1912

The artist and his work: a study in Goethe's aesthetics

Gertrude Martha James

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the Faculty of the Graduate College
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.

-by-
Gertrude Martha James

State University of Iowa
1912.
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Little butterfly!
"I've watched you now a full half hour,
Self-poised upon that yellow flower." ¹

And now you are off to the West! I might have caught
the delicate thing as it hung there dusting its pure
wings, have seen it quiver and flutter for fright, then
lie exhausted. It would never have had its flight to
the West; and I would have but a lifeless thing.

So it is with beauty, one of the most elusive
and enticing elements of the soul. Many have thought
about beauty. Some even have tried to catch it as the
butterfly, and examine it scientifically under the mi-
croscope. They may have seen its outline, but not its
life, its spirit: that vanished with the catching. As
Wordsworth said, ²

"Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things;
We murder to dissect."

To me, beauty, like truth and goodness, is
eternal and divine, an attribute of God. From this
point of view there must be somewhere absolute beauty
towards which our souls can strive. Subjectively,
however, beauty is in the soul of the beholder. Some
live in a world all drab. In some a purple sunset
reflected on mountain, sky, and water,

1. Wordsworth. "To a Butterfly."
does not stir that spark of divinity, lying, though sometimes dormant, in every one. "I always feel that the instinct for beauty is perhaps the surest indication of some essence of immortality in the soul." 1

All have a right to measure nature and art by its appeal to this divine sense. And yet there is danger that those who have to climb in a short lifetime from the lowest round of beauty, may miss the higher things by being too devoted to themselves. All through the years there have been towering figures who have seen far into the realm of beauty. As the moral genius leads to deeper and deeper insights into truth, so beauty-geniuses, with swift flashes of inspiration, can ever enlarge one's vision of the beautiful. One of these prophets said:

"Die Hauptsache ist, dass man eine Seele habe, die das Wahre liebt und die es aufnimmt, wo sie es findet."

This prophet was Goethe, in whose nature it lay "readily and joyfully to reverence what is great and beautiful." 2 He never worked out a theory of beauty as Schiller did. Yet we can follow his responses to beauty from the time when, as a child, he used to run away from an ugly face, until he realized in Italy the deep meaning of simplicity and grandeur, and knew that nothing in the world could fail to be beautiful when touched by the magic of a great genius. He had been born and

1. Arthur C. Benson, "From a College Window." Essay on "Beauty."
brought up in the land of beauty. He had lived, loved and suffered there. All his life long he had the weakness of being moved to tears by all that was truly and deeply beautiful. He can lead us more surely than anyone else, perhaps, to a broad, deep, sincere and sympathetic appreciation of the artist and his work.

1. See Goethe's Rezension von Sulzer, 1772.
Heine says: "Die Natur wollte wissen wie sie aussieht, und sie erschuf Goethe." From a mere boy Goethe had been sensitive to the appeal of nature. The broad view he gained of her when, as a youth, he looked out from the tower of the Strassburg Cathedral lasted him a lifetime. Later, in Wetzlar, nature became his refuge from the jostle of life. His love of freedom drove him from the dirty, narrow, sunless Gewandsgasse into the country where, as he says in "Werther," "Every tree, every hedge is a bouquet of blossoms, and one would fain be a cockchafer and float about in the sea of sweet fragrance." He liked to lie in the tall grass by the little brook with Homer in his hand and drink in the fresh air of the free fields. Goethe, thanks to Rousseau, Herder, Ossian and Homer, was beginning to feel to the full nature's sympathetic beauty. He was quick to recognize and respond to her moods, as in this letter which reminds one of his perfect little song of rest:

"Gestern waren wir den ganzen Tag geritten, die Nacht kam herbei und wir kamen eben auf's Lothring'sche Gebirg, da die Saar im lieblichen Thale unten vorbei fliesst. Wie ich so rechter Hand über die grüne Tiefe hinaussah und der Fluss in der Dämmerung so graulich und still floss und linker Hand die schwere Finsternis des Buchenwaldes vom Berg über

1. Heines Werke, Band III, "Reisebilder aus Italien."
mich herabbring, wie um die dunkeln Felsen durch's Gebüsch
die leuchtenden Vögelchen still und geheimnisvoll zogen;
da wurd's in meinem Herzen so still wie in der Gegend und
die ganze Beschwerlichkeit des Tags war vergessen wie ein
Traum---------

Such solitary communion with nature gave Goethe a
depth insight into her secrets and mysteries. He came to know
her in all her moods. "In a wise passiveness" he fed his
poetic soul whether he would or no. The very fact that he
responded to his longing for God's out-of-doors was enough, for

"The eye - it cannot choose but see;
We cannot bid the ear be still;
Our bodies feel where'er they be,
Against or with our will."

His soul became the dwelling place of manifold im­
pressions of beauty. When he came to write his "Tasso" and the.
rest, he found a veritable treasury of nature, which, through
the years, had become transformed, idealized, by the truth
and poetry of his spirit.

Thus out of Goethe's own experience grew his feeling for
art, as "eine zweite Natur" which is born from the head of the
greatest men as Minerva from the head of Jupiter. Schiller distinguished between those two by calling the one actual, the
other true nature. By true nature, he, like Goethe, meant

1. Wordsworth's "Expostulation and Reply."
3. Schiller's "Über Maithissons Gedichte."
nature stripped of all that is accidental, peculiar and unnecessary. A lonely oak on a windswept hill is not typical of that shapely tree which in some sheltered spot rears its luxuriant head high above its neighbors. By accident, perhaps, an acorn took root in that lonely place. Then came the winds and storms and beat upon the sapling until its scraggly shape little resembled the king of oaks. That is actual nature in which art sees the true, the general, the ideal. To Goethe, what we see of nature is blind power in manifold manifestations of good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly, ranged side by side. The most incongruous forms may appear near one another. I have seen a dainty wild rose blooming in the most repulsive surroundings. And of these incongruities the name is legion. Art arises from the endeavor of the individual to maintain himself against this destructive power. It is that "second nature" which brings harmony out of chaos and truth out of the accidents of nature.

