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"Collingwood on Art"

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ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an exploration of some fundamental questions in aesthetics. These questions are not new and have been the subject of many studies of great depth. In spite of this fact, as my study of art and art history progressed, I became convinced that I had to find some foundation on which to base my own judgement of artworks.

Modern criticism

In my opinion, fashion and economics nowadays play a disproportionate role in the public acceptance of what is good art. Added to which, the pluralism of art criticism makes it difficult to assess different trends in art. It appears to me that influential art critics and aestheticians frequently are closely associated with particular kinds of art. To the extent that certain critics are known to be formalist critics or modernist or marxist critics. It is inevitable that people write from the basis of their own ideologies. One can do so equitably, if one gives consideration to the arguments for the equal validity of art other than that under discussion. It appears to me that many critics and artists assume that only their kind of art is worthy of the name "art", and

they do not take cognisance of schools of thought other than their own. I imagine, and this is mere supposition, that if someone were to say to a formalist critic that they found the work of Robert Ryman boring, the critic would reply that was irrelevant. Indeed it may be,except to the person who is bored.

Objectivity of my own judgement

As I saw more artworks and learnt more about art history, certain questions became specific. For example, why did I "enjoy" some pictures more than others? On a visit to Florence last summer I went to the Uffizi gallery. There I saw the "Annunciation" by Simone Martini. I thought it a good example of the highly decorative work of the fourteenth century Sienese school, but of merely historical interest. In comparison, my reaction to Fra Angelico's fresco of the same scene was one of excitement. I thought it was one of the most wonderful pictures I had ever seen. Could the difference in my reactions be attributed to the fact that I visited the Uffizi when I was tired and hot and the gallery was crowded, whereas the Convent of San Marco was cool and empty? Did the presentation of the Fra Angelico influence me? It is dramatically situated at the top of a darkened stairway. Or was it caused by the fact that I was already very familiar with the Fra Angelico from reproductions?

Questions presented

From this experience of looking at two accredited masterpieces several questions presented themselves. What kind of pleasure was it I experienced on looking at the Fra Angelico? Did that mean that it was a better picture than the Simone Martini? Can a value judgement be made about an artwork on the basis of a personal

reaction?

Presentation of artworks

John Berger has illustrated how easily we are affected by the presentation of artworks. [1] A reproduction of "Crows over a Wheatfield" carries a certain emotional charge when underneath is written, "This is the last picture that Van Gogh painted before he killed himself." There is no doubt that we respond differently to this picture with that caption than if it were not there. Does our knowledge that this picture is the last Van Gogh painted before he committed suicide, make it a better picture or a different picture? Should we be able to judge it on its own merits? What do we mean when we talk about the "merits" of an artwork?

Prior knowledge

An American doctor, who had seen the Van Gogh retrospective, said to me that he considered the sequential arrangement of pictures to be a perfect example of a psyche's gradual disintegration into insanity. However, art historians know that Van Gogh had temporary fits of depression which only intensified late in his life. For the most part, Van Gogh was intensely hardworking and self-disciplined. If the fact of Van Gogh's suicide was not common knowledge, would this doctor be so confident in his diagnosis, or would he be able to see the pictures in a different light?

Artists and audience

How would Van Gogh have wanted people to react to his paintings? Is the intention of the artist important? Most artworks are seen by an audience with no knowledge of how the artist worked,and with no way of gaining that information.

As soon as the artwork leaves the artist there is usually no further opportunity for him to say how it should be seen or judged. There is no doubt that there have been thousands of artists with lives more tragic and emotions as intense as Van Gogh. Yet it is his work alone that is considered great art. Is it that Van Gogh managed to realise his intentions in a way that other equally troubled and dedicated artists did not?

Modern art

My confusion about the answers to these questions was intensified when I was confronted with modern artworks. I stayed in Hartford, Connecticut, in the summer of 1981. Near the Athenaeum Museum there lie large uncut rocks on a patch of grass. These are similar in appearance to those placed around sites by Dublin Corporation to prevent itinerants moving on to the empty ground. But in Hartford these rocks were a state commissioned sculpture by Carl André. Was I to compare them to the Old Masters in the Athenaeum? They were called "art" in the same way a work by Rembrandt was called "art". Similar works to these have been given the stamp of tradition by virtue of being in galleries, written about in art history books and commissioned by public bodies.

