilt? All are
naked, none is safe. And whence
is courage: the unanswered question,
the resolute doubt,—
dumbly calling, deafly listening—that
in misfortune, even death,
encourages others
and in its defeat, stirs

the soul to be strong? He
sees deep and is glad, who
accedes to mortality
and in his imprisonment, rises
upon himself as
the sea in a chasm, struggling to be
free and unable to be,
in its surrendering
finds its continuing.

So he who strongly feels,
behaves. The very bird,
grown taller as he sings, steels
his form straight up. Though he is captive,
his mighty singing
says, satisfaction is a lowly
thing, how pure a thing is joy.
This is mortality,
this is eternity.

The Pangolin

Another armored animal—scale
lapping scale with spruce-cone regu-
larity until they
form the uninterrupted central
tail-row. This near artichoke
with head and legs and grit-equipped giz-
zard, the night miniature artist-
engineer, is Leonardo's
indubitable son? Im-
pressive animal
and toiler, of whom we seldom hear.

Armor seems extra. But for him,
the closing ear-
ridge—or bare
ear, lacking even this small
eminence—and similarly safe

contracting nose and eye apertures
impenetrably closable,
are not;—a true ant-eat-
er, not cockroach-eater, who endures
exhausting solitary

trips through unfamiliar ground at night,
returning before sunrise; stepping
in the moonlight, on the moonlight
peculiarly, that the out-
side edges of his

hands may bear the weight and save the claws
for digging. Serpentine about
the tree, he draws
away from

danger unpugnaciously,
with no sound but a harmless hiss; keep-

ing the fragile grace of the Thomas-
of-Leighton-Buzzard Westminster
Abbey wrought-iron vine, or
rolls himself into a ball that has
power to defy all effort

to unroll it;—strongly intailed, neat
head for core, on neck not breaking off,
with curled-in feet. Nevertheless
he has sting-proof scales; and nest
of rocks closed with earth
from inside, which he can thus darken.

Sun and moon & day and night & man and beast
each with a splen-
dor which man
in all his vileness cannot
set aside; each with an excellence!

“Fearful yet to be feared,” the armored
ant-eater met by the driver
ant does not turn back, but
engulfs what he can, the flattened sword-
edged leafpoints on the tail and
artichoke-set leg and body plates
quivering violently when it
retaliates and swarms on him.

Compact like the furred fringed frill
on the hat-brim of

Gargallo’s hollow iron head of a
matador, he will drop and will
then walk away
unhurt, al-
though if unintruded on
he will come slowly down the tree, helped

by his tail. The giant-pangolin
tail, graceful tool, as prop or hand
or broom or axe, tipped like
the elephant’s trunk with special skin,
is not lost on this ant and
stone swallowing uninjurable
artichoke, which simpletons thought a
living fable whom the stones had
nourished whereas ants had done

so. Pangolins are
not aggressive animals; between
dusk and day, they have the not un-
chainlike, machine-

like form and
frictionless creep of a thing
made graceful by adversities, con-
versities. To explain grace requires
a curious hand. If that which
is at all were not for
ever, why would those who graced the spires
with animals and gathered
there to rest, on cold luxurious
low stone seats—a monk and monk and monk—
between the thus ingenious roof-
supports, have slaved to confuse
grace with a kindly
manner, time in which to pay a debt,
the cure for sins, a graceful use
of what are yet
approved stone
mullions branching out across
the perpendiculars? A sailboat

was the first machine. The manis, made
for moving quietly also,
is neither a prisoner
nor a god; on hind feet plantigrade,
with certain postures of a
man. Beneath sun and moon, man slaving
to make his life more sweet, leaves half the
flowers worth having, needing to choose
wisely how to use the strength;—

a paper-maker
like the wasp; a tractor of food-stuffs,
like the ant; spidering a length
of web from bluffs
above a

stream; in fighting, mechanicked
like the pangolin; capsizing in

disheartenment. Bedizened or stark
naked, man, the self, the being
so-called human, writing-
master to this world, griffons a dark
“Like does not like that is

obnoxious"; and writes error with four
r's. Among animals, one has a
sense of humor then, which saves a
few steps, which saves years—unig-
norant, modest and
unemotional, and all emo-
tion; one with everlasting vig-
or, power to grow
though there are
few of him—who can make one
breathe faster, and make one erecter.

Not afraid of anything is he
and then goes cowering forth, tread paced
to meet an obstacle
at every step. Consistent with the
formula—warm blood, no gills,
two pairs of hands and a few hairs—that
is a mammal; there he sits in his
own habitat, serge-clad, strong-shod.

The prey of fear; he, always
curtailed, extinguished,
thwarted by the dusk, work partly done,
says to the alternating blaze,
"Again the sun!
anew each
day; and new and new and new,
that comes into and steadies my soul."

The Sycamore

Against a gun-metal sky
I saw an albino giraffe. Without
leaves to modify,
chamois-white as
said, though partly pied near the base,
it towered where a chain of
stepping-stones lay in a stream nearby;
glamour to stir the envy

of anything in motley—
Hampshire pig, the living lucky-stone; or
all-white butterfly.

A commonplace:
there's more than just one kind of grace.
We don't like flowers that do
not wilt; they must die, and nine
she-camel-hairs aid memory.

Worthy of Imami,
the Persian—clinging to a stiffer stalk
was a little dry
thing from the grass,
in the shape of a Maltese cross,
retiringly formal
as if to say: "And there was I
like a field-mouse at Versailles."