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Poetry in Relation to Traditional Wisdom*

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It is one of the praiseworthy achievements of Jungian psychology that it has placed in our hands an instrument for the rediscovery, at a time when the understanding of symbols as they are used by the older poets (and in all the other arts) has been so largely forgotten, of what is the true purpose of poetry: not a compensation activity, not a mere play activity, but one of the principal means by which the soul discovers itself, reveals itself to itself, and achieves what Jung calls the integration of the personality.

Poetry has never yet failed in its task, for those who have known how to use it; and this century has seen poets as great as any who have used the English language—Yeats, Joyce (we must surely call the author of *Finnegans Wake* a poet), T. S. Eliot. Nevertheless, there have been and are currents of thought inimical to true poetry, and the loudest and most persuasive voices today are those that uphold what is, in the light of permanent values, false doctrine, the so-called ‘new’ criticism, and the school of poetry that accompanies it. These literary fashions may be but clouds that obscure the sun, the moon and the stars. They cannot remove the heavenly bodies, but they do darken the heavens when they happen to be above our heads. We all know the unhappy, angry and frustrated response to poetry that is the outcome of this kind of thought. A pity that it is no longer fashionable to know trees by their fruits. So that once again it is necessary to rediscover the first principles of poetic communication.

It is not altogether fair to condemn the critics and their accompanying poets. The dominant culture—cultures, rather—of the time are materialist; and this has affected the arts. Poets should not be asked to be philosophers as well, and to lay down the frontiers of knowledge and of wisdom. Poetry has declined with our civilization as a whole. The materialist philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth

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centuries has, in all its phases alike, made impossible a true understanding of the nature of symbolic thought of every kind, by calling in question, disregarding or merely forgetting, the metaphysical orders to which such symbols provide the key. During this long period—if we except the romantic poets, from Blake to Shelley, who were in their different ways reaffirming traditional values—it has been increasingly assumed that the poetic image describes natural appearances, and the feelings evoked by these, and not only has poetry been written that does correspond to this philosophy, but, what is more serious, the fallacy has been read back into the past, so that what in Milton, Shelley, Blake, Spenser, is symbol, is commonly read as image. The school of criticism which insists that the poem should be read, not in the light of what the words meant to the poet but of what the same words mean to the modern reader, thus succeeds in reading in many cases a totally different poem from the poem written, condemns Shelley for vague images, that are in reality precise symbols, or Milton for a failure to be realistic when his intention is to find the generalized imagery of myth.

It is not too much to say that for these critics most of the world's major poetry has become a closed book. I have attributed this, in general, to the darkening materialism of European thought. Against this it may be argued that Tennyson was a professed Christian—as in our own time is W. H. Auden. But whatever the profession, the real philosophy that underlies Tennyson's elegant poetry is materialist. He evokes, with great artistry, the sensible appearances of a physical world, and his poetry was to his age entirely satisfying. Auden and his school, the Social Realists, the French Existentialists, and others in our own time have also evoked the physical appearance, but without what would now be called the sentimental idealization of these that we find in the late Victorians. Stark, violent, crude, these schools claim a greater truthfulness; and with the images of Tachist painting (I do not know what the poetic equivalent would be) we see the physical appearances disintegrating altogether into blots and blurs, the ultimate dissolution of form that is the inevitable end of the materialist vision, since matter is the supreme philosophic *non-entity*. Form belongs to the intelligible world alone, and those who follow sensible images will sooner or later follow them into disintegration. We live in a period of decadent philosophy and decadent art.

To particularize, the 'new' poets are now saying that metaphor is a

poetic figure not to be used—only direct description or simile, it seems, is to be allowed. Now the rejection of the characteristic poetic figures of metaphor, symbol, personification, and at the apex, myth, is not meaningless, it is logical and honest, for it represents a rejection of the affirmations implicitly made by these linguistic figures. For as you ascend the scale, you find that we are asked to make increasingly 'animistic' assumptions about the world. The 'new' poets who allow themselves to describe natural appearances, or to compare one natural appearance with another (simile), have realized that this is demanded by the materialist world view (one cannot call it philosophy) of the present time. They could never, for example, subscribe to the demands made upon us by Shakespeare when he writes

Hark, hark, the lark
 At heaven's gate sings,
 And Phoebus gins arise,
 His steeds to water
 At those springs
 On chaliced flowers that lies,
 And winking mary-buds begin
 To ope their golden eyes.