Reasons for Thesis

The disparities between artworks and the diverse opinions of critics made me realise that I had to attempt to clarify some of these questions for myself. I wanted to see whether it is possible to arrive at an objective judgement about an artwork, and if so, how is this done. If we look at history, we know that such judgements have been made. The works of

Michelangelo, Rubens and Vermeer, for example, have always been judged as masterpieces. In our own time, there is no lessening of the honour in which Cēzanne is held. Fashion gives a short-lived popularity to some artists; but, I asked myself, is it possible to identify that which distinguishes the very best art from the large body of artworks, many of which have great merit.

Content of Thesis, Part 1

In Part 1 of this thesis I examine the aesthetic theory presented by R.G. Collingwood in his book "Principles of Art". In this book, in order to arrive at his own theory of art, Collingwood discusses many of the questions I had been asking, which I will re-examine in the light of his arguments. 2

Art and emotion

It is necessary to point out that Collingwood considers art and emotion to be inseparable. From my own preference for a certain kind of art, I know this is a view I share. However, I am aware there is a school of thought that would not consider that art and emotion need necessarily bear any relationship to each other.

"Art proper"

Collingwood provides an answer to the question whether it is possible to make a value judgement about an artwork. He puts forward the radical statement that the majority of what we call "art" today is not art but amusement. He holds that the term "art" is applied far too widely. He makes a distinction between his own aesthetic use of the word "art" which he calls "art proper", and art as amusement and art as magic. "Art proper" is the supreme level of art for Collingwood. His hypothesis may lead us to an understanding of the multiplicity of opinions about the merits of artworks.

Art and Craft

In order to arrive at his conclusion Collingwood makes a distinction between art and craft. He shows that he considers "art as amusement" and "art as magic" are craft. In his opinion, it is the fact that the best kind of art - - "art proper" - - is not craft that raises it to a different level than the majority of art. Here, I must state that Collingwood is discriminating between commonly acknowledged masterpieces. Because the distinction between art and craft is essential to his thesis, it will be necessary to present his argument in detail.

Content of Thesis, Part 11

In the second part of this paper I will discuss the relationship between the audience and the artwork in the light of Collingwood's argument. In order to do this, I will look at several artworks and analyse my response to them. In doing so, I hope to clarify the relationship, if any such exists, between the visual artist and the spectator. I will give examples of what I consider to be examples of art as amusement and art as magic in the visual arts.

I do not explore to any great extent the physiological and psychological aspects of visual perception as the above questions lie in a no-man's land bordered by philosophy and aesthetics on the one hand and the science of visual perception on the other.

PART 1

R. G. Collingwood

R. G. Collingwood (1889-1943) was Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford University. He was a philosopher and historian with a life-long interest in art. His father had been a painter and a friend of John Ruskin. In Collingwood's book "Principles of Art" we will recognise a moral fervour that is reminiscent of Ruskin. Collingwood views art with an intense seriousness and assigns to it a vital and prophetic role in our society.

Aim of "Principles of Art"

Collingwood will show us that he considers art to be language. The aim of "Principles of Art" is to demonstrate to us all, as users of language in different ways, that ours is a grave responsibility" . . . the effort to overcome corruption of consciousness, is an effort that has to be made not by specialists only but by everyone who uses language, whenever he uses it . . . . Bad art, the corrupt consciousness, is the true radix malorum! (PA,285) Collingwood's intensity is caused by the parallel he sees between the

society of fifth century B.C. Athens, when she was ruled by the corrupt and tyrannous commission of thirty, and twentieth century Western society. He envisages a decline of our culture similar to that of the Greeks, unless we manage to arrest the prevalent moral decay.