But what is art that it may presume to counsel mother-nature? Is it not the offspring of the mind of man who was taught in the school of nature? Yes, art is at once her master and her slave. To nature alone the artist has to look for all of his material. At first sight her lavish abundance would augur a task too light. Who would not be her willing slave? But, as it were in compensation, she demands to be understood. Only the great artist can see her, not as she

2. Eckermann's "Gespräche," 18 April, 1827.
seems, but as she really is. And then the very fact that the artist is a student of nature makes him dependent on her teachings. However much he may transcend reality, he must ever keep within the limits of experience. But art, or perhaps better the artist, is nature's master because to what she has to give, he can add his own noble soul. Out of the mass of material she must of necessity promiscuously offer him, he can select what best suits his artistic purpose. He can unify what has thronged through his soul as individual impressions. And through the divinity within him he can, like Schiller, touch nothing commonplace without ennobling it.

Furthermore, the artist, through his seer-like vision, can practically construct what is impossible to nature. What the uneducated call nature is not nature from without, but man, that is nature from within. Eckermann thought that Rubens painted a certain nature-picture "from life." It was not so at all, as could be easily seen on close examination: the light entered the picture from both sides. Rubens was so extraordinary as to be able to carry all of nature in his head, ready for the command of his genius. Thus it was that his work seemed in its details a veritable copy of life. This has been true of many a painter. As Goethe wrote from Rome, he was so taken with Michael Angelo that after him he had no taste for nature herself. This reminds one of the answer Ruskin is said to have made to a would-be nature-lover as he stood before one of Turner's glowing sunsets. "Whoever saw such colors as that

1. Schiller an Goethe, 14 September, 1797.  
2. Goethe an Zelter, November, 1830.  
4. April 18, 1827  
in a sky!" remarked the critic. And Ruskin answered promptly, "Don't you wish you had?"

Art gives the lie to nature who in all her manifestations says that everything passes away. The artist not only ennobles and transcends nature, but he conserves and makes eternal all that he touches. The warrior-bard of Maldon has preserved an inspired picture of that slaughter, though ten centuries have passed since his lord's glorious defeat. The field mouse whose home the plowman-poet chanced to shatter can never be forgotten, though that same "timorous beastie" has long perished from the earth. And so with Wordsworth's humble mountain daisy, and Rubens' landscape, and Turner's sunset — through the master's touch they are all as immortal as Goethe's Friederike. This is the artist's great triumph over nature. As Goethe says in "Tasso," which is "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh,"

"Das was vergänglich ist, bewahrt sein Lied.
Du bist noch schön, noch glücklich, wenn schon lange
Der Kreis der Dinge dich mit fortgerissen."

After seeing Goethe's attitude toward nature, it is not surprising to find this opponent of the actual ever a prophet of truth. Again and again he said such words as these: "Wer gegen sich selbst und andere wahr ist, besitzt die schönste Eigenschaft der grossen Talente." Whether concerning a religious dogma, a scientific theory, or a work of art, Goethe's first question was, "Is it true?" Noble ideas, clever hypotheses, marvelous technique meant nothing to him, if devoid

2. "Maximen und Reflexionen."
of truth. In his early years, the Gothic seemed to him to embody the very essence of the German race. Later his feeling for truth turned him from this devotion to the Gothic to be a lifelong student of and authority in the Antique. The Antique, unlike the Gothic with its lack of unity and repose, seemed to complete the teaching Oeser had begun in Leipzig — that simplicity and grandeur are the great attributes of beauty. Goethe found the antique works of architecture true both in conception and execution. As he wrote from Rome: "Diese hohen Kunstwerke sind zugleich als die höchsten Naturwerke von Menschen nach wahren und natürlichen Gesetzen hervorgebracht worden. Alles Willkürlich, Eingebildete fällt zusammen; da ist Notwendigkeit, da ist Gott."

John Galsworthy seems to echo Goethe's idea of truth when he says, "Life, shaped and purged of the irrelevant, the gross, the extravagant; Life, as it were, spiritually selected — that is Truth."  

Insistence upon such an interpretation of truth led Goethe to the very door of realism, as that convenient term is generally understood, where the great naturalist and the sane idealist must eventually meet on common ground. Genius, whether it be found in the so-called naturalist or the would-be idealist, says to the artist, "Truth admits but the one rule, No deficiency, and no excess."

Goethe's passion for truth kept him from any of the romantics' exaggerated sense of the function of art, and com-

2. "Vague Thoughts on Art," Atlantic Monthly, April, 1912.
3. John Galsworthy, "Vague Thoughts on Art."
pelled him to justify only those departures from reality, which the artist makes on account of his deep artistic emotions. This, it seems, is at once the strongest and weakest point in his theory. It is this idea of artistic freedom, which served to make Goethe the supreme artist, and which caused the downfall of his principle when put into practice by another. Lesser men, not stopping to comprehend his doctrine as a whole, caught at the idea of the supremacy of art over nature, and either forgot or were not great enough to obey the complementary admonition to keep within the realm of experience and to be a student as well as a master of nature. The very fact that Goethe leaves so much to the artist's genius makes it a dangerous theory in the hands of the dilettante. And yet through the years when so many have followed other methods, it seems that this lover of nature and prophet of truth was right. He had a long enough vision to see through the maze of mediocre minds those geniuses yet to be, who, like Homer and Dante and Shakespeare, would be a law unto themselves and would live when the various schools of art would be forgotten.

"Wodurch bewegt er alle Herzen?
Wodurch besiegt er jedes Element?
Ist es der Einklang nicht der aus dem Busen dringt,
Und in sein Herz die Welt zurücke schlingt?"