For these metaphors—even in this little song written so light-heartedly, make profound assertions about the nature of things that no materialist could possibly accept, to which, indeed, he could not fully respond because the world they are designed to open is closed for him. The eastern sky is 'heaven's gate' because there is a kingdom of heaven. The sun is called Phoebus, not at all as Fred Hoyle's fiery bodies in outer space are called 'red giants', as a mere name, but because the poet's sun is really conceived as a living god, issuing from the gates of heaven. He travels on an animate vehicle (steeds) and the marigolds that open to greet him are likewise living and therefore open 'eyes' to the great sun. The new poets are quite right if they feel that there is no room for this kind of poetic figure in honest materialist poetry. Only fools would write in this way, and at the same time assent to the cosmology of Fred Hoyle. It would be a kind of poetic hypocrisy to use myth on Sundays and live by the light of materialism for the rest of the week. Such a world of animism is, in a materialistic society, left to the indiarubber vulgarities of Walt Disney's cartoons, where the

metaphysical assumptions of wiser ages than our own are presented as jokes to amuse children. But is it the poets who write of Phoebus and Heaven's gate who are ignorant, or is it the materialists? Are not the traditional poetic figures, metaphor, symbol, personification and myth making true statements, about the metaphysical nature of things?

When I was growing up into the realization of what was contemporary, Auden and his school were becoming popular in England. Surrealism was the new movement in France. Writers of the Auden school were remarkable for their imagery taken from the modern cities, for their social conscience and for their desire to communicate with the common man. This seemed to justify them morally, as against the Surrealists, who were subjective, and drew their imagery from a near-Freudian range of stock dream symbols. In reality surrealism is just as much a materialist school of art as social realism; for its symbols are not true symbols at all—that is to say they do not form a bridge between one order of things and another. They are mere similes and signs—for umbrella read father, for sewing-machine read mother—a code-language in which both terms apply alike to the material order. These were the alternatives offered at that time—the public imagery of Social Realism or the more private code of surrealist subjectivity; and if egoism was more strongly attracted by the one, conscience was supposed to urge us towards the other—Auden's early poems are full of a kind of schoolboyish oratory addressed to this much badgered faculty. And conscience also dictated—so we were made to think—the grim, grey realism of imagery of the city. No Phoebus or heavenly steeds could hope to reach the common man; nor even Wordsworth's mountains and waterfalls, of which town dwellers know little. So we must speak to the common man in his own language, the bar in Forty-Second Street, the United Dairies, and the pylons and the cigarette-stubs, the landscape of Betjeman's subtopia, not the high words of Milton, but slang phrases and idioms contemporary as the *Daily Express*. Then at last the poets could speak to the masses. Now the hero must no more be Lear or Oedipus or Satan, but Arthur Miller's Salesman, or some Lucky Jim or Jimmy Porter. For this is the century of the common man. All the sorrow and protest of the outraged imagination must be canalized into political idealism, the hope for 'some vague Utopia'. But who, in such poetry, is the communicant and what is communicated, let us not ask. 'On Margate Sands', Eliot wrote in those years, 'I can connect/Nothing with nothing.'

Plato would have said the same. This is the speech not of humanity, but of shadows conversing with shadows about a shadow world. The best that can be said of such realist verse is that it was sometimes better than its doctrine.