In the introduction to his book Collingwood states that his aim is to say what art is,because, in his opinion, " . . . we live in a world where most of what goes by the name of art is amusement." (PA 104) To bring himself to his definition of what art is, which he calls "art proper", he presents two separate theories. The first, contained in Book 1, makes clear the distinction between art and craft and differentiates between "art proper" and art as amusement and art as magic. Book 11 is Collingwood's theory of imagination. In Book 111 Collingwood brings these two theories together, and is able to reach the conclusion that art is expressive and imaginative; that which is expressive and imaginative is language, therefore art is language.

Meanings of art

As often as possible Collingwood uses words in ways that are current, but he will first make sure that both he and the reader are in agreement as to their meaning. He delights in playing the pedagogue. He is not content to say "this is what I mean by art" instead, he examines the various meanings the word "art" has in common usage. He then defines what is, in his opinion,the genuine aesthetic usage of the word.

The aesthetic usage of the word "art" is comparatively recent. The ancient Greeks and Romans had no separate word for art as distinct from craft. Poetry and sculpture were regarded as the crafts of poetry and sculpture. Collingwood points out that, if people have no word for a certain thing as distinct from another, it is because they perceive no distinction. An example of this is that Eskimos have more than twenty words to describe different kinds of white, whereas we have only one. We therefore, in admiring Greek art as "art" with all the connotations our use of the word implies, are actually incapable of seeing it exactly as they did.

In the Middle Ages "art" meant any specialised form of book learning. In the Renaissance artists were still held to be craftsmen. It was only in the late eighteenth century that a clear-cut distinction between art and craft emerged. It was not until the nineteenth century that the fine arts became simply "art". Even so, Collingwood holds that "art" still carries with it traces of its former meaning of craft.

Craft

Because so much of Collingwood's argument rests on his distinction between art and craft it is necessary to give it more consideration. He summarises the philosophy of craft as taken from the Greeks.

" 1. Craft always involves a distinction between means and end, each clearly conceived as something distinct from the other but related to it. The term 'means' is loosely applied to things that are used in order to reach the end,

such as machines, tools or fuel.

2. It involves a distinction between planning and execution. The result to be obtained is preconceived before being arrived at. The craftsman knows precisely what he wants to make before he makes it.

3. Means and end are related in one way to the process of execution. In planning the end is prior to the means. In execution the means come first and the end is reached through them.

4. There is a distinction between raw material and the finished product. A craft is exercised upon something and aims at the transformation of this into something different.

5. There is a distinction between form and matter. The matter is what is identical in the raw material and the finished product; the form is what is different, what the exercise of the craft changes.

6. There is a hierarchical relation between various crafts, one supplying what another needs, one using what another supplies." (PA 15-17)

Classical Theory of art

The above are the premises on which rest the classical theory of craft. According to Collingwood the philosophers of the Socractic school, having evolved this analysis of craft, assumed that poetry was a craft. Therefore, these philosophers applied this theory to poetry. They came to the conclusion that the poet is a producer. He uses his skill to produce in his listeners certain kinds of emotion that he thinks are desirable. The poet knows in advance what state of mind he wants his audience to have as a result of listening to his poetry. By learning the skill of poet-craft he can write poems that will have the desired effect. Collingwood claims that this classical or technical theory of art is still current.

"To the economist, art presents the appearance of a specialised group of industries, the artist is a producer,

his audience consumers who pay him for benefits ultimately definable in terms of the states of mind which his productivity enables them to enjoy. To the psychologist, the audience consists of persons reacting in certain ways to stimuli provided by the artist; and the artist's business is to know what reactions are desired or desirable, and to provide the stimuli which will elicit them." (PA,19)

Collingwood's argument

Collingwood holds that art does not necessarily have to have the qualities of craft. He takes each of the six points of the classical theory of craft, and proves his argument by examples.

First,he asks how do we compare the means to the end of a poem with the means to the making of a horseshoe? In the case of the horseshoe, the means are obvious, the cutting of a piece of metal, heating the furnace etc. These actions are not analogous to filling a pen, preparing paper, which are the means to writing, not to making a poem. The only answer is "poetic labour" is the means, which cannot be regarded as similar to bending iron or tempering metal. Again, if making poetry is craft, if a poem produces a different state of mind in the audience to that which the poet intended, one would have to say the poem was a bad one. Whereas that may be true, but it need not necessarily be so.