Goethe went one step further in his devotion to truth: he combined it with beauty. In 1807, he wrote "Pandora," that symbolic Phantasie, in which he significantly throws aside the antique characterization of Pandora as a beautiful

woman who brings all manner of evil on mankind. She is beautiful, it is true, but as the symbol of beauty she can only strengthen, uplift and bless. She is the mother both of the sciences which seek truth through the understanding and of the arts which represent it to the senses. The motif of "Pandora" is that beauty can guide to eternal truth and eternal goodness. Its teaching is akin to that of "Faust:" that beauty is not a free gift of the gods, but only shown to us. We must acquire it in order to possess it. And then, whoever separates the elements of beauty, as Epimetheus did in choosing between his two daughters, loses Pandora herself. Thus, in making Pandora's daughters seekers after truth, Goethe united truth and beauty even as those almost involuntary words of Keats who was not a moral philosopher, but a lover of beauty,-

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty." 2

1. See Bielschowsky's "Goethe."
2. John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn."
Hauptmann says that poets are the tears of history, the men of sorrows. He does not mean that they are the pessimists of the age, who, like Jeremiah, lament over a perverse and sinful generation. Nor can he cry with Tennyson, "Tears, idle tears!" To him tears are not the sign of weakness, as some would have it, nor is coldness and impassiveness a virtue. They stand for a certain sensitive nature tuned to respond to life with a tone of understanding and sympathy. Such natures must of necessity rejoice and suffer with others. They feel a thrill of wonder and comprehension before anything beautiful. And they can "look into the face of a little child and see heaven there." All who have this delicacy of feeling are poets at heart though they may not write, but only live their poems. But tears are even more than this. In the wise words of Lowell,

"We all must suffer if we aught would know."

To him, like fortune's wheel of joy and sorrow, tears are life. As Hermann Neumann says,

"Zwei Kammern hat das Herz,
Drin wohnen
Die Freude und der Schmerz."

And they are so closely connected there, it is hard to stir one without arousing the other. Hauptmann seems to
repeat this thought in his "Versunkene Glocke," when happy, elf-like Rautendelein, holding out on her finger the little drop "vom Himmel" says to Nickelmann, that wise old watersprite:


Ein schöner Diamant!

Blickt man hinein, so funkelt alle Pein

Und alles Glück der Welt aus diesem Stein.

Man nennt ihn Thräne."

That is why the song of so many poets "dips its wings in tears and skims away." All through the ages, while historians have been gathering the facts out of the struggles of the world as so many photographs of life, the poets, in men's tears of joy and sorrow, have found truth, and have presented it as a master in a painting. Only such as weep thus with humanity can be its interpreters, telling what men know, but cannot express; for, as Platen sings,

"Wenn Leben Leiden ist, und Leiden Leben,

Der mag, nach mir, was ich empfand, empfinden."

If ever a poet responded buoyantly to joy, it was Goethe. Unlike so many poets, all his boyhood was sheltered, and through the devotion of his mother and the comfortable circumstances of his father, was filled brimfull of joy. Even in his maturer life he seemed astonishingly comfortable: he enjoyed good health, had not to ply his muse for his
bread and butter, and was surrounded by an admiring public. And yet he only proves the rule of the poet's tears. As early as 1772 he was writing "Die Leiden des jungen Werther." "It was not the influence of my time," he said, "so much as individual circumstances that touched my heart and made me create, and which brought me into that state of mind from which 'Werther' sprang. I had lived, loved, and suffered much. That was it.

"This much-discussed Werther period, if one looks more closely, belongs not to the course of world-culture, but to the course of the individual life which with a free spirit shall find itself in the limiting forms of an old world. Fortune thwarted, activity restrained, longings unsatisfied are not the defects of a particular time, but of each individual man, and it would be hard if each one, once in his life, should not have a period when 'Werther' would come to him as though written for him alone." Goethe is not denying that Werther, the hyper-sensitive youth, bursting into tears of joy and sorrow, reflected the highstrung, unstable spirit of the age, but he rather emphasizes the fact that each life, be it hoped, sooner or later experiences the world-woe. He is but expressing again this idea of the eternal circle of joy and sorrow: no soul can really appreciate the one without the other. As he makes Werther exclaim in one of his letters, "Must it always be

1. Eckermann's, "Gespräche," 2 Januar, 1824.
thus, that the source of our happiness must also be the fountain of our misery?"

With Goethe this is no fancy of youth. All through his lyrics one finds, sometimes expressed and sometimes only in the atmosphere of the poem, that "mein Leid ist mein Lied." He could even put such words as these into the mouth of that hoary harper,

"Wer nie sein Brot mit Thranen ass,
Der kennt euch nicht, ihr himmelischen Mächte!"

And then again in "Wilhelm Meister," during that new spring-time of his life, when one would think his joy in Schiller's friendship would be his inspiration, he has Mignon sing what might be put as the theme of many of his works,

"Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt,
Weiss was ich leide."

In "Tasso" which embodies the essence of the poetic nature, this very tendency of the poet to tears becomes the problem of the drama. The very nature that has made it possible for Tasso to produce a masterpiece and has brought him to the greatest joy of his life - to be crowned with laurel by his princess - makes him even then cry out,

"Der Lorbeerkranz ist, wo er mir erscheint,
Ein Zeichen mehr des Leidens als des Glückes."

The danger is that the poet, through his hypersensitive nature, his lack of contact with the world, and his consequent immersion in self, may make him, like Werther, too problematic

to live. He does become suspicious even of his friends, and suffers many imaginary ills. Yet there is hope for Tasso as there was not for Werther. He is a true poet, of whose nature Goethe had a lofty ideal, and in the final triumph of whose genius he had great faith. Tasso lives through his very devotion to poetry. Out of his suffering he gains a new vision of the artist and his art. Indeed in the calmness and constancy of Antonio he sees his own limitations. But that is not his real triumph. He also learns to glory in his weakness, remembering that the wave, though sometimes driven by the storm, can yet mirror the beauty of the sun and stars. He no longer struggles against Antonio, but he will live and let live. Knowing that he has run away from life, he comes to feel the truth of Antonio's words,

"Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille
Sonst ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt."

Unlike Werther, however, he is ready to give up active life with its cry for practical and calm natures, and be content with living as a poet in the stream of life, but not of it, with no other ambition than to be true and noble and to put the best he has to offer into song.

