Continuity in language

> Even animals are not shut off from this wisdom, but show they are clearly initiated into it. For they do not stand stock still before things of sense as if they were things *per se* with being in themselves: they despair of this reality altogether, and, in complete assurance of the nothingness of things, they fall-to without more ado and eat them up.
>
> Hegel: *Phenomenology of Mind*

Language is common both to the realm of poetry and to the domain of ordinary experience, and this is one of the main factors with which a study of poetic language must deal. For our ordinary non-poetic language gives us the world which we generally regard as non-verbal: a world of emotions, objects, and states of affairs. This is the language we use every day (from now on I shall call it, for simplicity's sake, 'ordinary language') and it is this language upon which Artifice must work to create its alternative imaginary orders. Of course, poetry deals also with the more specialised languages of, say, science, philosophy, religion, and cookery, but these do not present the same basic problem. For in them the non-verbal is already highly mediated, and Artifice has only to work on their alien structures of words, which must be absorbed and transformed into poetry.

When dealing with ordinary language, however, poetry has to confront the assumption that there is a non-verbal situation existing outside language which it is poetry's task to present. Ezra Pound claims that 'in the art of Daniel and Cavalcanti, I have seen that precision which I miss in the Victorians, that explicit rendering, be it of external nature, or of emotion. Their testimony is of the eyewitness, their symptoms are first hand'.[1] This may stand as the type of such assumptions (though, to do Pound justice, he never believed that technique could be by-passed in such external rendering).

We have already come across these assumptions in our reading of Sonnet 94 and, while it is easy to refute the notion that Shakespeare is talking directly about his love life or any specific person or persons, it is not so easy to do away with the idea that there is emotion in that poem, that there are attitudes which emerge from that arrangement of words, and that these attitudes and emotions are not entirely explicable as the result of the words' meaning as part of technique. In point of fact it is not

entirely clear why we should want to do away with the notion that there is feeling in poetry, for we should find ourselves very quickly arguing that poetry is of no interest at all. What is clear is that we cannot locate the emotion in either our minds or the poet's mind as situations outside the poem. If this were the case then T. E. Hulme would be right to claim that poetry was shorthand for a language of feeling that would hand over sensations bodily, and we should all be dying to get rid of the poetry to enter empathetic, kinaesthetic and inarticulate rapture.

But is this the case? No. Unless we are disciples of Norman O. Brown (and in that case we should not be interested in the problems of poetic theory). Where, then, can we safely situate these troublesome emotions? Where else but in the language of the poem itself, in those non-semantic features for which I have claimed the power to select and define the thematic synthesis that the reader should insert in the poem. For these features I now claim the further power to generate the required emotional reactions and, by their relationship to the level of meaning, to delimit the non-verbal context which the poem uses as a fiction in its structure.

In a poem which begins

From fairest creatures we desire increase

the language is working to achieve both continuity and discontinuity with a world of ordinary experience. The sentence implies the existence of 'fairest creatures'—animate beings ranked high on an evaluative scale—and suggests an attitude held by a significant portion of mankind ('we'). 'Increase' takes for granted, as elements which are fed into the poem, a whole background of natural processes. But the continuity which relates the poetic line to other situations in which its various words might be used is dominated by a discontinuity which distances and reorganises. The play of sound in 'creatures . . . increase', intensified by the vowel of 'we', creates a structural solidarity unusual in ordinary language; the conventions of verse insist that we notice this, as a distinctive value with an important role. This assertion of the form of the linguistic material itself exerts pressure on external references, limiting them to what the poetic structure requires. The phonetic solidarity of 'creatures . . . increase' acts as a kind of proof of semantic appropriateness: we need not look outside the poem for any particular creatures (from a biographical situation) or any attested desire. The desire has been made an appropriate one by the artifice of the line, and 'creatures' are simply whatever should multiply. In short, the fact that we are reading a poem rather than a letter, speech, etc., calls us to relate the formal pattern to the meaning. This is achieved by lifting the meaning away from direct reference to an external state of affairs and preparing it for its part in a

thematic synthesis, where the external contexts are evoked only to be made fictional.

Our reading must work through the level of meaning into the external world and then, via the non-semantic levels of Artifice, back into the poem, enriched by the external contexts of reference in which it found itself momentarily merged. This is what continuity in poetic language means. Without it the reader would have no way of making connections between poetic language and any other kind of language or between poetic language and the experience given him by the world of ordinary language which he inhabits most of the time. He would then retreat into either tendentious inarticulateness outside poetry—as did the Dadaists—or into tendentious Naturalisation which allows no play to the non-meaningful devices of Artifice—as so many critics and even poets have done in the last fifty years. Either manoeuvre deprives poetry of its essential strength of give and take with its environment, and both deprive it of its essential power over that environment. This power depends, as our analysis of Sonnet 94 has tried to suggest, on the non-meaningful levels of language. If poetry cannot control the meanings and feelings generated by the words it uses, its worth is reduced. If it cannot control experience by verbal relationships that channel it in a structural attitude, then its worth is less than that of the latest *News of the World* 'confession'.