Collingwood points out that it cannot be said that the artist always works to a preconceived plan as does the craftsman. "Suppose an artist were simply playing about with clay, and found the clay under his fingers turning into a little dancing man: is this not a work of art because it was done without being planned in advance?" (PA,22)

Necessity of Craft

By these and similar arguments Collingwood shows that the classical theory of craft is not sufficient for our understanding of art. However, he makes sure that we do not misunderstand him, in thinking that if art does show qualities that belong to craft, that this means it cannot be art. Most works of art can only be created by someone who is master of the craft in which he works. It is not that mastery which makes the work of art, it is some other quality.

> "A writer on art . . . . does well to insist on what every artist knows, but most amateurs do not: the vast amount of intelligent and purposeful labour, the painful and conscientious self-discipline that has gone to the making of a man who can write a line as Pope writes it, or knock a single chip off a single stone like Michelangelo. It is no less true . . . . that the skill here displayed . . . . though a necessary condition of the best art, is not by itself sufficient to produce it." (PA, 26-27)

Collingwood takes Jonson as an example of what he means, and in discussing the rythmic patterns of "The Faerie Queen", he mentions for the first time the kernel of his thesis.

Collingwood's thesis

> "What makes Ben Jonson a poet, and a great one, is not his skill to construct such patterns, but his imaginative vision of the goddess, for whose expression it was worth his while to use that skill, and for whose enjoyment it is worth our while to study the patterns he has constructed." (PA, 27)

From now on we find that every assumption Collingwood makes rests on this premise. That which makes "art" in his use of the word, which he calls "art proper" can be nothing to do with craft. Therefore, if art is made in order to evoke emotions i.e. as a means to an end, it is not "art proper" but craft,

or as Collingwood calls it "pseudo art".

There are two distinct types of this kind of art which Collingwood calls "art as amusement", and, "art as magic." His reason is "where an emotion is aroused for its own sake as an enjoyable experience, the craft of arousing it is amusement; where for the sake of its practical value, magic." (PA, 32)

This is not to deny that art may do either or both of these things. The fact that it may do so is not that which makes it art. If either of these functions become dominant in an artwork it is because the artist has subordinated his expression to these ends. In Collingwood's opinion, if this happens it is a tragedy, because "If art is art only so far as it stimulates certain reactions, the artist as such is simply a purveyor of drugs." (PA,34)

Collingwood is of the opinion that there is a commonly held confusion between "art proper" and art as magic and art as amusement. This confusion he aims to dispel.

In order to follow his reasoning, it is necessary to state his philosophical conception of emotion. Every emotion we have puts us under a certain tension, which must be "discharged" in some way. According to what emotion we are feeling, we discharge the tension generated by it by different actions. We act because we feel. Our emotions give momentum to our lives.

Art as magic

In order to show that the confusion between "art proper" and art as magic and amusement has always existed, Collingwood refers to the ancient philosophers. He finds in Plato's "Republic" weight for his argument. Plato denied certain poets access to his ideal city, but kept "those who represent the discourse of wise and just men" (PA,47). Plato's reason for doing so was, that when these poets wrote of certain situations, they evoked useful emotions in the people who then were better able to cope with such situations when they occurred in real life. The people discharged these useful emotions generated by the poetry into their practical life. The poets Plato would banish from the city were entertainers, who sought only to amuse. The emotions these poets evoked in their audience were discharged in the experience of the amusement itself. Plato would allow the more useful and educational poets to remain in the city, because their work was of value to society as a whole.

Collingwood finds an anology for this kind of poetry in the magical rites of primitive tribes. In a war dance certain emotions are generated in the dancers that represent the emotions of those actually engaged in battle. These emotions are not stimulated for their own sake, but in order that, when a real-life battle occurs, the warriors may discharge these courageous emotions into fighting their enemies.