When one thinks of the part tears play with a poet, it is hard to believe that only those things are beautiful which give pleasure. How can one separate pain

from pleasure? A song may be beautiful and yet call out aching tears. In George Eliot's "Adam Bede" it is really the most painful, heartrending parts that are most beautiful. "Crossing the Bar" touches a theme people love to shun. The life of Christ, beautiful as it is in its gentleness and love, yet rises to its highest, most beautiful moment on the cross. Even the joy of Easter and the resurrection cannot exceed in beauty that hour of intensest suffering. The great artists realized that, too, or they would never have chosen it as a theme to keep ever before the eye in art. It would seem a weak art that cannot include the painful. Just as it is the great artist who has gone through the valley of shadows and has yet endured, so it is supreme art which can be the bride of pain and endure and triumph. As Goethe himself said to Eckermann, the artist must represent things in their natural environment; then even a mutilated tree on a windswept hill is beautiful.

In this day when books of all sorts come forth from the press in rivers and are soon lost in the ocean of the world's work, it is wise to stop and think calmly and seriously about the artist's high calling and its consequent demands upon him. Goethe always believed that an artist must be something in order to create. If he is to create world-art, he must be a world artist. The human being is too often onesided in his development and consequently in his interests. This is a character
Goethe fairly reveled in portraying. How many complementary natures we find in Goethe's caste of characters, the one not complete without the other! There is Werther, all passionate and vacillating, who needs some of Albert's calm though unresponsive temper. In "Tasso" the sensitive, unworlly poet is put over against Antonio, a cool, unerring man of affairs, who in a word could break the other's heart. Even in his masterpiece Goethe makes Mephistopheles in some respects Faust's complement. This is but one phase of his passion for complete development, which he is said to have inherited from his father. Not content with merely showing the evil attending such deformed development, as narrowness, a lack of perspective, a wrong sense of values, and even false views of life, he early set about developing his own native powers to the utmost. Though he can scarcely be called a completely rounded character, yet in his activities as poet, philosopher, statesman, artist, and scientist, he certainly set a standard which it would be hard even for a genius to surpass.

What Goethe demanded of himself, that he required of every poet worthy of the name. There is probably no class in the world so unhappy, discontented, and, I was going to say, dangerous, as the half genius. They are unhappy because they have longings that cannot be satisfied. They are dangerous because they are out of tune with life, and like Werther, there is not room in the world for such a
discontented soul. They develop into those problematic natures, such as Hauptmann loves to depict, who are selfish and weak because they do not know their own limitations, and who must perish because they have left the solid foundation of the commonplace, and not being able to realize their artistic ideals, hang in mid air, too enlightened to return to earth, and not genius enough to reach their vision. Their lives are always tragic.

There are two kinds of half-genius, the one as pitiful as the other. There are those who have some ability, but have no inspiration, and those who see through the great truths of life and long to produce, but can not. Goethe has analyzed them thus. The first class who have zeal but lack inspiration, become imitators and small artists. Those who have talent alone, but lack seriousness of purpose or perhaps even the ability to express themselves, become followers of phantoms and writers of unstable sketches. He then, carrying it one step farther, combines this earnest zeal with talent and gains as the general result - style. Furthermore, he finds artistic truth, beauty, and finish as the great characteristics of this union. Thus not Goethe alone, but art itself demands a thorough knowledge of self and then complete development of the individual. Let the would-be artist examine himself that he may escape the peril of the half-genius, and then set about to develop what he has found wanting.

1. "Der Sammler und die Seinigen."
In addition to this emphasis upon symmetrical development which gave him broad sympathies and a seerlike outlook on life, Goethe insisted upon selfculture, upon a systematic and lifelong communion with nature and the great masters; "Denn wir kleinen Menschen sind nicht fähig, die Größse solcher Dinge in uns zu bewahren, und wir müssen von Zeit zu Zeit zurückkehren, um solche Eindrücke in uns aufzufrischen." Artists must have something in their hearts to which the world can respond. As a poet, Goethe never asked how he could serve the masses, but he only looked to see how he could enlarge his own personality and then always strove to express only that which he recognized as good and true.

Largely because of his longing both for nature and for the masters, Goethe, in 1786, felt himself irresistibly drawn to Italy, that land of sunshine "wo die Citronen blühn." Coming out of the cold, gray, misty North, he found Italy at once startling and familiar. In spite of the strangeness of the deep blue sky, the dark foliage and the brilliant sunsets, he could write from Trent, "It seems to me as if I had been born and reared here and were just returning from a whaling voyage to Greenland." The people themselves reflected not only the sunshine and joy of nature, but even her high colors. Under the dazzling skies, the brilliant hues that no Northerner would dare to don, were softened from their signs of barbarism and blended into highly artistic harmony.

To Goethe this seemed to account for the brilliant colors of the Venetian artists, since the eye forms itself by those things which it has been accustomed to look upon from its youth up. He noticed, too, that the Italians enjoyed work. They were like joyous children, clothing the prose of daily life with poetic ornaments. And as the Italians lived, so they buried their dead: no long, black funeral procession marred the harmony of their happy world.

The more Goethe studied art and nature in Italy, the larger he found it. The same greatness of the masters that showed him his lack of genius in the plastic arts, but confirmed and strengthened his faith in his mission as a poet, led him to a great moral change as well. He felt his life expand even to eternity, for there the spirit of the Divine spoke to him directly of holiness and truth and beauty. We all know how the Sabbath day is different out of doors. If man would let her, Nature would teach him how to worship. Just so, she offered Goethe a quietness and peace that fostered meditation and brought contentment. This it is that made him come out from Italy the lofty, serene, and sympathetic poet all can admire.

On his return from the Italian journey, he became more than ever a citizen of the world. He had always been able to see the world with an artistic eye and to

Recognize the general in the individual. But in Italy he had seen noble buildings which were old even before the birth of Christ. He had seen the treasures of Rome, among which were marbles shaped by inspired hands when his own forefathers were still roving barbarians in the Northern wilds. The very fact that after thousands of years they still appealed to him, a child of a different race, showed him that humanity is above nation, race and age. In a letter to Schiller, he said of great artists what can now be said of him:

"Die grössten Dichter erscheinen uns als solche, weil sie auch grosse Menschen sind, und oft bewundern wir einen Künstler eigentlich nicht deshalb, weil wir seine Kunst, sondern weil wir seine Kultur lieben."