Poetry's dealings with emotions, objects, and situations all fall under the general problem of continuity and discontinuity: the way in which poetry retains its contact with the world articulated by ordinary language while distancing itself from these customary modes of articulation. The power of poetry depends on its ability to maintain continuity while achieving discontinuity, but it is difficult to show precisely how this is done in particular cases. The best way to approach the problem is to study the various strategies and technical devices by which poetry distances itself from ordinary language and through which it limits the kind of external material which is assimilated and subjected to new organisation and articulation.

Several of Wittgenstein's remarks can give us a perspective on the problem and help to set the stage for discussion. First, 'the limits of my language mean the limits of my world.'[2] The basis of continuity between poetry and the rest of one's experience is the essentially verbal nature of that experience: the fact that it takes shape through language. What we can know of experience always lies within language. And, correspondingly, 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.'[3] The world is not something static, irredeemably given by a natural language. When language is re-imagined the world expands with it. The continuity which makes it possible to read the world into words provides

that the world may be enlarged or enriched by the enlargement of one's awareness of language and/or awareness of others' enlargement of their awareness of language. However, 'awareness' and knowledge' are perhaps the wrong words if they suggest that this expansion involves simply an accretion of information. As Wittgenstein says, 'the grammar of the word "knows" is evidently closely related to that of "can", "is able to". But also closely related to that of "understands" ("Mastery" of a technique).'[4] The knowledge of both the poet and the reader of poetry is a kind of mastery, an ability to see how a use of language filters external contexts into the poem and subjects them to new distancing and articulation. The knowledge of readers and writers of poetry is an ability to exclude and to include and to grasp imaginative relations which are implicit in the words of the poem when they are read in terms of the conventions of poetry. It is mastery of these conventions that underlies the experience of 'seeing as' which the poem produces. To quote from Wittgenstein once more, ' "Now he's seeing it like *this*", "now like *that*" would only be said of someone *capable* of making certain applications of the figure quite freely. The substratum of this experience is the mastery of a technique.'[5]

A study of the way in which the conventions and formal devices of poetry direct the assimilation of external contexts and produce the discontinuity which gives poetry its power over those contexts will also be an account of the kind of mastery which is required of the reader of poetry. Learning to read poetry is a matter of acquiring the ability to hold together, simultaneously, continuity and discontinuity in the requisite proportions.

To see what is involved in the achievement of continuity and discontinuity, to see how poetry modifies and distances itself from the external contexts it assimilates, we might start with the most elementary case of poetic convention. If one takes a passage of prose and rearranges it on the page as verse, the language itself remains the same and hence any changes in its effects can be attributed to the new type of awareness with which we approach the verse passage. Any differences, in short, can be identified as effects which result from the conventional level: it is by convention that we read and organise the verse passage in ways that make it different from prose.

In a book on *Metre, Rhyme, and Free Verse*, Mr George Fraser tries this experiment of rearranging a passage of prose as free verse and claims that the rhythms which remain are those of prose. Poetry is absent, except insofar as the prose original contained pure stress rhythms and poetic figures.[6] In one sense this is perfectly true. If we rearrange prose as poetry in order to bring out rhythmic patterns we can only bring out elements or patterns which were dormant in the prose. Indeed, this is why

the convention of free verse was developed in the first place: to make us aware of the poetry in our prose, of the imaginative alternatives that exist even in ordinary language. But the fact that resulting poetic rhythms were already there in the prose only makes more evident the fact that the differences between the prose and verse passage are the result of a change in conventional expectations, modes of attention, and interpretive strategies, rather than the result of any alteration of the linguistic material itself.

By way of example, I propose to rearrange as free verse what no-one, except perhaps certain members of the journalistic profession, would claim to be latent literature: a paragraph from a *Times* leader. The first paragraph of the first leader for Friday, December 15th, 1972, in its original form runs as follows:

AT THE HEAD OF THE BBC

> The Government have taken their time in appointing the new chairman of the BBC, which is a measure both of the importance now attached to the office and of the difficulty in persuading somebody of the necessary quality to take it on a part-time basis at £6,000 a year. But in choosing Sir Michael Swann they have made a good selection, and a very much better one than might have been expected after such a delay. Both his record at Edinburgh, where he has been Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the university since 1965, and his comments on his appointment suggest that he will bring the right approach to his new responsibilities.

I have not kept the original line-endings but this is immaterial since the alignment is governed by the requirements of the printer which have no relation to the matter in hand. That is, no violation of material rules is involved since there is no continuum in newspapers between the meaning of the paragraph and the way it is arranged. Quite otherwise with the rules of rearranging the paragraph as verse, as a poem entitled 'At the head of the BBC':

> The Government have taken their time
> in appointing a new chairman of the
> BBC
> which is a measure both
> of the importance now attached to the office
> and of the difficulty in persuading somebody
> of the necessary quality
> to take it
> on a part-time basis
> at £6,000 a year

There is no need to look, as Mr Fraser did in his re-writing of a passage from a novel, for poetic figures or traditional stress rhythm as used, for example, in Eliot's verse plays. For twentieth-century poetry has evolved

a whole new set of conventions for showing which words are dominant on any scale. Poems may or may not use traditional metre, rhythm, and rhyme, but they do generally stick to the convention that beginnings and ends of lines are marked as important in the thematic synthesis.

