

THE  
PROSE  
OF  
CHRISTOPHER  
BRENNAN

Edited by  
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ANGUS AND ROBERTSON

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SYMBOLISM IN  
NINETEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

*Six Lectures, June-July 1904*

I

THE LOGIC OF THE IMAGINATION

[...]

II

THE FACTS OF POETRY

Our next question is as to the necessity of symbolism: what then are the living facts of poetry?

The first and most patent fact with which poetry has to do is the imperfection of our life: and this involves the contrary fact of its possible perfection. Out of the conflict of these two

facts poetry is born: and its office is to exasperate or reconcile that conflict, indeed both to exasperate and reconcile it. The imperfection is in ourselves; the imperfection of a divided consciousness, a divided life; war within us and war upon the earth.

One need not be a philosopher to be convinced of this. Mankind, to the very simplest glance, presents itself as divided up into creeds, schools, sects and conventicles; nations, tribes, municipalities, and parishes; all actively jealous of one another; each heartily occupied in excommunicating the rest, predicting their eternal damnation in the next world, or strenuously taking care that they come to grief in this. Everywhere applies the question which Blake addressed to that jealous deity on whom he bestowed such irreverent names:

Is this thy soft Family-Love  
Thy cruel Patriarchal pride  
Planting thy Family alone  
Destroying all the World beside.

Everywhere war and division: nowhere peace and unity—nowhere except, of course, within the charmed circle of symbolism.

The war without is a correspondence of the war within. Truth is not manifest to us, but we are working our way through error; the good is a matter of doubt and of compromise, never coming to us unmixed; happiness something that vanishes when we grasp at it, a thing of moments, and if ever a human being is continuously, for any prolonged length of time happy, as Rousseau was at Les Charmettes, the fact is written up in history with amazement. As for content, that shadow of happiness, we know with what sacrifices, what limitations, what resignations it is usually bought.

Philosophy makes more precise this imperfection. Confining itself to the department of knowledge it shows a discrepancy between our thought and the reality with which it deals, between our thought and the perception which feeds it: take for instance three simple matters—motion and the time and space which it involves. Now while real motion does take place in real space, it is a puzzle nearly as old as the hills

that if you transport it to the regions of thought and try to analyse it, you will most assuredly fail. Nowadays, of course, we do not bother ourselves with the puzzle: we are content to point out that it rests on a confusion of real time and space with their ideal representatives. But in so doing we are only confessing more openly the discrepancy between thought and reality. Time and space, as we perceive them, are one kind of thing: time and space, as we conceive them and use them for mathematical constructions, quite another. This is a simple instance of the division running through all our knowledge and we need not at present afflict ourselves with more: if it be found in such apparently ultimate principles as the three we looked at, it is bound to affect all their derivatives.

We grope in error; that is a plain fact, whether our groping be really in the direction of the truth or not. The progress of the centuries has brought us so far that we refuse to agree on any of the important questions of life or thought: we cannot even get so near agreement as to agree to differ.

Now one noticeable fact about this disagreement is that the parties to it, not merely end but have begun with different aspects of life and, following them out with a logic entirely drawn, in each case, from the special aspect chosen, have finished by representing them as opposed. This opposition is by no means a natural fact: nature does not know of opposition: as Blake, Baudelaire, and since them, many philosophers have remarked, nature only gives us contraries, contradictories are the creation of man. In nature at least all contrasts can coexist: nature has no other form: strife and harmony seem to depend on us.

This would point to a certain wilfulness in the division we deplore: not merely are there natural defects in us, but we have exasperated them by our various goings-on. A wilfulness, I say, by which I mean that we have each of us rather exclusively followed our own interests, our own preoccupations, in our attempts to account for that which is of wider scope. We are all amused at the specialist who imagines that he can explain everything by his own narrow strip of knowledge. When Nordau, for instance, does away with symbolism, Pre-

Raphaelitism, Nietzsche, Wagner, and Tolstoi, by saying degeneration, degeneration, and again degeneration; showing, to his own satisfaction at least, that Rossetti's use of the refrain is just a phase of echolalia; that the elaborateness of Mallarmé and the simplicity of Verlaine, the altruism of Tolstoi and the ego-worship of Nietzsche are all indifferently variations of a single modern disease; we begin to find the explanation rather stretched and thin. But what if Nordau himself or anyone like him were but an exaggerated symptom of a principle underlying all our special knowledges?