We have seen that there are certain innate qualities and some which can be acquired, that are essential to a poetic nature. Poetry, "which is thought and art in one," demands the culture which comes from an association with nature, humanity, and art to fulfill the one, and the responsive temperament of a genius to insure the other. But even then there is something lacking. One may be a poet at heart and yet not be productive. What is it that makes a poet create?

Goethe always speaks of the poet as "den aufgeregten Dichter." Indeed he goes so far as to say, "Dichtern

1. 31 Juli, 1799.

ist ein Übermut." This "over-exuberance" of the poet would seem to refer to that idea of poetic madness which has long been connected with inspiration of any kind. The wild seances of the early tribal priests and of the medicine men of the American forests may have been but a barbarous, unrestrained expression of that same state from which so many poems have sprung full-grown. At any rate, something, call it Divine inspiration or poetic madness, must make the poet forget his own individuality in his consciousness of life and truth. Strangely enough, the immediate inspiration which frees the poet from himself is always very personal. It is a varying combination of youth, love, pain and solitude. And the greatest of these is youth. Youth is what all poets long for when they are old, that time when they were just becoming and had not forgotten how to wonder. Heinrich, that bell-founder in Hauptmann's "Versunkene Glocke," was ready to die when his bell into which he had put the strength of his youth, fell from its mountain heights into the depths of the sea; for, as he cried from his bed of pain,

"Jung müsst ich werden wo ich leben sollte.
Gesunde Kraft müsst ich im Herzen fühlen."

As Heinrich knew, youth is a time of zeal and vigor and divine revelations. Then the artist creates irresistibly, against his will. His impressions and experiences are so numerous that he has to express what must otherwise break

his heart. As some one has said: "This absence of intention gives the works of the great artists a similarity to the creations of nature, who does not print on the leaves of her roses and lilies any special admonition to enjoy and admire them, but contents herself with allowing them to grow and blossom."

But youth is not limited to twenty, or to forty. One is not old until the heart is old. The best youth is that which has been tried and tempered with experience. Just so great poets, when they are no longer young, transcend the body by their still young spirit. Goethe was such a one. In 1794 his life through his loneliness in Weimar was for a second time becoming "a cold barren rock." His friends had gradually fallen away. Even his friendship with the Duke had begun to cool. The great man, lost in scientific investigation, had retired more and more into himself, until he had almost forgotten his poetic calling. Then a poet with the zeal of youth, whom four years before Goethe had not noticed, but whom, unconsciously, he had kept near him in the University of Jena, came to him and brought him youth again. In the winter of his life there appeared "eine neue Blütezeit," when such works as "Hermann und Dorothea" and "Faust" could grow and blossom.

Again, youth is the greatest of the poet's outward impulses, because then he learns that second inspiration - love. To many poets, as to Goethe, new love has meant new life. When it is true, it is man's most unselfish feeling;
"For love is but the heart's immortal thirst
To be completely known and all forgiven."  
It has inspired the daintiest of Heine's plaintive songs.
It has brought a song of reverence from Ben Johnson and
passion from the fiery Byron. And from Burns and Goethe and
so many others, it has brought tears, too. But whatever suf­
fering love has caused, or to whatever exalted state it has
raised the lover, they would all say with Lowell:

"Beauty is love, and what we love
Straightway is beautiful;
So is the circle round and full."  

To pain, as to love, poets are most sensitive
in youth. Then years have not hardened them or taught them to
subdue their sorrow. Their very excess of feeling makes them
find relief in words. Poets from their sensitive nature feel
the joys and sorrows of the world. The world-woe becomes a
part of their very being. But it is out of their own suffer­
ing that their poems grow. Then come "tears and the gift
of song." As Kerner sings:

"Poesie ist tiefes Schmerzen
Und es kommt das echte Lied
Einzig aus dem Menschenherzen,
Das ein tiefes Leid durchglüht."

And Heine, that poet of a mattress-grave, to whom suffering
could not have been poetic fancy, could yet see flowers in

1. Henry van Dyke, Complete Poems, "Ode to Love."
2. From"Bellerephon."
his tears:

"Aus meinem Thranen spriessen
Viel' blühende Blumen hervor."

To him, his poetry, though it might not sound inspired, meant freedom from his suffering. Goethe, too, with his life of apparent joy, found "comfort in tears." The phrase he used in his diary to sum up two days of youth, might serve to represent the spirit in which he composed. It was -

"Leiden und Träumen."

And ever and again through his poems echo the words,

"Tränen fliessen gar so süß."

The last great inspiration of a poet is solitude, where he may learn to know himself and think. The world's great men have for the most part lived some portion of their lives away from the mad rush of things, alone with God and nature and themselves. Moses and all the prophets who walked with God and led His people went apart into a mountain or to the wilderness, to be alone. Mahomet has ruled thousands of hearts with the words he caught in the deserts of the East. Even that Perfect Man often fled from the multitude to seek the lonely places and to find himself. And Lincoln, "a Christ in miniature" as Tolstoi called him - did he not gain his sure sight of truth and right, and his strength to finish the work God had given him to do, from the quiet woods of Kentucky and Illinois? Everywhere one hears the cry that

1. Tagebücher; Gartenhäuschen, 17 und 18 Juni, 1777.
the world does not take time enough to think. They say that in America there will never be a race of great preachers or great poets until men go back to nature and live alone a while.

"Mit Andern kann man sich belehren,
Begeistert wird man nur allein."

When we find that Goethe, like Wordsworth, often "wandered lonely as a cloud," we need no longer wonder at his deep comprehension of nature, at his strange knowledge of himself, or at his great faith in his mission as a poet. He himself had so much faith in solitude that he could say,

"Meine Sachen, die so viel Beifall gefunden hatten, waren Kinder der Einsamkeit." "Es ist so wahr: irgend etwas Gutes, Geistreiches wird in stiller, abgesondelter Jugend hervorgebracht."

"Werther" sprang from his loneliness in Frankfort, "as a wanderer in the night." "Tasso" and "Iphigenia" grew irresistibly when he was a stranger in a strange land. And may it not have been that in those years of apparently barren solitude in Weimar he gained a depth and strength of heart to finish "Faust?" At least in that story of the striving of a soul he sings of solitude.