In the example above this is seen in lines 1, 3, 6, and in the body of the other lines where there is an ironic tone. 'Taken their time' stresses the Government's dilatoriness; 'BBC' casts a sardonic eye on that institution; 'somebody' suggests a frenetic haste to find 'anybody'. As for the other lines, 'necessary quality' suggests, given the previous ironic tinge, that the Government is being self-important; 'to take it' suggests that they have been begging anybody to accept it (which is at variance with the pomp); 'on a part-time basis' still contrasts the supposed importance with the casualness it has in fact. And 'at £6,000 a year' increases the irony (especially for those who are underpaid and overworked) by implying that £6,000 a year is a paltry sum for anyone to accept for a part-time job.

This ironic tone could be made blatant by increasing the use of poetic conventions:

At the 'head' of the BBC

The Government
have taken their 'time'
in appointing the
'new chairman' of the BBC
which is a measure both
of the 'importance'
now 'attached'
to the 'office' and of the difficulty
of persuading
somebody of the 'necessary quality'
to take it on a 'part-time basis' at
£6,000 a year
BUT
In choosing Sir Michael Swann
they have made a
'good selection' and
a very much better one
than might have been expected
after such a delay.
BOTH his record at Edinburgh
where he has been
'Principal and Vice-Chancellor' of the university
since 1965
AND his 'comments on his appointment'
suggest
that he will bring 'the right approach' to his new 'responsibilities'.

The line-spacing across the page, which is the first thing to catch the eye, is a formal convention much used in all poetry but especially in poetry of this century, where neither stress or syllable metre is accepted as the norm and where other means must therefore be found to signal the importance of phrases and, if possible, to distinguish a dominant rhythm. The title already introduces another important convention, by no means confined to this century, but which has come to have a much greater importance that it had before: the use of quotation marks. Here they indicate the distance, the ironic distance, of the poet from the world of officialdom which he (for convenience's sake let us stick to one gender) regards with amused and slightly embittered annoyance.

How do we know that this is his attitude? From the way in which he uses the poetic convention of quotation marks to enclose official jargon. This is another mark of continuity between poetry and other languages: the conventions of poems see to it that the other languages are subordinated. And it is another instance of the way in which we can deduce from internal relations an attitude that might be supposed to exist outside the poem. The line-endings themselves would not do this, for they do not tell what kind of stress should be given to the words that end and begin, and I have chosen not to feed through these words into the formal pattern, for this is difficult without metre and would be obfuscatory for the present purpose.

The irony is increased by the use of capitalised 'BUT', 'BOTH', 'AND', which use necessary breaks in syntax to give the rudiments of a formal structure to the layout and thus link the levels of theme, meaning, and form to preserve continuity. The same is true of the italics; the focus attention and determine which contexts are appropriate. My suggestion that 'somebody', for instance, could imply a frantic search for 'anybody' is now converted into a definite thematic implication by the conjunction of three kinds of contentional features: line-breaks, which give importance, quotation marks, which by that stage in the poem have established ironic distance, and italics. The point is that these conventions do not conjoin in a void; they operate with meanings of the words to modify and filter the external contexts which the meanings involve; only thus is a thematic synthesis possible. Naturally it is not much of a synthesis since we have left out image-complexes and formal patterns, but bringing these in would have swamped and obscured the austere demonstration that even so slight a re-arrangement can open up imaginative possibilities in a dull piece of prose. And it would have obscured the more important point that it is through linking conventional expectations and the external contexts implied by syntax and lexis that these contexts may become indicators of the emotion or attitude the words are to carry.

By taking another poem which uses rhythm and its semantic feed-back

to increase formal pattern and relate it to the conventional level and image complexes, we can see that the thematic synthesis becomes more complicated when the poet does not merely stand back to satirise but includes himself as a persona in the poem. This step also increases the number of external contexts which contribute the creation of a general fictional context, for the poet is not committed to the single stance of the satirist but may include alternatives to satire. The poem is Pound's 'Homage to Sextus Propertius', from which I shall quote lines that include a sneer at officialdom but go no further than 'At the "head" of the BBC':

> Out-weariers of Apollo will, as we know, continue their Martian generalities,
> We have kept our erasers in order.
> A new-fangled chariot follows the flower-hung horses;
> A young Muse with young loves clustered about her
> ascends with me into the æther, . . .
> And there is no high-road to the Muses.
>
> Annalists will continue to record Roman reputations,
> Celebrities from the Trans-Caucasus will belaud Roman celebrities
> And expound the distentions of Empire,
> But for something to read in normal circumstances?
> For a few pages brought down from the forked hill unsullied?
> I ask a wreath which will not crush my head.
> And there is no hurry about it;
> I shall have, doubtless, a boom after my funeral,
> Seeing that long standing increases all things
> regardless of quality.[7]

Naturally this is better than my little exercise; its operations involve speech-rhythm in the taut syllable metre of the verse and in the two mythologies of Greece and of Propertius' Rome. These appropriate the conventional and the thematic level without needing to use cruder devices such as capitalisation for emphasis, italics, and quotation marks. The personages and decor of the lines are already distanced from the reader by the fact that they come from a world remote from him in time and situation. In time, because the reference is to mythology and history and this brings in an area of alien discourse which is not as readily assimilated to the present world of ordinary language; in situation, since the stance is that of the poet, Pound/Propertius. The reader must work through these initial thematic fictions before trying to naturalise.