Take for instance our way of dealing with what we call the external or material world. It is, I suppose, the crudest fact of experience, the first rude awakening out of the baby's paradise, that if you fall down you get bumped one way, whereas if something falls on you, you get bumped another way. So we get our first ideas of matter—matter at rest, hardness; matter in motion, force. We abstract these aspects from all others: it is just the same process by which the much-decried metaphysician gets his much-decried abstract ideas. And just as he, villainously, hypostasizes his abstractions, giving them a life apart and a tyranny over all those aspects which he neglected at the start, so do we. We thin matter down till we can't get any further and leave any of it, and so we have the atom. And the atom is hard: that is the explanation of the hardness of matter: it is hard because its smallest possible parts are hard. But matter also came and hit us: and when a thing moves it is shoved or pulled: so we get force, the cause of motion, something which shoves or pulls the atoms. Where is it? in the atoms: because when a thing was shoved or pulled, it was shoved or pulled by something else; especially because *we* are given to shoving and pulling. But now it occurs to us that matter is not uniformly hard: some of it is actually what you might call soft, and none of it is absolutely hard, it is all compressible. Now our atoms were absolutely hard and we can't make them soft: for if we did they would be compressible and could become smaller. But they were the smallest things we could get. Mark now that, having abstracted one quality of matter to account for the whole of manifested matter, we are driven, in order to explain for what is not really a different aspect—

because softness and hardness are not marked off from one another in this world, are not opposites but contraries, mere relatives—we are driven to bring in something that is not matter. We remember that things thrown at us or falling on us passed through space. What if the atoms are divided by space? Wouldn't that account for softness and compressibility? So we treat space as we treated hardness—we abstract it. We never saw or heard of empty space, but we calmly assume it, and we stick empty space in between the atoms. But now what is to keep the atoms in their places? What is to keep that empty space between them? If we can't manage that they may come together and we're just where we were. We bethink us of that force: suppose the atoms mutually shove one another, exert what we dub a repellent force? Yes: but then it will be this shoving, this repellent force which accounts for the hardness of things and not the hardness of the atoms. So we have wandered away from our first principle. Well, let us be logical: suppose the atoms are not hard masses, but nothing else than that force, centres of force, mutually repellent. But then we reflect that we know nothing of force except through the vehicle of matter and that force acting *in vacuo* is not to be conceived. So we go back to our hard atoms, and their mutual repulsions. Repulsions? How? We reflect again that when one thing shoves another it always comes up to the thing it shoves, and how can the atoms shove each other across empty space? Action at a distance? Not to be thought of! So now we fill up the empty space with matter: but mind, we have to keep in our eye that that empty space was put there to account for the softness of matter, so this matter that we put in its place must be of an entirely new kind. This matter is not divided into atoms, it is not divisible into atoms; it is perfectly homogeneous: it is not hard, it is perfectly fluid, and it will neither retard nor stop anything passing through it. Other matter gravitates, this doesn't. The sum and substance is that we account for the hardness of matter by the absolute hardness of infinitely small particles of matter and for its softness by the absolute softness of absolutely homogeneous matter; and we account for gravitation by the attraction of the particles towards one another through matter that does not gravitate. We have left out of account the facts

that matter also appears to us as light or dark, coloured, and odorous: and all these have to be explained out of that atom which possesses nothing else than mass and hardness. But I must remind myself that this is not a lecture on matter and that my enthusiasm has already carried me far out of my course.

Do you now feel inclined to say that God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions? It would be too hastily said, if you meant it in the Preacher's sense. For these many inventions have a use and a principle, and it is the next part of our argument to look for them.

In the first place—and this is the beginning of our consolation—the inventions work. That was what they were invented for. Their end is a human, practical end. We desired to find out so much about the threatening material world as that we could calculate and predict its course, and shape our own accordingly. We have managed to do so. And from this practical utility depends their principle: we have, in order to simplify our calculations, ignored everything but the aspect which interested us.

But now, this scientific process claims to be something of more than practical use, it lays claim to theoretic value. It claims to be an explanation of the world. Let us consider in how far it can be such. The world is an object of knowledge: an explanation of the world is such as makes it a consistent object, an object satisfying to the human intellect. Here again we find a practical end aimed at. And again, the human intellect is a peculiar affair and whatever it explains to itself takes on a new character: the explanation of the world means a deliberate rehandling of facts, originally given in no other order but that of somewhat higgledy-piggledy coexistence, a reshaping of them in accordance with certain principles, the introduction into them of new governing lines and rhythms. Where are these principles to be found? Where do we perceive them in their best defined form? Not in that outer world, but in ourselves. For instance, the three great scientific principles of substance, causation, and uniformity, if sought in exterior phenomena alone, are still open to every one of Hume's sceptical

objections. Abiding substance is simply derived from our direct knowledge of that which abides, under all change, within ourselves. In material phenomena it never can be a matter of direct consciousness. Let us measure and weigh and discover that after the candle is burnt out, the balance is still affected in the same way, we still must make an inference before we can arrive at the idea of indestructible substance. And where do we get the inference? From the analogy of ourselves. Similarly with the notion of cause. We argue, such and such an event must have had some prior event which determined it. Where do we find such compulsion? Only in our familiarity with the way in which we ourselves act, with the way in which we are accustomed to bring about changes in the world. Whittle the idea of cause down as thin as you please, it remains none the less a fact that it arose out of our own direct knowledge of our own purposive action, and it remains only to ask whether, in whittling down its original meaning, you are getting nearer to any meaning at all. In the same way, we have no real idea or perception of force except in our own will; none of uniformity except in the recurrence of special manifestations of our own personality. Nowhere, except in ourselves, is any principle of explanation given to us directly: its introduction elsewhere is a matter of inference.