For the doctrine is false. Just as the modern philosophy of logical positivism is a philosophy without metaphysics, so modern realist and surrealist art is an art without an imaginative world. Both are the work of Satan. For the landscapes of poetry, the landscapes of the great painters are not to be found in nature at all. It is a false doctrine that sees them in terms of materialism. They are landscapes of the soul, and the imagery is not an end but a means—a language for discoursing upon realities of the intelligible world, not of the physical world. The theme of imaginative art is not physical but metaphysical. When we realize this, many things that in the poets seemed obscure become plain, and what seemed fanciful becomes full of ordered meaning. Passages that had seemed pure description come to life as pure doctrine. Shelley's Witch of Atlas lived in no fanciful cave; Coleridge's mariner voyaged upon no real or sur-real sea. Both inhabit the landscape of the mind, whose sensible images are correspondences (like the images of dreams), to essential meaning, to living experiences of the soul. It is in the soul that their validity lies, not in nature. It is the poets' and painters' task to perfect a language of *correspondences*—the word is Swedenborg's but the concept is Plato's and goes back to the famous saying in the *Timaeus* that the world is 'a moving image of eternity'. Correspondence is the secret of all poetic imagery; and this is just as true of Wordsworth, who found in nature the correspondence of spiritual states—his 'characters in the great apocalypse'—as of a professed symbolist like Blake who worked always from the imaginative concept outwards, and who complained that the observation of nature deadened imagination in him. Coleridge in his notebook writes of moon and sky seen through his window, seeking, 'as it were asking for', some equivalent in the soul that 'already and for ever, exists'. The poetic secret is to find in nature the images that correspond to the already and forever existing landscape of the eternal world.

For my generation, Jungian psychology has put in our hands the key that freed us from Doubting Castle, by reaffirming the existence of an archetypal world that had been long lost to sight. Where, materialist scientific thought might reasonably have asked, is this

Platonic world of ideas? Nowhere in nature, certainly Jung has answered, 'in the psyche'. For this key, my own gratitude is boundless. It first unlocked for me the doors into freedom. Yet I must also say that some of the first effects of Jungian thought upon the reappraisal of the symbolic language of poetry have been most unfortunate. Jung himself has written about Goethe's *Faust Part Two* as though this great and profoundly learned imaginative synthesis of the Platonic, alchemical and scientific studies, which had been occupying Goethe for a long lifetime, was the spontaneous production of the poet's unconscious. Jung might point to Plato, who also taught 'that poets and prophets do not know or understand that they write'. But this, Blake says, 'is a most pernicious falsehood. If they do not, pray is an inferior kind to be called knowing?' A work written on Blake by a Jungian critic some years ago is a still more unfortunate application of this fallacious method. This Jungian critic has supposed Blake's writings likewise to be the work of the unconscious. He was unfortunate in an example he selected to demonstrate Blake's neurotic aberrations—some passages from *The Four Zoas* on the hermaphrodite spectre of Tharmas; for, as it happens, this symbol is pure traditional doctrine, and Blake has based these passages upon a philosophic myth in the second book of the *Hermetica*, and dressed it in the imagery of Ovid's metamorphosis of Salmacis and Hermaphoditus. There is nothing personal, still less unconscious, about the passage at all; and it is extremely dangerous for psychologists to suppose that poets are drawing upon the unconscious. Poets—and in particular major poets—tend to be learned in the language of symbols.

What Jung has really done is not to discover something new, but to rediscover something old. He has put into our hands a key to the great symbolic tradition of myth and poetry—to the significance of Neoplatonic myths, of the traditions of magic and alchemy, of religious symbolism both Christian and pre-Christian. For the symbols of the poets are not decorative, nor do they reflect an out-of-date science. They are, in the strictest sense, a language whose terms were, and still are, the understood currency of a certain kind of discourse: discourse not about the landscape of nature but the landscape of the imagination, or in Plato's terms, the world of the archetypes. 'Giants, dragons, paradises, gods, and the like are themselves the expression of certain basic elements in man's spiritual experience. In that sense they are more like words—the words of a language which speaks the mere