This distancing, this halt, imposes a suspension which makes us examine the formal features before we are certain of their relation to any thematic synthesis, whereas in 'BBC' the formal features were taken from the extension of meaning into an already given theme. I say 'theme' rather than 'thematic synthesis' because a conjunction that does not use

image-complex or formal (sound/look) pattern deprives itself of the most important tools for reminding the reader that he is maintaining a balance between continuity and discontinuity with the world of ordinary language. Syntax was seen to be the most malleable aspect of poems, for it can lead either out from or into the other levels, but if syntax is used—and punctuation marks are included in syntax—to provide the organisation for all the other levels, the poem becomes locked in a stance that makes movement inside it impossible. In 'BBC' the conventional level is dictated by a single purpose: to use the plain fact of being written as poetry to induce the reader to adopt a particular attitude towards the language of officialdom; to adopt the ironic stance which the poem enforces. In the Pound example, however, we find much more freedom due simply to the fact that the conventional level varies; it does not always support a single attitude.

First we have the ironic stance in the two opening lines, but this is modified within these lines by 'as we know' which, besides establishing a contrast between 'we' and 'they', converts the line-pause at 'their' into a thematic implication. That is, the levels give and take among themselves so that the conventional level may either rise to support a thematic implication or remain content with the one inevitable function of indicating that this is a poem. 'Martian generalities' is isolated by the conventional level—set off as an independent line—but connected through syntax and diction with the lines immediately preceding and following. Since this example works on the scale of relevance the reader is justified in assuming an external context which will be fictionalised by the relation between the various levels and traceable on the level of meaning. He assumes, that is to say, not simply the existence of meaning but the relevance of areas of the external world to which the meaning refers. And while 'Martian generalities' implies a continuity with classical myth as found in the first line's reference to Apollo, its overtones of pomposity contrast its external context with that of 'we'.

'We' and 'they' are brought into the lines both as references and as correlates of thematic oppositions among which the poem can move and which it can develop. Whereas in 'BBC' the conventions of meaning lead us to infer a poetic mind existing outside the poem, here the conventions which lead one to imagine referents for 'I', 'we' and 'they' are absorbed into the poem as a set of shifting relations through and around which it moves. Sometimes the convention of poetic stance is used to make diction imply an attitude, as in the polysyllabic 'expound the distentions of Empire'; sometimes diction is used to change the convention, to enforce a shift in stance, as, for instance, in the quickened rhythm and near colloquialism of 'And there is no hurry about it'.

All this is part of a process which I shall define as *internal limitation and*

expansion: what happens when the world of ordinary language is drawn into the poem's technique so that those parts of that world implied by the meaning of words and phrases are limited by their function inside the poem but also expanded by the power released when levels other than meaning become important. Opposed to such a process is the *external limitation and expansion* which, relying upon pre-conceived ideas about the necessity of relating a poem to the world that exists outside it, limits the movement of internal organisation to those patterns which can be made relevant in a move into an external, non-poetic world. In 'BBC', for example, such areas were our knowledge about the contemporary world, about the way people use punctuation marks to indicate their attitude to what they say, and about the ways a poet might use his techniques to support his external stance. The Pound lines do almost exactly the reverse, since they include the external world as part of the poem and thus make it fictitious. I say 'almost' since there is not an exact correspondence between the twin processes of external limitation/expansion and internal limitation/expansion; if there were, then we could neither read the world into the arrangement of a poem nor distinguish the various levels at which the poem's technique reorganises the external contexts it has assimilated. In short, continuity in language—the relation between poetic discourse and other kinds of discourse which directly imply a world—requires discontinuity, a dislocation that occurs when one passes from the latter to the former. This is the central paradox of poetry. Mr Booth puts it thus:

> Art must distort; if it is to justify its existence, it must be other than the reality whose difficulty necessitates artistic mediation. It must seem as little a distortion as possible, because its audience wants comprehension of incomprehensible reality itself. We do not want so much to live in *a* world organised on human principles as to live in *the* world so organised. Art must seem to reveal a humanly ordered reality rather than replace a random one.[8]

Such a general statement of the paradox helps us to see why our particular problem of poetry's situation between fact and fiction needs the special solution towards which I am working, for it highlights the questions of mediation. We have all been taught, by Marx, Freud, *The Golden Bough*, and contemporary developments in Anthropology and Linguistics, that the human consciousness cannot get at reality itself without mediation. This applies whether the agents of mediation be, as for a pattern inherent in the human mind which imposes binary form on the inchoate, or, as for Marx, the self-justifying ideological structures which produce a social class's 'objective reality', or again, as for Freud, the operations of condensation and displacement which order the world as figures of desire. Most relevant for us, perhaps, is the insistence of Ben-

jamin Lee Whorf and of the linguists who attend to semantics that as a language changes from one society to another so does the world in which the members of the society live.[9]