Supposing now that you agree with me so far, I can imagine you as asking, "Where does symbolism come in?" It is already there, but I must ask your patience for some time longer before I can show you that it is.

If now our intellectual dealings with things are based on abstraction and that abstraction on practical needs, and if further, in handling those abstractions we proceed according to principles which we can only find within ourselves, it follows that all our thinking partakes of our human nature. It would be strange if it did not. Reason is a distinctive human activity. No problem can present itself otherwise than in relation to us, as a human problem; and we cannot solve it otherwise than by human faculties. There can be nothing more unreasonable than to ask us to jump out of our own skin. And yet, because of the foolish errors of certain classes of thinkers, a foolish discredit has been attached to the word "anthropomorphic" so that now

it has been proposed to substitute for it, as a name for the true method of knowledge, the word "humanized". And it has been thought that only a thorough de-humanization of our minds, in the direction of the purely unconscious, would give us truth. Yet if, say, unconscious matter were the absolute reality and truth in one, then it alone could be the expression, absolute or individual, of its own truth.

I choose a proof of the essentially anthropomorphic nature of all our knowledge and thought in the most vehement opponent of all anthropomorphism and idealism, Friedrich Nietzsche. I prize this thinker and poet for his extraordinary honesty: he made his mind a battlefield for all the conflicting tendencies of his time and allowed it to fight their battle with a ruthless logic. He began as an idealist, of a kind: and after his system had been wrecked, owing to extra-philosophic, artistic reasons, he became the sworn enemy of all idealism. He waged war in the name of science, which he had at first despised, and he waged war at first in the superior, easy way of the French *philosophes* of the eighteenth century, afterwards, as he found that the enemy would neither die nor surrender, with an increasing wildness which finally wrecked his own brain. His method was to take up such and such a fair idealism and say "Just see what a crude and ugly origin this mincing illusion had, the wild fancy of some ignorant savage!" We are not concerned with the validity of this method but with its results. When Nietzsche had destroyed everything else, it occurred to him that science also, as a piece of human activity, began in the same way as everything else, and its development led only to the accursed thing. To be the ascetic of truth, as scientist, was just as awful as to be the ascetic of goodness: one more moral prejudice blocking the way to the Overman! And the idea of causation was just due to the savage's incapacity to accept a fact simply: he must needs put an act behind the act; instead of doing, a doing-doing. Man is simply ridden and driven by his own language: subject and predicate have vitiated all our thinking. So, it would seem, in order to attain to reality and truth, the philosopher must close his mouth and stop thinking: an agreement with the absolute mystic which, just because it is not intended, is all the more amusing.

I am vexed myself at having to lead you through all these apparently aimless ways of argument: yet they were necessary not merely for the matter in hand this evening but for the lectures that follow; all that I have said until now is just the negative basis of Blake's system.

And now let us get back to that thorny path which, I assure you once more, is leading us to symbolism. Our science, we saw, is an interpretation of the world in terms of ourselves, but its fundamental conceptions do not admit of explanation. Why? Because we are still in that region of division and imperfection. Scientific conceptions cannot be ultimates, cannot be other than mutually contradictory, because they are made out of abstracted portions of our total experience and no part can ever be the whole. Of course this does not invalidate science within its sphere: and no harm is done if we recognize that such explanations are merely partial explanations, corresponding to the various parts into which our life has come to be broken, and all of them waiting to be taken up into a larger explanation which will correspond to the unity of our own life that heals all our divisions. But if one of these partial explanations claims to lord it over all life, then we have what Blake called the error of Urizen, his "soft Family-Love": and it is an exact correspondence that this deification of a mere machinery of thought should be rampant in an age that seems determined to regard nothing but the wheels and machinery of life and sequester each man in his prison-cell of soulless drudgery.

I can now state the main proposition to which I wish to lead you. If we always read the world in our own image, and if the partial readings of our various mental departments confess themselves as partial, it must follow, since, as Novalis says, the feeling of want and imperfection involves and is that of completeness and perfection—it must follow that all are taken up and explained in some activity of the whole man, some reading of the world in the light of our own totality, some complete interaction of man and the universe. It is of course also plain that at this we have not yet arrived, that is the work not merely of a human generation or a whole people, that

requires nothing less than the whole cosmic time-process for its perfection. But what I do maintain and where I do take up my stand as firmly as Roderick Dhu is on this proposition—that during our present dispensation and while we are not yet redeemed into that perfection of unity to which we, still broken as we are, give the broken names of Wisdom, Beauty, and Goodness, in this time-process at least and in the body of this death, imagination alone stands for and, in a certain way, is that harmonious co-operation of the whole man and the universe, and all our other activities come after it, to consolidate and administer its conquests and set it free for new victories.