unspeakable—than they are like the people and places in a novel.' I quote Professor C. S. Lewis's *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. Shelley's caves and rivers, the landscape of Blake's *Book of Thel*, of Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, of Yeats's *Byzantium*, are built up from this language of symbols; and once we begin to recognize its terms we discover, as when a curtain is withdrawn, that there is not a private symbolic language for each poet, or for some period; like any other language, the traditional terms of symbols have their changes; the symbolic vocabulary of every poet is a little different, or larger or smaller, but we find the same terms in all, used with a strictness and accuracy that is the greater in the greater poets. We find that Spenser, Milton, Shelley, Blake, Yeats, all speak the same language, employ the same terms, describe the same world—with infinite variation and life; but their symbols, far from being private and personal, are traditional, and used deliberately and knowingly. There is nothing of the unconscious in their choice and use. The poets have always known—have been initiates of the order of the imagination that is new only to modern psychology. No phrase has been more misunderstood than Milton's statement that poetry should be simple, sensuous, and passionate, Milton would never have imagined that a generation could exist so ignorant as to suppose that the poet should confine himself to simple themes, sensible emotions. Milton had in mind the opposite thoughts. The themes of poetry being so high, so philosophic, it is necessary for the poet to embody them by imagery of perfect correspondence—thought and image must be one (simple), perfectly realized in the image (sensuous) and felt as living experience (passionate, not merely conceptually apprehended). It is in this that the poet is distinguished from the philosopher, but not in the essential difference in the nature of their themes. As Professor I. A. Richards has recently been saying, the ultimate subject matter of poetry is vedantic knowledge. Significantly, he has taken Shelley for his text.

Plato says that 'all sensibles are apprehended by opinion, in conjunction with sense,' but intelligibles—the realities of the imagination—are not of this kind. They are apprehended by reason, or, as we should say (since the word *reason* has been debased from Plato's sense, in which it is used by Milton and Coleridge), intuition, imagination, or vision; the knowledge of them is innate and we discover them, so Plato taught, by a process of remembering—not as we remember past events, but as we remember something already and always

known; by anamnesis, *unforgetting*, or *dis-forgetting* as the Greek word expresses it. That is why the more sublime the work of poetry or art, the more we feel that it expresses to us something that we have always known, something deeply familiar, and intimately our own. Few of us feel that we might have written Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*, or Auden's *Nones*; why then do we dare to feel that we might ourselves have written—almost as if we *had* written—*Paradise Lost* or Spenser's description of the Garden of Adonis, or the *Songs of Innocence*, or Shelley's *West Wind*, or the *Ancient Mariner*? I know relatively uneducated men who can recite long passages of Milton by heart, but who have little use for Auden or the Social Realists, and would give them little thanks for coming down to their own supposed level, with the pylons and the cigarette packets. For the common man is not what their philosophy supposes. The temporal man is, certainly, confined within his temporal world. Juvenal's Rome, Dryden's Restoration, Auden's Twenties were all modern once, and are all dated now. But the imaginative world is outside time, and transcends class and education. It is our human nature. The Common Man has more in common with Milton than with Auden. The soul has been called naturally Christian, and this is true because, and in so far as, the Christian myth corresponds to the archetypal pattern of the soul.

Science discovers facts of the natural world that make us gape with astonishment; poetry gives us, at its best, the delight of awakening recollection; the more sublime its reach, the more surely do we feel 'This I have always known.'

In bringing this about, not only is the symbol the most characteristic figure employed, but the whole overall purpose of a poem is symbolic. Of symbol, as poets use the word, Coleridge has given us this definition:

A symbol is characterized by a translucence of the special in the Individual, or the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity of which it is representative.¹

1. 'The Statesman's Manual', quoted by Kathleen Coburn in *Inquiring Spirit* (London, 1951), p. 104.

The symbol is in this sense what Milton calls simple—*simplex*—in containing in a single term the multiple states of being; Plato's Four Worlds, or in psychological terms, Jung's fourfold psyche. 'The nature of Visionary Fancy or Imagination, is very little known, and the eternal nature and permanence of its ever Existent Images is considered as less permanent than the things of vegetative and generative nature'²—so Blake wrote. He, like Coleridge, was a natural Platonist. 'Vision or Imagination is a representation of what Eternally Exists, really and unchangeably.' Writing of his great composition of the Last Judgment, Blake says, 'I have represented it as I saw it; to different people it appears differently, as everything else does.'