Collingwood agrees with Plato that these magical arts are useful to society. Magical activity is a kind of dynamo supplying the mechanism of practical life with the emotional

current that drives it. Hence magic is a necessity for every sort and condition of man, and is actually found in every healthy society.

Religious art and public monuments are examples of art as magic. The primary function of such art is to generate emotions that will be incorporated into people's ordinary lives. Elsewhere, (Autobiography),[3] Collingwood discusses his own reaction to the Albert Memorial. He draws the conclusion that, although to modern taste its aesthetic qualities are few, it serves as a useful piece of magic art. It would have inspired the Victorian public with the idea of their glorious Empire that was worth defending and enlarging.

Art as amusement

Amusement art is like magical art in that it seeks to evoke emotions. In this case the emotions are not to be discharged into practical activity; they are to be discharged into the enjoyment of themselves.

Amusement art is involved in the invention of makebelieve situations which have a close enough relationship to the audience's practical life, that they may enjoy the arousal of these emotions, but there must be no danger that these emotions will be discharged into practical life. For example "A play in which a foreign nation is held to ridicule will not amuse an audience in whom there is no sense of hostility towards that nation; but neither will it amuse one in whom this hostility has come near to boiling point." (PA,84)

As already stated, Collingwood considers that much of what we consider to be art is amusement. He asks the person who considers himself cultured to question whether he and someone who is artistically uneducated are merely amused by different things. A Woolworth print obviously is not art, but how can one be sure that the latest esoteric piece of modern art is not a rather recherché form of amusement? "The cliques of artists and writers consist for the most part of a racket selling amusement to people who at all costs must be prevented from thinking themselves vulgar and a conspiracy to call it not amusement but art." (PA,90)

In his discussion of art as amusement Collingwood outlines the danger he sees for our society. For amusement is useful only when it is recreation. It then enables a person to return refreshed to the ordinary tasks of his daily life.

> "Amusement becomes a danger to practical life when the debt it imposes on those stores of (emotional) energy is too great to be paid off in the ordinary course of living . . . . practical life becomes emotionally bankrupt, intolerably dull or drudgery. A moral disease has set in, whose symptoms are a constant craving for amusement and an inability to take any interest in the affairs of ordinary life, the necessary work of livelihood and social routine. A person in whom the disease has become chronic is a person with a more or less settled conviction that amusement is the only thing that makes life worth living. A society in which the disease is endemic is one which most people feel some such conviction most of the time." (PA,95)

It is Collingwood's opinion that such was the root cause of the collapse of the Graeco-Roman Empire, and that modern society is suffering the same moral disease. Although Collingwood was writing in 1939, it would be difficult to say that our society has changed for the better.

Collingwood's position

Having demonstrated the incompleteness of the classical theories of art, Collingwood tries to find out what was the distortion that gave rise to these theories. He hopes that by correcting the distortion he may arrive at a correct definition of art. The ancient philosophers held that "art" was "craft", therefore they assumed that there was a distinction between the means and the end. However, Collingwood has shown us that this is not so in art. But he reasons that there must be a relationship between the means and the end, unless we wish to think the early philosophers were incapable of analytic thinking. Collingwood presents three ideas which he will develop into his theory of art.

> "1. That there is in art proper a distinction resembling that between means and end but not identical with it.
>
> 2. That which the classical theory calls the end is defined by it as the arousing of emotion. But arousing belongs to the philosophy of craft whereas emotion does not. Art has something to do with emotion which has a resemblance to arousing it but is is not arousing it.
>
> 3. Art has something to do with making things, but these things are not material things made by imposing form on matter, and they are not made by skill. They are things of some other kind and they are made in some other way." (PA,108)

Expression

Collingwood examines what, in common usage, is held to be the link between art and emotion. Art expresses emotion is the common definition, so Collingwood investigates this term to see if it will give him the definition he seeks.

It is Collingwood's opinion that the knowledge of our exact emotions is always linked to the expression of them. A man who seeks to express his emotions cannot know them

exactly until they are expressed.