In saying this I may seem to be showing disrespect to a most ancient and venerable muse—divine philosophy. Yet the history of philosophy—and the historical method, properly applied and not after the fallacious fashion of Nietzsche and his kindred, is a most valuable means of finding out the character of a man, a nation, or a science—the history of philosophy shows her to have been one of the most cruel daughters of Urizen, one of the most audacious builders of Babels, one of the most arrogant excommunicators of humanity: indeed, where and whenever a partial interpretation has been forced upon us instead of the whole, materialism, for example, the wrong has been done not by science, which can do no wrong, but by philosophy. And all through neglect of this evident fact, to which we shall return more than once in its symbolic aspects, that here we have no abiding city, that man is not meant to build lasting structures in this world, that the making of systems—even systems of symbolism, as I cheerfully confess—can never be final and is never more than an experiment, an attempt to see in how far the results we have reached agree with one another.

The wrecks of systems which philosophy has scattered over the earth in her monstrous infatuation for that spectre, the Absolute, are almost innumerable: they have been refuted and wrecked by the simple human process of getting past them; the only damage we may do to ourselves is that we may forget to bring away the few valuables which they were built to house. Yet philosophy herself has tried to save us from that. Late in her history and yet three centuries ago she began to

recognize her limitations and took to the humbler but more fruitful occupation of criticism, of search for fundamental principles involved in human experience. And more definitely with Kant and since Kant—though even in that short period her incorrigible lust for final system has flared out perhaps more tremendously than ever before.

The whole value of the critical movement in philosophy can be, I think, summed up in this, that it has insisted on the one principle of unity which saves us from being altogether lost in the chaos of appearances, outer or inner. Against all attempts at explaining the world and ourselves by some ingenious abstraction from the fullness of experience, philosophy has persistently opposed the fact that, over and above all the manifold of reality, over and above all the abstraction of our sciences, there remains the unity of the self, an ultimate fact of direct experience, an ultimate principle implied in all our knowledge and in all our logic. That is precious and that is the outlet to salvation: but when we have got so far we are only just beginning.

Yet even critical philosophers take it for everything. The latest development of critical philosophy, the system which is much in vogue both at Oxford and here, that of Thomas Hill Green, falls, as it seems to me, into this trap. It forgets that it began by opposing the unity of self, a fact in which it has no more property than anyone else, to a theory which supposed the mind and its knowledge to be built up out of another kind of atoms, sensations and ideas, and when it came to build, alas! it assumed these atoms as true and smuggled a kind of activity into the self as knower to account for their union. It forgot that it too started with an abstraction, the knowing aspect of the self, and that therefore it was condemned to remain within the limits of that abstraction; that a principle so obtained cannot be carried over to other departments, for with departments we must, even in philosophical analysis, be left; and that the one thing which insists on escaping and vanishing, when we deal with departments, is that unanalysable thing, activity and energy, which, as ordinary experience makes us pretty well assured, is a fundamental essence of our self.

What we require, then, to rescue us from the division, disunion and death of our discursive mind, is something which will at least heighten in us the native sense of our own indivisible energy, which will present us our self, not as a mere blank refusal to be analysed away, not as something merely implied in all our activities, but as a total energy, fusing and implying every special activity. We want it brought home to us as knower, feeler, and doer—because, broken as we are, we must approach it by many ways—yet directly again as a power holding all those aspects in potency and transcending them, somewhat similar to the theological mystery of unity in trinity. Now there can be no doubt that poetry does so. Not explicitly, because explicitness implies analysis, and analysis is not the way of poetry. The perfection of poetry, and there is plenty of perfect poetry in the world, is a fusion and intension of the three forces into which our energy resolves itself in this world—thought the shaper, emotion the soul, sense the body. Not in the words of the poem, as we may abstract them and analyse them like so much prose, is this given, but in the totality which is nothing else than the poem; or, if we insist on analysis, then to our confusion, in what we despise as its mere form; or as we then say, to cover our confusion, in its suggestion. But we must remember that all the suggestion which we find in a poem is not something outside it, but an inseparable, organic part of it, whether intended by the poet or no: it is that aspect of it which Mallarmé paradoxically, but none the less rightly, called its “silence” in contradistinction to its aspect as speech. If Mallarmé seems to you to be talking as a mere ingenious foreigner, remember that Carlyle spoke thus of symbols: “In a symbol there is concealment and yet revelation: here, therefore, by Silence and by Speech acting together, comes a doubled significance.” No concealment at all, I should prefer to say: speech is a function of the discursive mind, and when it comes to reveal what transcends analysis, it must take on that higher power and wed itself with silence. But such silence is not a blankness: it is in every case a determinate silence, charged with significance, attending on the word as it moves.