'All this the world knows well yet none knows well to shun the heaven that leads men to this hell', for literary theory has not kept up, has not kept that fact of mediation firmly in view. Critics have been slow to realize that literature, being based on language, cannot—to use a Poundian phrase—get at the things behind language in some special way and that there may, in fact, be nothing (at least for the human mind) more real than forms of language. We find, for example, J. P. Sullivan praising the lines from 'Homage' which I have quoted as a triumph over 'artificial diction': 'because Pound's style is an individual creation and emerges from a living language which is felt in all its nuances, because it has for background the colloquial speech of everyday', Pound's 'Homage' is able to get at the 'reality' of emotional experience and situation behind Propertius' poeticising.[10] Need one emphasize that it is scarcely praise to tell a poet that his greatest genius lies in not being a poet, in transcending those features of his art that make it an art, in lapsing into dependence on the level of meaning as 'BBC' does, and thus immersing and obscuring his art so that it becomes a 'comment on life'. This view makes his art subservient to life as we know it rather than a subversion and reinvention of that life through artifice; it makes us ignore mediation and take the 'reality' given us by ordinary language as the final court of appeal.

Luckily not all poetic theorists have succumbed to this view, and I shall hope to show that not all poets have put their theories into this realistic straight-jacket. In some literary styles, notably, but not entirely, those developed in this century, the connection between verbal form and the extension of verbal meaning into the non-verbal world may be openly questioned. The implication that 'reality' is a product of linguistic rules may emerge. As Paul de Man claims, 'literature, unlike everyday language, begins on the far side of this knowledge; it is the only form of language free from the fallacy of unmediated expression'.[11] De Man goes on to connect this fact with the priority of form over meaning and sees this latter as an analogue, essential to our understanding of literature, of the priority of fiction over reality.

This is the theme of my book, and my task it to develop a method of demonstrating it in practice. To such an end I have set forth my system of Artifice as deployed in the analysis of Sonnet 94 in the Introduction. Nevertheless, a further schematisation now seems needed, and in order that there may be no dichotomy between this and the system of Artifice I shall rechristen internal limitation/expansion as *artificial limitation/expansion* and external limitation/expansion as *realistic limitation/expansion*. We must remember that the difference between my 'BBC' and

the lines from 'Homage' lay in the former's use of conventions, that already exist in non-poetic language, to signal that it was a poem and then to lead out through these extended-meaning conventions. This made artificial thematic synthesis impossible (so that I spoke of 'theme' rather than 'thematic synthesis') and we shall not be surprised that premature and external Naturalisation corresponds with the process of realistic limitation/expansion, while suspended and internal Naturalisation corresponds with artificial limitation/expansion.

We might now try to identify these operations more explicitly by schematising the good and bad Naturalisations of the lines from Pound. First, the process of realistic limitation/expansion or bad Naturalisation.

I

First presupposition: poetry uses the language of a man speaking to men and therefore I can understand these lines by relating them to ordinary language and to the non-verbal world.

First stage: what is the poem about? *Method:* Look at the title; it will sum up the theme. *Result:* 'Homage to Sextus Propertius'. These lines were written by a poet who felt he had something in common with Propertius.

Second stage: What did Pound in these lines give us to understand that he had in common with Propertius? *Method:* (this follows from the first presupposition). This common factor must be situated in the external world. Look at external contexts, bring external knowledge to bear on the poem. *Result:* Pound is comparing his situation as a poet writing in London in 1917 with the situation in Propertius' Rome. What is Pound's situation? Answer: he thinks he is in an uncongenial environment; he is embittered by the fact that 'the pianola "replaces" Sappho's barbitos' (lyre), that 'we see *to kalon* displayed in the market place', and that inferior writers are elevated and true merit ignored. What has this in common with Propertius' situation? Answer: Propertius was less appreciated by his contemporaries than Virgil and Horace, whom he considered inferior poets; one of the reasons for this attitude was the fact that they engaged in the Latin equivalent of Mr Nixon's advice to 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley'; the 'buttered reviewers'. That is, they toadied Maecenas, the greatest patron of his day, and through him, the Emperor himself, and they did this by writing poems on the Emperor's military triumphs. Propertius' bitterness was not made less by the fact that, in order to succeed at all in a poetic career, he had to accept Horace's influence to approach Maecenas. In this also he resembled Pound who had to conform to *some* of the poetic orthodoxies of his day. (And note, in passing, that this is all external evidence from what we know of first cen-

tury Rome and the first two decades of this century.) *Result:* Pound and Propertius share a dislike of officialdom.

Now, how can we read this attitude into the actual lines? Answer: 'Annalists' who 'will continue to record Roman reputations', 'Celebrities from the Trans-Caucasus' who 'will belaud Roman celebrities/And expound the distentions of empire' are set against 'something to read in normal circumstances', 'a few pages brought down from the forked hill unsullied', 'a wreath which will not crush my head'. The casual colloquialism of Pound/Propertius' diction is set against the pomposity of the official jargon. But they inhabit the same world, as is made plain by the mention of the laurel wreath that crowns poets and the 'forked hill' (where Helicon springs) in the colloquial part of the lines. And therefore both the ironic poet and his victims inhabit the same world as the poet behind the persona and the reader outside the poem. The scene is fictional, certainly, but it is the fiction that reproduces the illusion of reality by modelling its technique on the techniques of those other languages which structure the world, and especially on the techniques of a critical reading which is anxious to stress the continuity between poetry and the 'real' world—so anxious that it ignores or smothers the differences.