It is unnecessary to point out that Blake is talking about the archetypal world, common, as Blake says it is, to all men though 'to every man it appears differently'. That which mankind truly has in common, and that in him to which poetic symbols address themselves, is not a shared physical environment but a shared nature, the archetypal world that contains entirely what any one life can only experience partially. Poetry makes accessible to us not only what we have, but also all that we have not, experienced or become, in ourselves. It reveals to us what we are, enables us to know our real selves. It is the task of poets to hold up before the soul images of its own nature, and these magical signs, presented to us, awaken what Plato calls recollection, the soul's self-awareness, a process at once healing and enlightening. Long before analytical psychology, poets and painters and musicians and architects have been engaged in the task of bringing to the soul this integration through self-knowledge, by means of symbolic images. It is the task of poetry to find, over and over again in every generation, the apt *correspondences* of the unchanging archetypes, to present the true images of the gods and of their world. Blake calls them 'images of wonder' and speaks of this process of assimilation to the 'ever existent images' as one of supreme joy, and, he almost implies, of healing.

When Blake speaks of 'visions' he again and again insists that he does not mean something personal to himself, but insight into a collective world, shared by all mankind. That the recognition of these archetypal beings does in fact bring this special and indescribable delight is a matter of continually repeated experience. To quote Blake again,

2. 'A Vision of the Last Judgment'. Rossetti Manuscript, pp. 68–9.

If the Spectator would enter into these Images in his Imagination, approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought; if he could make a friend and companion of one of these Images of wonder, which always intreats him to leave mortal things (as he must know) then would he arise from his grave, then would he meet the Lord in the Air, and then he would be happy.³

The Lord here is Blake's 'Jesus the Imagination', the knower and the object of knowledge, the Platonic Logos or Vedantic Self. What Blake is saying is that the images of poetry open the way to 'meeting the Lord'—discovering the immortal Self. 'Poetry, painting and music are man's Three ways of conversing with paradise.' It is for this reason that Blake says Jesus and his disciples were 'all artists'—that is to say, they addressed themselves to the imagination, the true man. There is no attempt in the Gospels to reach the common man by the methods of the Social Realists.

It has seemed to my generation—and indeed it is—yet another major contribution of Jungian psychology that the unconscious mind has been presented not as a chaos but as an order. This also is, of course, traditional doctrine, though long forgotten. Plato says that the soul contains mathematical order, and demonstrates this by eliciting from an ignorant slave-boy the necessary proofs of a geometrical theorem. In the soul, likewise, is that order that we call beauty—an unfashionable, indeed a meaningless word, according to any materialist philosophy. For, as Plato beautifully says in the *Timaeus*,

When, therefore, an artificer, in the fabrication of any work, looks to that which always subsists according to the *same*, and, employing a paradigm of this kind, expresses the idea and power in his work, it is then necessary that the whole of his production should be beautiful. But when he beholds that which is in generation, and uses the generated paradigm, it is alike necessary that his work should be far from beautiful.⁴

And this is why the word beauty has meaning in terms of the Platonic philosophy, and none whatever when applied to materialist art (if

3. Op. cit., pp. 82–4. 4. Translation by Taylor, vol. II, p. 273.

there is such a thing—the first visible effect of Marxist materialism in any country is to kill the arts; and is the ‘American way of life’ better?). Beauty is correspondence to the intelligible order, ‘the beautiful itself’. It is beautiful just because it is an order—the innate order of the soul, and therefore, to man, infinitely satisfying, harmonious, and healing. But there is no such beauty, Plato says, in nature; for ‘Nature has no outline, but imagination has. Nature has no tune, but imagination has. Nature has no supernatural, and dissolves. Imagination is eternity.’⁵ Whatever beauty we see in nature is the reflected image of the soul. Those who copy nature soon cease to discover beauty, and to speak of beauty at all becomes, for them, mere sentimentalism. Only those who know the metaphysical order have the right to use this word, once a great philosophic concept, now an empty and hollow echo in a world unconscious of the intelligible order of the soul.