Here at last I have brought you within view of symbolism;

but there is still some way left to go. We must still find out in what way poetry deals with that full self of ours and in what relation that self stands to our undeniably broken life and our undeniably imperfect world. Have we any other knowledge of that self than as a blank persisting unity, as a metaphysical implication?

I have already implied that we have: but such knowledge as most of us have is vague and at the mercy of theory. Let us see if science, whose function is to make our common sense explicit, can help us here. I think we will be helped by a science yet in its infancy, the science of what I call abnormal psychology. The self-styled “normal” man—though such a thing as a normal man does not exist, yet so great is the power of imagination that the fiction has come terribly near being real—the normal man as he has made and perfected himself, that precious atom of our social system, at once its foundation and pinnacle, is so complete and harmonious within his chosen negations, that out of him we can get no light on human nature, its temporal division and its extra-temporal unity, and must go to those abnormal and dangerous outcasts, the saint and the sinner, the madman and the poet. Within the last twenty years, even since the S.P.R. began its work, the most important work, I think, that any scientific society today is pursuing, a vast mass of material has been collected and dealt with in a scientific manner, the most thorough treatment being that of the late Frederic Myers in his posthumous work on *Human Personality*. Let me simply state the results, in so far as they affect us.

This discursive mind, whose divisions and imperfections afflict us, this conscious mind, is but the surface of our mind. Below it stretches a dark region, the subconscious or subliminal, out of which every now and then something swims up into the sunlit region. As is only natural, a good deal of what swims up is merely submerged wreckage from the conscious surface, things lost from memory, silly jingles which have fixed themselves there, and what are called “dissolutive” phenomena of all kinds. But more important things arise. Hence arise all the enthusiasms and inspirations of poet and saint, and hence the whole energy by which we live. William James, the foremost living psychologist, after a careful and detailed dis-

cussion of such facts in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, to which I have referred and which I heartily recommend to every one here, arrives at the conclusion which is best given in his own words: "The further limits of our being plunge into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and 'understandable' world. Name it the mystical or supernatural region, whichever you choose. So far as our ideal impulses originate in this region (and most of them *do* originate in it, for we find them possessing us in a way for which we cannot articulately account), we belong to it in a more intimate sense than that in which we belong to the visible world, for we belong in the most intimate sense wherever our ideals belong. Yet the unseen region in question is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world. When we commune with it, work is actually done upon our finite personality, for we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change. But that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself, so I feel as if we had no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal." And here is Myers's conclusion, after a life-time of dealing with facts more various than those dealt with by James: "Each of us is in reality an abiding psychical entity far more extensive than he knows—an individuality which can never express itself completely through any corporeal manifestation. The Self manifests through the organism; but there is always some part of the self unmanifested; and always, as it seems, some power of organic expression in abeyance or reserve."

Here we win most important results. Between our discursive mind and our true self there may be a gulf, but also a means of communication—the sea of the subconscious, no longer altogether unplumbed or estranging. The self no longer remains suspended in air as a logical phantasm—and idealism itself has often turned to pessimism in despair of being able to bring it into vital connection with this imperfect and yet real life—it has now become something dynamic. And again, we are able to give a meaning to this time-process, to this tangle of error in which we are implicated, such as absolutist philosophy has never been able to do. The transcendental self in us is not

something abstract but a concrete reality: only, its full potency is not manifested, it is yet in process of development. The mind, like the material world, is going through an evolution. It is by coming to know the world that we come to know ourselves: the double process is still going on, each aspect of it acting on and helping forward the other.

And now, I think, we can justify that proposition that poetry and the imagination, alone, are the expression, adequate or not, of the vital reality. Not merely does poetry shadow forth to us the full self, but in the process of making that self explicit through the world of things, it is always in the van. Science and philosophy follow, co-ordinating and organizing, the one with a view to practice, the other with a view to final explicit synthesis, but both unable to transcend their analytic limitations. Neither of them is a vital activity, or directly represents such: poetry alone can do it. If it should be now objected that poetry leaves work for philosophy to do and that further poetry is fleeting, unstable and undogmatic, the answer is that the objection is not aimed at anything. Poetry may hold philosophy in potency but it cannot become philosophy without ceasing to be poetry: and if philosophy or science take the place of poetry, well, they cease to do their own legitimate work. That poetry holds the higher place and has greater power of communicating the real and vital is shown by the well-known fact that every system of philosophy or religion comes to poetry for its final consecration and, when its working-time is over, lives by its poets. We may refuse to be materialists, but there is Lucretius; agnostics, but there is FitzGerald; Catholics, but there is Dante; Puritans, but there is Milton: and we certainly refuse to cut ourselves off from the enjoyment of so much poetry. The reason why poetry appeals to us where doctrine finds us armed to the teeth, is surely this, if you think it out, that instead of the limited ideas and polemical arguments of a doctrine, poetry embodies that of which they are but the sign, the human "mood", the total attitude of the self, in a certain direction, towards the world. And again, if it be urged that poetry is fleeting and undogmatic, the reply is that there is a large mass of poetry in the world and we have hardly begun, as Mr Yeats would have us do, to arrange it in some