"Bist frank und frei; nun frisch zu deiner Sphäre!

"Dorthin, wo Schönes, Gutes nur gefällt,
Zur Einsamkeit! Da schaffe deine Welt!"

1. "Chinesische-deutschen Jahr - und Tagesheften."
3. Ibid. IV, 16.
From the modern point of view of the independence of the artist, it is hard to think that there ever was a time when syllables were painfully counted, and rhymes as consciously worked out as a problem in geometry. To this tradition of the Mastersingers poets were still bound hand and foot, when Goethe and Schiller, profiting by the pioneer strokes of the fearless Lessing, became the liberators of aesthetics. Against the iron-clad rules that killed the spirit their cry was "free art." In their first revolt against authority, they fell into the excess of the "Sturm und Drang Periode" which bred so much artistic anarchy. Thinking that Shakespeare's greatness lay in his lawlessness, they wrote in imitation such works as "Goetz" and "Kabale und Liebe." Later, when they could think calmly of their youthful enthusiasm, they knew they had followed a phantom: the English dramatist was not free, as the anarchist counts freedom, but free in the sense that he was master of his genius and had not to think of laws. As Hartley Coleridge said of him,

"Great poet, 'twas thy art
To know thyself, and in thyself to be
Whate'er love, hate, ambition, destiny,
Or the firm, fatal purpose of the heart
Can make of man."

This is why Goethe can hardly be considered the leader of a school; especially when he himself never posed as a teacher of poets, and when the young singers of Germany did not want to follow his example, but their own weakness. Though he believed that there were principles in art that might be
taught, he raised the native artistic sense above rules. As he shows in "Tasso," he had great faith in the real artist's being led by the voice within him to truth and beauty. He gave the same advice in this field as was being given in the field of ethics: "Act always according to your own deepest feeling, follow the best voice within you."

Goethe emphasized the supremacy of genius over law because between inspiration and execution he recognized an important selective process when all the impressions the artist has received, go through his mind and are there refined and filled with new meaning. The greater the genius, the more unconscious and yet the more inevitable is this process. He cannot take everything he recognizes as true, for his art, just as the sculptor, seeing in the rough marble the outline of his ideal, chips away the stone which, though formed as carefully by nature, does not suit his artistic purpose, so any artist must select only that which his instinct tells him is in harmony with his plan. If the artist is true to the instinct of his genius, he can have no rules more strict.

Artists work under varying conditions, it is true. Goethe would not be the one to demand their following one pattern. Schiller, himself, worked very consciously, bending to his will both his material and his muse. But in his own activities Goethe was intense and swift. Among great modern poets, he was preeminently dependent upon the mood of the day.

and the hour. As in writing "Werther," when the final inspiration came, "he shut himself up, denied all access to the outside world, and worked for four weeks in a state of mental abstraction which he likens to the condition of a somnambulist. "He would summon before him in the spirit some one of his acquaintance, walk back and forth in front of him, and discuss with him the subject uppermost in his mind."

Perhaps the very reason that he could write so intensely was that his work had been taking shape within him long before he ever put pen to paper. He seemed to know when the time was ripe. The writing of "Faust," to be sure, was extended over a long period of years, from youth to age. But that was a theme he continually pushed from him, and which returned again and again, and would not be suppressed. All through his life he was unconsciously, perhaps, storing away material for his masterpiece. When the inspiration finally came, he mustered all his powers, though dulled a bit by age, and poured into this work the joys and sorrows, the struggles and inspirations of a deep, rich life. Even the most casual reader cannot fail to appreciate the atmosphere of sincerity which results from this intense personal experience. He does not need to say that he never posed or that he abhorred such affectation. As spontaneously as his thought took on a musical rhythm, so it gathered from experience those fundamental facts and feelings which all the world could understand. This unconscious insight was often a surprise to

the poet himself. Even in his enthusiasm in explaining Shakespeare's vision of life, he had to say, "Wir erfahren die Wahrheit des Lebens und wissen nicht wie."

"We see the truth of life and know not how."

In those words Goethe has revealed the whole secret of the free artist: true insight and unconscious effort. A temperament responsive to nature, life, and inspiration is such because it is the necessary accompaniment of artistic genius. Ruskin analyzed the artist in the same way when he said that "the greatest thing a human soul ever does is to see something, and tell what it saw, in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think; but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion."

It must be disconcerting, to say the least, for a poet to pour his heart's blood into his works and then to see them ignored or torn in bits by an unsympathetic public. It seems, however, the lot of a great genius to be misunderstood, or not understood at all. Indeed the latter state is preferable, for the public's look of incomprehension can never bring the pain that the hostile glances of distorted interpretation can inflict. If he is not understood at all, he can feel that his work will be handed down to at least an unprejudiced and perhaps a wiser posterity.

However, the great artist who knows himself no doubt looks for thorough comprehension of his vision only in some future age. As a rule, he towers head and shoulders above his short-sighted generation and gains an insight into life and truth and art, which only a people with a broader outlook can fully appreciate. In his view of life he is as one standing on a bridge above a madly rushing river. The little drops of water in the wave which beats against the interrupting rock and rises, but to fall again, cannot see their destiny. They come from some place and they flow somewhither, but are only conscious of a rushing, jostling, rising, falling. Those little drops might be pessimists; they might lose faith in progress, for to them the shore-line must look much the same. To the watchman, however, they are all one mighty force,
having some humble, unknown origin, perhaps, but moving in
spite of barriers surely toward the sea.

But the poet can never be so separated from the life he
contemplates as that isolated philosopher of the river. Though
he has a broader outlook, he is yet borne along with, and
should be upheld by the tide of human life. Every seer is to
some extent an expression of his times. There are always
cycles of thought, when the attention of a whole people is
directed toward one end. In Italy in the fifteenth century,
the humanists reflected a general tendency in religion and
life, as well as in art, toward the rehabilitation of human
nature. Later in England, where a wise queen in spite of the
Spanish inquisition had saved for her people freedom of thought,
Bacon responded to an age which demanded observation, and
methodically showed man his place in nature. In the same way,
Voltaire and Buffon were an expression of French rationalism
as were the Grimm brothers of German organism. Goethe admired
and wondered at the Greek tragedies, and yet he knew that the
same qualities of finish and knowledge of life that made them
great, were also in epic and lyric poetry, in philosophy,
rhetoric, and history. He even carried this idea so far as to
prophesy what his young artistic friend, Béranger, would have
been, had he lived in the cold atmosphere of Jena or Weimar.