We know, of course, that this fragment is part of a poem, but that is entirely because it uses line spacing—the conventional level. Apart from that, it seems as though the piece might just as well have been written in prose as was, originally, 'BBC'. The process of realistic expansion/limitation has produced nothing to show us that special skills are involved or that these lines are different from my rearranged 'BBC', because no attention has been paid to devices that do not lead the level of meaning upwards into themes in the non-verbal world. Pound and Propertius expressed their disgust and bitterness at their contemporary literary 'scene' by writing verse satire. That is all we know on earth and all we need to know. As far as realistic limitation/expansion is concerned, indeed, it would be impossible for us to know more, since the formal keys to the other levels of Artifice are deliberately obfuscated by the blanket of our already-known reality.

Let us see what artificial limitation/expansion can do with the lines.

II

First presupposition: poetry is different from any other language though it may use all others for its own ends; it stresses the artificial nature of the world we make through language. *First stage:* What is this poem doing? *Method:* look at the conventional level and see what initially separates and distances this piece of language from others. *Result:* First, the title indicates a literary genre: an 'homage' is as much a formal 'kind' as an elegy,

ode, or sonnet.[12] Second, the spacing of lines on the page indicates that this is a poem and therefore, to go a step further than in realistic naturalisation, that it is a sample of the kind of artifice which links the modern poet with the ancient and leads him to write in homage. For a poet to write a *poem* rather than a prose tract in praise of a poetic predecessor is, at the very least, a significant act which enjoins us to ask in what respect the process of writing poetry, the techniques of composition, act out the homage and display the relation to the predecessor.

Third, why Propertius rather than other poets of the day? What is the connection in artifice? Sullivan says that Propertius 'is a poet who should appeal very strongly . . . to the romantic and post-romantic sensibility, and it is indicative of Pound's flair for what is relevant to a poetic tradition that he should have become interested in Propertius.'[13] The qualities that distinguish Propertius from his poetic competitors and make him more relevant than they to modern versification are, as Sullivan says, his 'Alexandrianism', a refusal to be carried away, or to pretend to be carried away, by a simple desire to utter, an insistence on the importance of his stylistic craftsmanship and his arcane scholarship. This can be seen in Pound's invocation of the Alexandrians elsewhere in the 'Homage', as well as in a kind of imitation: Pound's own obscurity on the thematic level corresponds to Propertius' frequent obscurity and to the crabbiness of his style on the formal level. The 'Homage', in short, asserts at the conventional level and occasionally at other levels a poetic ancestry with a technical forebear.

Second stage (in internal Naturalisation): how is the conventional level related to the formal level? By giving a value to the disposition of the poem on the page, the conventional level stresses the break at the end of a line and isolates each line as a semi-autonomous unit with a beginning and an end (in a way that lines of prose are not isolated). Through the conventional level lines come to function as units which are set in relation to one another as rhythmical blocks. For example, after the line, 'Ăňd ĕxpóund thĕ dĭsténtiŏns ŏf Émpíre', comes the next rhythmical block, 'Bút fór sómethĭng tŏ réad ĭn nórmăl círcŭmstàncĕs'. After the three strong anapaests of the first line, the second begins with two anapaests, suggesting that it is cut from the same pattern and enforcing the possibility of similarity between the two lines. But the resounding firmness that characterised the first line is quickly lost, as the second shades off into two iambs and the general metrical collapse of 'circumstances'. Taken by itself, 'círcŭmstàncĕs' is an extended dactyl with a secondary stress on the third syllable, but in context, where the stressed initial syllable belongs to the previous foot, the secondary stress is not strong enough to compose a rhymic unit from the last three syllables. This contributes to a sense of lightness, as opposed to the heavy regularity of the

first line; and the effect created by a purely formal, metrical variation induces, in conjunction with the pattern of diction, a contrast between the pompous and the colloquial. That in turn, feeding up into the level of poetic stance and its connections with theme, produces suggestions of irony, which might be defined as the simultaneous presence of two orders which, by their mutual reflection, criticise one another.

In terms of realistic naturalisation these rhythmical and metrical patterns are irrelevant, but in internal or artificial naturalisation they assimilate the meanings of words and, while ordering these towards a thematic synthesis, restrict the aspects of meaning which might be relevant. For example, given the functions imposed by other levels, it makes no different what are the 'distentions of Empire' that might be expounded, nor what should count as 'normal' circumstances.

Metrical and rhythmical patterns are in one sense irrelevant to meaning, yet they also use the meaning of words to lead up towards thematic synthesis. The tension between these two facts is what I have called the necessary combination of continuity and discontinuity between poetry and other kinds of language. In this case, continuity is provided by the way in which formal and conventional devices take up and assimilate various kinds of discourse, weaving them together into a poem whose movement is the movement from one moment or kind of discourse to another. Discontinuity derives from our awareness that by being cited, as it were, the various kinds of language are no longer what they would be in isolation and are subjected to a different form of organisation.