regular order. That poetry, as well as philosophy, is, in the long run, a makeshift, I can well believe: they are both only valid within the time-process; at the end of it, when the whole potency of the self shall have been realized and made explicit, and the world shall be pervaded through and through with mind, then there will be no need either for philosophy or for poetry.

In the meantime here we are, *in* the time-process, exceedingly troubled about both; and symbolism is still complaining, like Xanthias in the *Frogs*, "and still no word of me". Well, I can only repeat my assurance that even the time-process of this evening will have its certain ending and, I hope, a harmonious realization of all the yet undeveloped potency of my promises.

Poetry then stands for what Novalis calls "voluptuous knowledge" and Coventry Patmore "nuptial knowledge", what I, in obedience to my own strict determination to talk plain prose, shall continue to call the meeting of our divided life with our full, perfect self. As there is no truth without reference to us, as everything we mean by truth means a harmony of the world with our nature and its deepest interests, it follows that the whole truth, beauty, and goodness in one is simply the full revelation of the whole man. The whole man, the perfect man: for assuredly I do not mean that we should whimsically clip the world to suit the incomplete, divided John Smith that each of us appears to the other. Lest the statement should still seem too surprising, let me recapitulate in a few words what I said before. Crude fact, with which many people make parade, is only found in unreflecting consciousness: as soon as man begins to think, fact ceases to be crude, it is modified, reshaped and rearranged, and, as we saw at the beginning, always in accordance with practical human needs and principles found in the human mind. Crude fact has no other value than as an explosive, to blow up the other fellow's philosophy: when you begin to make your own you can only proceed in the same way. And let me take an example, again, from that inexhaustible refuter of nearly everything he ever said, Nietzsche: when he forswore idealism and began war on it in the name of

science, what was his principle for testing truth? This: "Let me find out what idea costs me most pain to conceive: that must be true." As if even then he was escaping from the law that we measure the universe by ourselves! And we saw to what suicide his method led him: if we do not care to follow him—and here yawns the abyss that is at the heart of all philosophy, where we must recognize that all depends upon our choice—then we must extend our principle in the other direction and acknowledge that the final solution of all our problems is the complete revelation of the complete man.

Now poetry again becomes our mediator in that, while the revelation of the complete man delays, it can pass ahead of what we are and present to us, vividly and pungently, what we might be. It is in this sense that poetry perpetuates our youth. There never was a young man yet, I believe, who did not go to meet life with a fuller faith in his own capabilities and the opportunities that life would offer him than was justified by the result. The shock that follows we call variously the conflict of the ideal and the real, or disillusion, or some such name: it is and has written itself large in poetry under the name of *Weltschmerz*, a thing which the staid elder of thirty-three regards as both dangerous and ridiculous, as he looks back with pity and contempt on the heaven-storming enthusiast that he was at twenty-three. Yet some tell us that to him who has retired from business the dreams return, that

life moves out of a red flare of dreams  
Into a common light of common hours,  
Until old age brings the red flare again.

And I cannot accept the theory that all this excess of idealism in our youth is merely nature's little way of wasting a lot of energy in order to get a little common thing done: I would rather believe in a slightly reversed Wordsworthian theory of intimations of our future from the enthusiasms of our youth.

Anyway, to get back to business, poetry anticipates the slow evolution of the time-process and gives us images of our possible perfection. Does symbolism still complain, Xanthias-like? We have caught it in the act. For every presentation of that which transcends our broken, imperfect life, our divided,

discursive consciousness, is a symbol: it cannot be anything else.

I said, far back, when we were struggling through what seemed quite foreign places, that symbolism was there and so it was. Our partial readings of things, based on abstractions from ourselves and outer facts, all end in symbolisms of a kind: the various atomic theories give us, as Mr Knibbs has ably shown, symbolic pictures of the universe. Poetry is, like them, a mediator; it presents us with embodiments of the total reality and the perfected reality; it uses the facts of our broken life as elements with which to fashion images of the life that is complete.

I shall pass over the symbolisms with which we are familiar, for to the making of those symbols there went much that was not purely poetic. Let them be merely mentioned thus in passing, in order that we may not drop that which I have insisted on, the continuity of symbolism in poetry; and let us now consider how the matter is affected by what I would term the self-consciousness of the art, the rise of which would be definitely marked by the transference of Swedenborg's law to poetry.