1. See Hillebrand, "German Thought," Chapt. I.
In his opinion, only the spirit and culture of France could bring that uneducated descendant of a tailor and of a poor printer's apprentice to write, so early, songs full of grace, spirit, artistic finish, and masterful handling of language. In England, Burns seemed to embody the spirit of the folksongs which had gathered to themselves the emotions of generations, and which had been sung to him in his cradle. He was loved because his songs found receptive ears among his people.

Few artists, however free they may be, are entirely independent of sympathy and appreciation. Though they know only too well what their work is worth, the fact that they are human makes them look to some one for approbation. So Schiller at least hastened Goethe's return to artistic activity: not that he could add to Goethe's poetic range or give him new material, but because he sympathised and understood. This personal inspiration is but a sign of what the world can do for artists if it will. In his conversation with Eckermann Goethe said that he had once had the idea of creating a German stage, and that out of that thought grew "Tasso" and "Iphigenia." He then added that these dramas had not created the revolution he had expected. If the audience had shown comprehension and approval, they could have inspired him to write a dozen such dramas instead of two. Though it is doubtful whether a dozen would have been of so much more value than those two, the fact remains that Goethe felt keenly the part the world may play

1. 27 März, 1825.
in the promotion of art. If a poet can produce such works as "Tasso" from the incentive of his own art-instincts, to what heights might he not rise with the added impulse of a sympathetic world?

According to John Galsworthy we are entering upon an age of "new criticism" to which Goethe was looking forward when he said that art, as well as religion, needs faith and love. The "new critic," in his attempt to take the artist's point of view, throws aside his personal attitude to life and comes unprejudiced to his task. He then tries to recreate the atmosphere under which the work was produced, and while still in this spirit, he constructs his criticism. It would seem that Goethe could approve this method, for, as he wrote concerning criticism, this producing and reproducing belongs with an active reception of impressions. Some go so far as to say that such criticism becomes as much a constructive art as the very production of the work itself. However that may be, it at least leads the critic to expect to find greatness there, and perhaps to love that greatness.

Now, unlike this "new critic," the public cannot be expected to appreciate a work of art at once. In the first place, people may not be cultured enough. It is so easy to dull the aesthetic sense by neglect. If the artist who has an inborn feeling for art, must return again and again to the great masters, so the world must continually see

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1. "Vague Thoughts on Art." Atlantic Monthly, April, 1912.
2. To Jacobi, 1812.
3. Schriften über Kunst, 1797.
and hear and feel the great things of the ages in order to be ready for a masterpiece. Otherwise its misdirected enthusiasm could be of no assistance to an artist. In France and Italy, as Goethe declares, the people were willing to see again and again performances of their great dramas, while in Germany, on account of their demand for something new, neither the actor nor his audience was accustomed enough to great German drama to make the production by the actor or the appreciation of the audience satisfactory.

Furthermore, youth especially, so eager to pass judgment, has oftentimes neither lived nor suffered enough to appreciate an artist's work at once. Because it has not yet tried the truth of a "King Lear," it cannot appreciate the bitterness of ingratitude. This is true not only of Shakespeare, but of Chaucer, Thackeray, Browning, and so many others who looked at the world through the "glasses of truth:" inexperience cannot hope to fathom what life itself has wrung from the heart.

Because of the numerous public libraries and the popularity of higher education today, there is a certain general familiarity with the great in literature. And yet even this progressive century has not come up to Goethe's standard of a cultured public. Good theatres and great art galleries have thus far been confined to a few great cities whither the majority of people go when they can no longer cultivate a sincere appreciation of such art. They either affect enthusiasm, or if they are honest with themselves, confess that they see no virtue

1. Eckermann, 27 März, 1825.
in the indistinguishable words and the confusing themes of
grand opera, and wonder how the treasures of the art galleries
are greater than the pictures on their walls at home. America
is just waking up to an effective appreciation of the im-
portance of drama and art in general culture. The problem,
however, is more difficult here than it was in Germany where
distances were not so great. Goethe wanted the towns of Germany
to keep their own art treasures. He also encouraged the study
of copies of the great in art, that, when opportunity offered,
appreciation of the real works would be possible. In the
drama, he favored "Gastspieler," as he put it, or a system of
"starring" plays. Thus the audience could compare, judge,
and gain insight. And the actors themselves could learn from
these celebrated strangers by inspiration and imitation.

Aside from general familiarity with what is great, the
world for true appreciation must know the artist and his people.
It must study his personality, his life, his friends, his
age. Just to know what an author "aspired to be, and was not"
encourages "faith and love." Knowing his life and its environ-
ment teaches charity, too; for, as Carlyle said of Burns,
one cannot censure an author for what he is until one knows
how much he has resisted. And since the artist is, to some
extent, the product of his times, insight into an author's
century may help to explain his philosophy of life as well as
his attitude toward art itself. Rousseau with his cry for a
return to nature reflected the spirit that caused the French

revolution. One cannot mention Goethe himself without remembering the influence of Herder and von Humboldt. Only of late is Heine partially forgiven, now that the world is coming to understand what sharpened the irony of his nature.

When people thus attempt to understand an artist, they will, for the time being, unconsciously accept his point of view. It is not necessary or desirable that a work of art absolutely harmonize with individual opinions of art and life. People are often mere travellers in art, who, after leaving the genial atmosphere of the fatherland, must continually learn to appreciate the good in what is foreign to them. After his Italian journey, Goethe felt the difference in his appreciation of Italian and English poetry, for the poetry of Italy had a response in all his senses, while he had to use a great deal of imagination in English verse. As Schiller through culture ever approached Goethe's point of view, at first so diametrically opposite to his own, so the world can grow to be a real friend of the artist: it is to such he writes.