The poetic images, then, must correspond to, and serve to awaken, the paradigmatic order of the archetypal world. They are magical signs to overcome the soul’s forgetfulness. They exist, like Yeats’s golden bird, ‘to keep a drowsy emperor awake’ (note how this seemingly descriptive phrase lights up when we see what it means in terms of the traditional symbolic language—for it is poetry, the golden bird, that awakens the soul of the emperor whose ‘sleep’ is the Platonic *amnesia*, the forgetfulness of the intelligible world characteristic of natural man. Why, then, must poets be a class apart, why (since these images are in all of us) cannot every man be his own poet and artist? What need have we for learned poets, or painters, or for a religious myth external to ourselves? There has been much interest since Jung formulated his theory of the inherence of the archetypes, in child-art, the art of the insane, or of patients under analysis, and in the dream-images that in every individual are the correspondences, spontaneously formed, of a symbolic content. Indeed it is a remarkable vindication of the arts that we have now experimental proof, as it were, that these images really do lie latent in every soul.

Sir Herbert Read has written of education through art—that is through self-expression in art; and that the remembering of dreams, or the expression of the unconscious in symbolic figures, can help the process of integration of the soul, is too well proved to be doubted.

5. Blake. Preface to ‘Blast of Abel’.

And yet I believe that in recognizing this we have gone a little too far, and forgotten that there is all the difference in the world between child-art, the art of the insane, or the amateur, and that of the true artist. Mathematics is also, Plato says, latent in the soul; and there is evidence that under certain drugs, people who have no knowledge of mathematics may perceive complex algebraic and geometrical relationships; but no one has as yet suggested that the teaching of mathematics should be replaced by spontaneous mathematics of this kind. Mathematics is still, in our culture, taken too seriously for that. Poetry is not taken seriously—but we must remember that it once was the occupation of great and learned men, not of women and psychological misfits; and that it always is so seen by the few who keep alive the poetic tradition. Poets gifted by nature are the least likely to dispense with the traditional language of symbols, or to seek to substitute a personal for a received symbolic vocabulary. A naturally gifted mathematician will naturally seek to understand the literature of mathematics; and a born poet will be a natural initiate in the poetic tradition. Visionaries are not innovators, mystics are seldom heretical; for the vision illuminates the symbolic tradition of the past, as the mystic's insight bears out the validity of the symbols of his religion. The visionary poets—Milton, Shelley, Blake, Yeats—all in their different ways respect the inherited symbolic language.

When I speak of a traditional symbolic language, I do not mean the copying of copyists, the imitation of the forms without recourse to the living originals. In poetry, as in religion, this kills the very tradition it seems to perpetuate. Dryden, when he writes of Phoebus or Diana, is not speaking of these gods at all, but imitating earlier poets who were. For Dryden the gods do not even exist, they are mere figures of speech. Blake and Shelley may change the names, but they describe the gods. Los or the Witch of Atlas are the gods themselves—Phoebus or Diana—drawn from the originals of the archetypal world; but they are also described with scrupulous respect for the traditional attributes of these archetypes. The visionaries are the traditionalists because, themselves perceiving the archetypes, they best know how to value the visions of earlier poets, and the myths and symbols in which tradition has embodied the knowledge, not of one but of many generations. There can be no originality in the sense of invention, for the archetypal world is the same at all times—as Joyce says 'the same anew'. The originality of great poetry is of another kind—it looks to the *origins*—the twofold origins of vision and tradition.

Dreams, child-art and the like are *original* in only one of these senses; they have the authenticity of springing directly from the source, but in fact they express the archetypal world less perfectly than those myths and symbols that have been built up not by one but by many generations of poets. At most the unconscious throws up fragments, whereas the Christian mythology, or the Orphic or Hindu cosmogony, is a whole, taking us a good deal farther into knowledge of the archetypes than we could penetrate alone.

Freudian psychology seemed to open a world of pure subjectivity. From this, Jung has retrieved the imagination, by demonstrating the universal and common nature of the archetypes. Once more it is possible to see that the symbols of great imaginative art are not private or subjective, but a common language, an objective language, if not a public language; and the more the symbolism of Eden (to use an old name for the archetypal world) is perfected by time and usage, the more fit it becomes for poetry, and—paradoxically—the more directly and immediately it touches the individual soul.