The first thing to explain is the word "moods"—a word definitely brought into circulation by the editors of Blake. In my first lecture I promised this explanation, and in this I have already used the word in such manner as to give it a little more definite meaning. Novalis, in his meditation on poetry, had already made the remark that "not thoughts but indeterminate moods make us happy", a remark which we may misinterpret according to our ordinary understanding of the word; but in reading Novalis one must be careful and this note is rather to be taken in connection with his query whether happiness and unhappiness do not depend on musical relations, and his further statement that "in the perfect mood all ideas are present". A mood is a movement of the total self as opposed to any of its broken surface manifestations: an energy on its way to become broken, but still whole. Thus, distinguished from his disillusionment, the young man's idealism is a mood; or, when a lecturer thinks what a fine set of lectures on symbolism

he is going to write, that is a mood; when he comes to deliver them, you get his *Weltschmerz*. A mood, then, though not an object of analysis save in its imperfect embodiment, is not something vague or indefinite. It is a movement of the energy of the self, but in a certain direction. Just as a poem though a manifestation of the whole, may determine itself towards a certain part, and bear a distinctive character of thought, emotion or sense, so it is with the moods. They are the furthest we can get towards a glimpse of the whole. They transcend ordinary life and consciousness, being the attitudes or gestures into whose rhythm the innumerable single thoughts or feelings are resumed, as a draughtsman, in drawing an outline, resumes into its continuity the innumerable broken lines of nature. The mood gathers the doctrine or emotion into the unity; and this is what I meant when I said that poetry could keep a doctrine alive because it let the argument go and held by the mood. Hamlet is not a doctrine but a mood and therefore inexhaustible. The mood, again, because it implies a determinate energy of the self in a certain direction, implies a certain artifice, since artifice there must be in any presentation of the transcendent, namely a raising of the appearance to a higher power: and that is the definition of symbolism in so far as we regard its dealing with images taken from the ordinary world.

I have said that Hamlet was a mood and that reminds me that the moods run, like symbolism, through all literature. The classic schools always insisted on subordinating the individual to the mood: their error has generally been to lean too much towards the philosophic definition of art as "the presentation of the universal in the particular"—a definition which could only satisfy a philosopher: historically it is a fact that they tend to regard the moods as one would regard plaster-casts or geometrical diagrams that die out in the hands of feeble copyists. Romanticism, with its insistence on the individual, the emotional, and all that is not rigid, is a necessary reaction: but the lack of brains, which generally accompanies pure romanticism, prevents it from being of much use; it must either find brains and so become symbolism, or degenerate into realism; it was by an inherent logic of events that the romantic movement in France ended with Mallarmé and Zola

as contemporaries. Now I do not at all want you to go away with the idea that symbolism is just a mixture of classicism and romanticism, though most often romanticism is the soil in which it grows, as Blake's young imagination was nourished by Westminster and revolted by S. Paul's: I wish to use the contrast between them to help us to a clearer idea of what symbolism is; like classicism, it holds by the moods but not as pure abstract ideas; like romanticism, it holds by emotion, but not mere special emotion. It conceives the moods as intellectual raptures.

Now what has the law of correspondences to do with all this? A great deal. What spiritual fact needs is corroboration and of corroboration it never can have enough. It must behold itself not merely in one isolated fact. Here the symbol, being, as we defined it, the meeting-point of many analogies, mediates. For a mood, resuming into itself and transcending the imperfections of our manifested soul, brings, as embodiment, an image into which the scattered beauty of many material things runs together and burns more vividly. The law of correspondences has a double action. It charges the outer world with meaning and it awakes meaning within ourselves, helping the mood to disengage itself. When a man lets his soul wed itself to some unified aspect of nature, the vastness of the dawn, the wonder of the woods, or the royal passing of the day, all the pettinesses and vexing trifles drop away: what is left is the purer, intenser mood, the rhythm that is ample enough to sing in tune with that of nature.

There is much more to be said on the corroboration of spiritual fact or the arousing of ecstasy by the perception of correspondences, but I am not under contract to speak poetry and I detest prose-poetry in a lecture, the chief function of which is to be—and you will long ago have deduced my theory from my practice—to be, if not edifying, at least not dull: all that is to be said will be said, in the next three lectures, by better men, and illustrated from their work. Here I prefer to hark back to my grammatical discussion of last evening and confirm the statement that in poetry there can be no distinction of matter and form. For since poetry passes beyond the divided, analytic, everyday life and symbolizes the complete,

perfect, eternal self, it must follow that it presents what cannot be presented in any other way. It follows too—and this justifies that paradoxical definition of symbolism as speech and silence acting together—that poetry is not a way of saying something, but a mode of that something's being, a world existing beside and, when formed, independent of, the world in the dust of whose things we are frittered away. A conclusion which is confirmed by what we know of the agonies which poets have undergone in the mere struggle to express: they would assuredly not have endured all that rending and sweat to put those few simple words in that simple order had it been merely a question of giving more pleasing utterance to what has been already said in a dry way or might again be said in a slightly more pleasing way. Poetry is, in sober truth, the birth of new worlds.