> "All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement, which he feels going on within him, but of whose nature he is ignorant. While in this state, all he can say about his emotion is 'I feel . . . I don't know what I feel.' From this helpless and oppressed condition he extricates himself by doing something which we call expressing himself. This is an activity which has something to do with the thing we call language: he expresses himself by speaking. It has also something to do with conciousness: the emotion expressed is an emotion of whose nature the person who feels it is no longer unconscious. It has also something to do with the way he feels the emotion. As unexpressed, he feels it in what we call a helpless and oppressed way, as expressed, he feels it in a way from which this sense of oppression has vanished." (PA,109-110)

It can be seen from this quotation how Collingwood infers that the person expressing his emotions is expressing them, not to an audience, but to himself in order that he may know what it is that he is feeling; also, he cannot know what he is feeling until he has expressed it in language.

Collingwood also claims that what is expressed is always specific. There can be no prior censorship of emotion, because one cannot know what emotions one has until one is conscious of them. And becoming conscious of them is linked to expressing them.

This led Collingwood to make the controversial statement that an artist cannot know in advance whether he will write a tragedy or a comedy. The artist who writes a tragedy that can be called "art proper", has come to realise that he has emotions of pity or sadness about certain situations. It is in the expression of these emotions that they become clear to himself; this is as he writes his play. The audience is in the position of being able to overhear him at this activity

To take another example from drama, "It is not her ability to weep real tears that would mark out a good actress; it is her ability to make it clear to herself and her audience what her tears are about." (PA,122). It is quite different from the artist who decides to write a play that will make the audience feel sad and fearful, while he himself remains unmoved. This artist has used his craft to write a tragedy.

Function of the artist

Collingwood does not believe that the artist should be considered different from any ordinary member of society. If art were craft, and therefore a specialised form of skill, he would allow a certain segregation as inevitable. However, as art is expression, of which all are capable, any such isolation is wrong. The artist is different from other men and women only in that he takes the initiative in expressing what all feel. The artist's function is to express emotions, which when heard by an audience will cause all or some of that audience to realise that they hold similar emotions. They are helped by the artist, therefore, to express their emotions by becoming conscious of them. It is Collingwood's opinion that, for example, a certain kind of fear is only going to be precisely understood by those who have experienced a similar fear.

From arguments like these Collingwood is led to condemn certain artists. Jane Austen made great art from the emotions generated in a small village; that was the boundary of her life. But some artists choose to set themselves apart from the society in which they brought up into a smaller society of like-minded people. They arbitrarily limit their experience. Collingwood

holds that such a withdrawal is wrong. Their art can have little value because it can express only the emotions of that like-minded group which voluntarily sets itself apart from the mainstream of society. Collingwood remarks that the art produced in such a group will be given an amusement and a magical value by members of that group in order to give a validity to their self-sought isolation.[4]

Collingwood's idea of "art proper" is now emerging. But he must first discuss what kind of making the artist does (see above, p No. 3)

Creation

Collingwood finds that the artist "creates"; that is, he makes something consciously and voluntarily but not technically. Moreover, a work of art does not have to be a concrete "thing", it may be fully created when it is in the artist's mind, when it is an imaginary work.

To imagine

As Alan Donagan [5] points out Collingwood uses the word "imagine" to mean two quite different things, which has resulted in some confusion about the precise meaning of the last statement. "To imagine" can mean in Collingwood's use, either the act of forming mental images, which in common use we call "imagining", or it can mean the linguistic act of raising something to consciousness or expression. As we will see, Collingwood holds that works of art may be imaginative in the first sense of the word, for example, a poem composed in the head, but they need not necessarily always be so. But they must always be imaginative in the second sense of the word.

Poetry and music can exist in the mind of the poet and musician. Similarly, an engineer who designs a bridge can have the plan of the bridge in his head before he begins to draw. The form of the bridge can exist without its matter. When the bridge is made as an actual artifact, the form is imposed on the bridge; the bridge is now made as distinct from being created. If the plans are made without any intention of their being executed, (for example, drawings for a textbook) one can say the plans are created. If the plans are solely in order that the bridge may be actually made, the plans are annotations or a reminder, the making of which is fabrication, the craft of the draughtsman.