"Meine Sachen können nicht popular sein; wer daran denkt und dafür strebt, ist in einem Irrtum. Sie sind nicht für die Masse geschrieben, sondern nur für einzelne Menschen, die etwas Ähnliches wollen und suchen, und die in ähnlichen Richtungen begriffen sind." With culture, sympathy, faith and love, the world is well nigh master of the passive art of listening. It ought to rejoice in its mission of ap-

preciation, for, in the words of Milton, "They also serve who only stand and wait."
IV.
THE SERVICE OF ART.

In life and nature there is a certain harmony, which, like the music of the spheres, lures and eludes mankind. Day and night, summer and winter, seed time and harvest are but outward manifestations of this rhythm. Rhythmic as the tide's ebb and flow is the rise and fall of the emotions. As certainly as season follows season, so joy follows sorrow. There is also a harmony between part and part, part and whole, such as that which binds the worlds together. Some can feel this mystery of life without knowing what it is; others can talk about it as a sort of echo; poets can see it, and now and then can catch a bit of it in song.

"In the still air the music lies unheard;
In the rough marble beauty lies unseen;
To make the music and the beauty needs
A master's touch, a sculptor's chisel keen."

Thus art becomes a language between nature and humanity. In the rhythm of sound and sense in poetry and music, there is the murmur of wind and water, the laughter of the hills, bird song, and all the sweeter "unheard melodies" of earth. In the arts that please the eye there is like nature an instantaneous harmony of form and color. This rhythm which some can never feel outside of art steals men from themselves. Many go about the world with blinded eyes until poets speak
to them, and teach them how to wonder. With artists for interpreters, however, they learn to see "sermons in stones," and to feel that

"The meanest flower that blows can give

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

In addition to this appeal from nature, there is the added wealth of a personality, rich, throbbing and sympathetic. Those feelings which have surged through the soul of humanity for centuries emerge from the poet's heart, purified and purified. There those vague longings are made clear, the unseen becomes tangible, and thoughts one has not dared to utter are expressed. Poetry seems to hold a mirror up to humanity and say, "Know thyself!"

Men's souls are stronger and more sympathetic when artists are their friends. Art knows no yesterday and no tomorrow. In this realm there is neither Jew nor Greek. All are children of nature; all have the same emotions; all speak a common tongue. Many poems are still appealing, though they were sung so long ago that their language is now dead and their singers are forgotten. Seeing how others live and suffer inspires a feeling of brotherhood with man which is independent of nation, race, or age. In the larger sense, Homer was not a Greek, nor Horace a Roman, nor Chaucer an Englishman. Their spirit went far out of their own land to embrace the soul of the universal man. This breadth of view and hence

1. Wordsworth, "Ode on Intimations of Immortality."
this wise tolerance among the poets raises men out of their narrow circle, out of themselves, and makes them, like the poets, citizens of the world.

Since the time when primitive men looking heavenward wondered at the glory of the sun and worshiped God, their mysterious response to beauty has ever been connected with a longing for the eternal and divine. The Greeks expressed this "desire of the morrow for the star, of the night for the morrow" in their story of the Shepherd on Mount Ida, who had to choose between three goddesses. Hera promised, if he would give her the golden apple, that she would make him ruler over Asia and Europe; the second goddess, Pallas Athena, was prepared to make him an invincible warrior and a wise hero; but Aphrodite only looked at him kindly and promised him nothing but her beauty. Yet she had an easy victory. Another early nation which was a religious— not a beauty— genius, ever sang of the "beauty of holiness." The Greeks went by the way of beauty to truth; the Jews by the way of truth to beauty. But they were both of a nationally poetic temper which could not allow the good and the beautiful to be separated.

All true poets, however devoted to beauty, can teach men how to worship. Matthew Arnold has said that "poetry possesses in an eminent degree truth and seriousness." Unlike essays on theology, however, which "irritate by improving the occasion," the very unconsciousness of art kindles a certain responsiveness in mankind. One can hardly be the same after reading Shakespeare, though that master never
preaches. Goethe's "Slumber Song of Summer" has something of the beauty and peace of eternity about it, though the divine as such is never mentioned. Wordsworth and Tennyson, on the contrary, speak directly of truth and goodness, but with no conscious purpose of reforming the world. This, it seems, is what Goethe meant when he said, "a great work of art must and will have moral consequences; but to require moral ends of the artist is to destroy his profession" It is the great wonder of poetry that by being steeped in beauty it works toward the promotion of truth and goodness.

"Der Menschheit Würde ist in eure Hand gegeben,
Bewahret sie!
Sie sinkt mit euch! mit euch wird sie sich heben!"

1. "Über allen Gipfeln."
3. Schiller, Gedichte, "Die Künstler."
AN AFTERWORD.

To exhaust the subject of Goethe's aesthetics would take a lifetime. His opinions on various forms of art are so numerous and so scattered that only those have been selected which reveal his attitude toward the artist and his work, and which throw light on his own activities as a poet.

In brief, Goethe was the champion of the "free artist," not in the sense of those "Storm and Stress" enthusiasts, but in the faith that genius lays down rules at once sympathetic and exacting. To him it seemed that the instincts of the artist would open his eyes to truth, would make him responsive to the world, and would insure his sincerity. And then, that art might accomplish its highest mission, to free men from themselves, Goethe urged the necessity of sympathy upon the critics and the public.

In order to gain this sympathetic attitude and a more unbiased view, the source of the material has not been confined to quotations from Goethe. Thinking that several witnesses would be more convincing than one, I have not hesitated to quote even from English authors whose ideas harmonize with Goethe's. But the great German seer has had the final word.

The discussion has for the most part concerned the poet in particular, since Goethe was greatest as a poet. But, inasmuch as he himself used the word artist in the broad sense and often compared the arts, artists in other fields have been used as examples, when their activity could help explain the subject in
I have not hoped to give new light on Goethe; every corner in his life has been explored. He has had plenty of enthusiastic advocates, as well as cold critics. But in this investigation into Goethe's attitude toward beauty, thoughts that have come during four years have found expression. Thus I have tried to present from a personal point of view this study in Goethe's aesthetics.
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