The imagination then has this further insight into the nature of things—to recur to the definition with which we began these lectures—that it has access to the unity and perfection that lie behind and explain our divided imperfect life. It images this to us by a fusion of all the elements which are chaotic and separated here, a fusion embodied in the symbol, which is a corresponding fusion of the beauty scattered through many natural appearances.

Now our life consists not merely of high movements and hours in insight, such as give birth to poetry, it consists also of days, weeks and calendar months of dullness and mediocrity, that outer weariness which made Baudelaire a maniac. There are, as most of us keenly feel, two lives: that lies in the brightness of truth, this stumbles in error; that is radiant with love and beauty, this is vexed with its own littleness and meanness; that is unfettered, lying beyond good and evil, this is caught in the quagmire. That, in short, is our health and this our disease: or one might call these two facts of poetry by their simple names—our happiness and our unhappiness. But these simple names involve universes; and I prefer to introduce them first now, after an attempt to see what they imply. Poetry, mediating between the two, necessarily enters into the conflict, and as I said at the beginning of this lecture, its part is both to exasperate and reconcile that war. Hence a double attitude of poetry towards the imperfect world, an attitude which we shall find

running through Blake, exemplified in Novalis's and his fellows' theory of irony, and in Mallarmé's definition of poetry as consisting of lyricism or enthusiasm and satire—enthusiasm for every glimpse of beauty given here, satire that scourges the world for its imperfection or pretends to find content in things "as they are", things with the poetry dissolved out—an inverted lyricism.

If we had begun, as Mr Yeats invites us, to arrange in some order our inheritance of poetry, we should have found a symbolism of these facts running through it. As for the perfect life, the mystics, following out logically the principle that we read the world in our own similitude, have figured it as a man—that man standing in the zodiac whom you may have seen in magical diagrams, the Adam Kadmon or perfect Adam of the Kabbala, the Grand Man of Swedenborg. This symbol is found again in Blake's Eternal Man: but Blake also employed largely the other symbol of the poets, who prefer to imagine the ideal life as a state, an age, a country—Eden, the Golden Age, the Country of the Young, Eldorado, or the Fountain of Youth. It is curious that, just as magic and alchemy tried to realize in science what belongs only to poetry, so people have, time and again, debated the question where these places were or when these ages existed—a question which, as Novalis says—and he puts his finger on the centre of the whole matter, on the problem of which they are in their way symbols—is as curious as the question concerning the seat of the soul. It resembles John Henry Newman's belief in the actual existence of what, to Blake and others before him, were symbolic representations of principles—angels carrying on the economy of the visible universe or presiding over the destinies of each particular people.

Out of this symbol of Eden or the Golden Age grows a myth, for every symbol naturally produces a myth—this time a myth as to the relation between the two worlds, a relation which must naturally be imagined in terms of time. The myth is that of the fall of man—in Blake that of his redemption as well—the decay of the Golden Age and its restoration. But this myth is to be read in the same sense as that in

which the Gnostics and Neoplatonists reshaped it: the fall is the birth of the soul into matter, which is its bondage.

These two lectures are an introduction to our subject. I fear they may have seemed to you, if not incoherent, at least disparate and occasionally irrelevant. I can only ask your patience. Hitherto we have been just tracing out lines of approach, starting from widely distant points. We have now to follow out those lines through three different authors, authors working independently: and at the end there will be an attempt to show how the lines converge and to finish up much that tonight is left with a ragged edge. I am attempting to bring symbolism into relation with philosophic principles of today, to show that its fate is not bound up with that of discredited absolutisms: I am trying to show that the lover of poetry need not be frightened off by any rumour of mysticism in the neighbourhood; whatever my personal predilections may be, I mean to keep them out of sight and try to make a common ground of meeting. Perhaps this could have been done without so much philosophical talk: but then I cannot banish my personal disability as easily as I can my personal likings; and after all symbolism is a philosophy. At least, we are lucky to have done with the hewing of the rock, even if the paving of the road has not been done to satisfaction: our track henceforward lies through the promised land and it will tax all my capacity to prevent you from catching some glimpses of happy fields.

### III

WILLIAM BLAKE

There is a foolish phrase often used when a great unrecognized genius like Blake begins to be, I will not say understood, but talked about: it seems, people say, as if he were about to come into his own. Foolish as it is, the phrase is amusing; it conveys all the impertinent condescension with which the dear public still thinks it fitting to treat genius. As if there ever had been a time, these hundred years, when William Blake had not come into his own! as if the whole question were not simply this,