One might say, in fact, that Pound is using his language itself as the level of image-complex. That is, rather than offer a single image or set of images which, by their way of joining together two domains, indicate which aspects of each are relevant to a potential thematic synthesis, and rather than use images of this sort to indicate the dominant order of meaning, he employs switches in diction and rhythm which serve as the central point of reference in the poem and control the extensions of meaning. His switches in diction not only blend with the formal level; they also blend with and control the selection, arrangement, and order of words' meanings and thus make this mode of organisation an image-complex which leads the formal levels through meaning towards a thematic synthesis.

Moreover, even the officially pompous lines tend to have the discourse of the ironic poet inserted in them. In the first line, for example, 'as we know', brings him into the line in complicity with the reader; similarly 'a few pages brought down from the forked hill unsullied' casts an ironic glance on the party-line of official mythological inspiration, while the last four lines quoted not only do this but also sneer at official societal patronage and Virgilian/Maecenian views of poetry. And the point (shall I

say it again, I shall say it again) is that the image-complexes are created internally: the conjunction between the levels of meaning and of formal pattern creates an image-complex which has no need of metaphor, simile, allegory, and all the other agents of the image-complex, for the diction is itself its own image. The thematic point emerges from this image-complex of the diction itself as it varies.

To some extent this answers our query about how the conventional level is related to the other levels and through these to an internal thematic synthesis. And it stresses the difference between bad and good Naturalisation by showing how a skilled poet can innovate internally while an unskilled one—myself as author of 'BBC'—has to rely on the devices of extension of meaning into the non-poetic world and so runs the risk both of failing to fictionalise the external contexts thus invoked and of leaving the reader stranded in the world and the language he already knows. We are now in a position to compare the thematic syntheses attained by realistic expansion/limitation and artificial or internal expansion and limitation III is the overall result of bad Naturalisation resulting from realistic limitation/expansion.

III

This is a poem written by Ezra Pound and entitled 'Homage to Sextus Propertius'; we know that Ezra Pound was an expatriate American poet and that the poem is dated 1917, at which time he was living in London; we know that Sextus Propertius was a Latin poet living in Rome and writing in the first century A.D. These facts make an external context. We are not such bad naturalisers as to think that the context can have nothing to do with the words on the page, and so what do the words on the page tell us? Official and respected poets are mocked along with their patrons, i.e. ultimately, society; the reason for this is plain when one recalls the fact that both Pound and Propertius were relatively unknown and unpatronised. Both were better poets than those who were so belauded, and they felt this was the fault of society for wanting 'a worn-out poetical fashion' and of the official 'Annalists' for providing the want. What of the style of the lines? They are obviously rather loose free verse, and that is explained by the fact that Pound/Propertius's grievance was caused partly by their attempt to write in new and experimental ways. That is all we need to know about the style, and we can move straight on our external thematic interpretation. Pound expresses his bitterness towards his society by an 'imitation' of an earlier author who also wrote obscurely and expressed bitterness at his society. Pound was quite right, because prewar England was very like Rome in the last days of the Republic and the beginnings of the Empire: I refer you to Professor X's book, *First-*

Century Rome and Twentieth-Century England: Some Parallels (Sheep, Rotterdam, 1964). Note that this is still the orthodox opinion on the 'Homage', still purveyed to undergraduates reading English in universities.

Artificial limitation/expansion, on the other hand, grants precedence to the reflections of II and allows the internal organisation to filter the external contexts evoked in III, selecting as relevant those which can be taken up and fictionalised by the poem's structure. The conventional and rhythmic levels call our attention to the ironic contrast between the pompous and the colloquial, not as attitudes of the historical individuals Pound and Propertius but as a major component of poetic technique. It is not important, for example, whether anything in pre-war Britain corresponds to the 'distentions of Empire' in Roman times. Artificial naturalisation excludes that external reference in order to permit an internal expansion focusing on the contrast—metrical as well as semantic—between 'distentions of Empire' and 'normal circumstances'. And ultimately, as I have said, the language itself—the language which Pound/Propertius the poet uses—becomes the image-complex around which levels of the poem are co-ordinated.

We can see this if we consider how the pronouns 'we', 'they' and 'I', whose normal function is referential, work in this case. The idea of continuity and the notion of limitation/expansion help us to formulate the problem. Limitation suggests that limits are imposed on an interpretive reading while expansion shows that these very limits can be used to expand the reading. If we undertake external naturalisation, then the external contexts to which the poem is taken as referring limit the internal features which can be included in a thematic synthesis, and the expansion takes place in the world outside the poem (we tell ourselves empirical stories to fill in an interpretation). This is realistic limitation/expansion. If, however, we call upon artificial limitation/expansion then it is the internal and distinctively poetic artifice which limits what our reading may import from the outside world, and this limitation allows our reading to expand in terms of internal features.