Besides this, traditional symbols are a common language, enabling us to communicate with the past and with the future, as well as with our own contemporaries. It is this common imaginative symbolism that gives what Yeats calls 'unity of culture'. The Christian ages never wearied of painting and sculpting the few themes of annunciation, nativity, crucifixion, Christ enthroned. The Jewish race has owed its continuity to the words of the scriptures, repeated by succeeding generations. Even in this century, Yeats dreamed of giving unity of culture to Ireland by wedding—as he says—the imagination of the people to the landscape of Ireland, holy mountain and magic well, the sea into which the sun sets, and the white birds of the western shore, a revival of old myth in a new way. At the present time the replacement of traditional shared symbols by personal symbols threatens this continuity, and we are in danger of a total disintegration of our culture. That is the other side of an art of self-expression, the darling of our fatally democratic society. It is not important that the words and symbols should be our own, but that they should be right—for if they are right, they will be more true to our own vision than any we can invent. I am perverse enough to believe that it is in the long run better to make children memorize the Psalms, or the *Songs of Innocence*, than to encourage them to express themselves in their own words; for the great words enable us to be, and to become, our selves more truly than we can ever be through 'self-expression'.

It is true that the archetypes are ever present, and that there are always poets born—‘the ever apparent Elias’, Blake says, returns in every age. The old symbols must be renewed continually at the source. But we must also consider whether in earlier ages, the barrier between conscious and unconscious was less opaque, whether the old belief in ‘revealed’ divine knowledge may not have some foundation in fact. Have there perhaps been times, in every civilization, when the myths and symbols have been revealed, and thereafter are handed down, enriched, reshaped perhaps, but never again given in such completeness? This, it seems to me, is by no means impossible; and if it is so, after ages should the more carefully preserve what may not be given again.

The cult of originality, and of the ‘modern’ and the new in art, belongs to the relatively brief reign of materialist philosophy—in fact to modern Europe. Originality is not a virtue admired in a traditional society—the Indian, or the medieval Christian—and the stamp of personal authorship is not, in such societies, held to add very much, if anything, to the value of a work of art. Rather the reverse, perhaps, since the more personal the less universal. And yet the archetypes, if they are not perpetually re-lived, re-experienced at the source, cannot survive. The poet is the meeting point of vision and tradition, who re-verifies and re-states what has always been known and yet is continually forgotten; tests by his own vision the received body of traditional poetic themes and symbols; and re-dresses them in the images of his time and place, for the use of his society.

Now it may seem to religious readers that I ought to be wholeheartedly on the side of conservation of some specific symbolic system. But the wind bloweth where it listeth—formulations of the archetypal world that for one age are valid may for another become empty shells. Particular names or images may become used up, obscured, worn away, vulgarized. It is not the names that matter, finally, but the realities, and the poets of any age are those whose instinct is, or ought to be, the most sure on such matters. Yeats, for example, thought that our symbolic heritage must include Christian symbols; but could not, at the present time, be limited to these. Joyce made his own a number of myths, interweaving, recombining in order to re-create them in a myth entirely new—as Blake had done a hundred years earlier. Blake in *A Little Girl Lost and Found* retells the

themes of the Lesser and Greater Mysteries of Eleusis. The poems are consciously and carefully modelled upon the symbolic events of the Mysteries, as he found them described by Thomas Taylor in his *Dissertation on the Mysteries of Eleusis and Dionysus*. But he has given the old theme modern dress. The *Kore* becomes Lyca, the 'little girl'. Pluto becomes the glorious figure of the lion-king and Demeter—scarcely changed—the Mother seeking her child in the Caves and Dens. It is, as Blake says, *vision*; it is also scrupulously traditional, in the only way that matters—respect for the archetypal theme, not for the accidents of name or setting. For true poetry is not only vision, it is also art; or, otherwise said, the poet, unlike the spontaneous child-artist or the amateur, works not from the unconscious alone, but with the whole mind, with knowledge as well as with intuitive vision. And we do in fact find that the great poets do all possess great learning in the symbolic tradition, and scrupulous respect for its terms—its *languages* as Professor Lewis boldly and rightly calls the symbols. They are initiates; in the true sense, *bards*; and all, from Homer to Virgil, from Dante to Milton, from Blake to Yeats, speak one language; yet with what infinite variety, and unfailing freshness and life.