Artificial limitation/expansion helps us to see how the pronouns work in Pound's lines. Personal pronouns rank with demonstrative adverbs and adjectives—'here', 'there', 'that', 'now', 'yesterday'—in the category of what those concerned with linguistics call 'shifters' or 'deictics'. Shifters are orientational features of language which refer to the situation of utterance: 'I' means the person speaking, 'now' the moment of utterance, etc.[14] In ordinary, non-poetic, utterances these references are easily supplied, and deictics indicate the importance of supplying an external context. In poetry, however, there is no empirical situation of utterances. The 'now' of a poem does not refer to the moment when it was

penned or set in type, or to the date of the first edition. The time of the 'now' is a purely relational linguistic fiction with no referent in the external world. In poetry, as Jonathan Culler says, 'the deictics do not refer us to an external context but force us to construct a fictional situation.'[15] They become formal devices for organising a work. A contrast between 'now' and 'yesterday' or 'five years ago' in a poem does not lead us out into an empirical situation but tells us that a temporal contrast will be an important device for thematic organisation; and the same holds true for references to 'I', 'we', and 'you': these oppositions, lifted away from external contexts, limit the invasion of the external world and provide scope for internal thematic expansion.

In our Pound lines we have a clash between a reference to the non-poetic world—'Out-weariers of Apollo . . . continue their Martian generalities'— and the shifter 'as we know', which is sandwiched between the two portions of this reference. Though the primary function of this shifter is to provide a tone, we could no doubt recover it as a reference to the poet and his readers—though even that class is a fictional one (not so much a reference to a given class of people as an attempt to create internal complicity between the reader and a poetic 'I' which he is led to postulate). But the second 'we' of 'We have kept our erasers in order' shows that the poem is not referring to an external class of persons, however nebulously defined. Functionally and internally it asserts a contrast between 'we' and 'you', addresser and addressee, and hence produces a class of 'poetic voices'.

The 'we', one might say, is a shifting reference which comes to refer to all those who have 'kept their erasers in order'; within the poem that reference is organised around the language itself as image-complex; the negation of ironic juxtaposition which 'erases' one linguistic sequence by ringing changes on its formal organisation in the next line, the implication of austerity and craftsmanship as against pomposity and prolixity, crystallize here.

The fictionalized 'we', which refers not to an external class of persons but to a shifting function within the poem, helps to distance the language from particular external contexts and to associate first-person pronouns with the self-reflexive process of reading and writing poetry.[16] And it thus becomes difficult to avoid associating the first-person singular pronouns with the same process: 'A young Muse . . . ascends with me into the æther', 'I ask a wreath which will not crush my head', and 'I shall have, doubtless, a boom after my funeral'. The 'I' which ascends with the young muse is any poetic voice which ranges itself against the other forms of verse displayed and parodied here. It is, of course, the author whose artifice takes place in the same de-temporalized present as the ascent, but it is also, since this is an Homage, a figure of continuity in artifice:

Propertius/Pound, a mythical figure which the poem itself aims to create and which can only exist within the realm of artifice. As soon as it reenters time or becomes an empirical figure it is subject to irony: 'I shall have, doubtless, a boom after my funeral,/Seeing that long standing increases all things/regardless of quality.'

As in every good poem, the process of artificial naturalisation is suspended inside the poem, so that the reader takes account of the way in which levels of organisation assimilate possible external contexts and filter them into a thematic synthesis. The reader is made aware of the process of naturalisation so that he may sense both the requisite continuity between poetry and other languages and the requisite discontinuity. If he gives the poem its due and allows artifice to work on and through him, he will never engage in that bad naturalisation which consists in stranding the poem like a whale when the tide retreats on the deserted beach of the ordinary world ('How high the seas of language flow here', as Wittgenstein says).

Empson himself is well aware that 'the process of becoming accustomed to a new author is very much that of learning what to exclude in this way' and that 'the selection of meanings is more important to the poet than their multitude, and harder to understand.'[17] If he himself tends to prize the multitude rather than the selection, to multiply ambiguities instead of seeking to determine which enrich the poem in the relevant ways, it is because it is hard to select properly, hard to exclude, if one operates entirely on the level of meaning. The process of exclusion—and the internal expansion which it permits—can operate only if other levels of organisation are brought into play, which is why I have stressed so much the importance of non-semantic features. In the next chapter we shall encounter more directly problems of meaning: modes of obscurity in twentieth-century poetry and their relation to the problems of continuity and discontinuity. I shall end here simply by restating the basic premise of artificial limitation/expansion.

Artifice tells us that selecting and ordering external contexts is one of the basic manoeuvres in writing and reading poetry. When we naturalise well it is because we are aware that primary among these contexts is the existence of poetic art itself: the fact that we are reading a poem. When we get behind the surface of a poem we encounter not another kind of meaning nor a different non-poetic world, but another organisation of the levels of language that produce meaning. Through the relation between these levels, language and the world may be changed, changed utterly. A terrible beauty is born. Often, of course, the birth is slow and obscured; it may seem a blur rather than a change. As Empson says, using a visual metaphor,

> you have an impression of a thing's distance away, which can hardly ever be detached from the pure visual sensation, and when it is so detached leaves your eye disconcerted (if what you took for a wall turns out to be the sea, you at first see nothing, perhaps are for a short time puzzled as with a blur, and then see differently)[18]

The distancing of artifice produces dislocation and, of course, discomfort. 'The reading of a new poet, or of any poetry at all, fills many readers with a sense of mere embarrassment and discomfort, like that of not knowing, and wanting to know, whether it is a wall or the sea.'[19] Like Empson, I want to know whether it is a wall or the sea.