Similarly, a musician's tune, when written down, is something which allows others to construct for themselves in their heads the composer's tune. But the relation of the tune to the written music is not the same as the plan to the bridge, but it is the same as the engineer's mental plan to the specifications.

Total imaginative experience

When a person listens to a tune, he does not just hear a succession of noises, he mentally reconstructs the tune created by the musician. It is also possible that, as well as hearing the created tune, he may mentally hear other sounds, or recall various sights or even scents. This experience, Collingwood calls the "total imaginative experience" which the audience shares with the artist. As I will examine this idea in greater depth later in this paper, I will only briefly summarise his idea here.

In order to demonstrate what he means by this idea, Collingwood takes the paintings of Cézanne. From them he draws the conclusion that the experience of looking is not exclusively visual. If we look closely at Cézanne's pictures, the objects appear as if they would feel to us, if we could translate our tactile experiences into paint. As well as seeing colours and shapes we get other experiences which are not merely sensual visual experiences. This does not mean that we project our own experience on to the formal elements of colour and shape that the artist has made. Certainly,the imaginary experience we get from a picture is only what we are capable of having and what the picture is capable of arousing. Because we see the colours the artist has painted, we may assume that our colour vision is like his. Similarly, we may assume that the imaginative experience we have is related to that of the artist.

Art proper

This brings Collingwood to his conclusion that the work of art proper, which is an expression of emotion, is a total activity (note not a thing) which the audience is conscious of by the use of his imagination. Collingwood must now analyse this definition to show what he means by imagination and emotion and what is their relationship.

Feeling

Collingwood describes the two kinds of experience that go by the name of feeling. If we feel hot or cold, we feel sensation; if we feel sad or happy, we feel emotion.

Sensation

We can perform two acts of sensation simultaneously,

yet the two sensations can remain distinct. For example, we can hear a noise while we are looking at something, and we can be aware of both auditory and visual sensations.

Collingwood holds that the experience of feeling emotion is unlike sensation, in that we cannot feel something emotionally as distinct from the sensum on which it is a charge. For example, if a child is frightened by a scarlet curtain, he does not have two experiences, one of red and the other of fear. He has the single emotional experience of a terrifying red. This may be analysed into its two separate elements, but they are not independant.

Collingwood holds that sensation takes precedence over emotion; emotion is a charge upon a sensation. He claims that every sensum has its own emotional charge, "and that sensation and emotion thus related are twin elements in every experience of feeling." (PA,163). He is aware that this is not generally accepted, but thinks that the reason that it is not is because we have more or less trained ourselves to ignore this relationship. He asks the reader to examine what really happens to him when he looks at a particular colour. He holds that the reader should become aware that when, "he is conscious of seeing a colour (he) is simultaneously conscious of feeling a corresponding emotion." (PA,162) We appear to have these emotions independantly of thinking, although it is by thinking that we are aware of them. This level of experience Collingwood calls the "psychical level" and he uses the word "feeling" to refer to these emotional charges upon sense.

Collingwood claims that all thought is based upon feeling. At its simplest level, when I say "I am hot", it is directly related to the warmth that I feel. I have attended to that feeling. I have become conscious of it. Most of our thoughts are like this, we attend to relations between shapes, colours, sounds etc. This is empirical thinking.

There is a secondary form of thought. We may think about our thoughts: which is to remark on the relation between different acts of thinking. However, if the first kind of thinking is attending to relations between sensa, how can we hold in our heads sensa which are by their nature fleeting?

By studying the work of Hume, Collingwood demonstrates that these sensa (or sense impressions) are converted by the activity of consciousness into ideas. This activity is the activity of the imagination.

Imagination

Collingwood examines the history of imagination from Descartes to Kant. He agrees with these philosophers that there can be no empirically proven distinction between real and imaginary sensa. I can hear a church bell ringing now, and I can imagine I hear someone calling to me. The first is real - it is twelve o'clock - but I cannot prove that it is anymore real than the voice I hear in my head, although I know there is a distinction between the two sounds. Collingwood holds that this distinction, although it is true,

can only be shown by the way I interpret these sensa. He defines imagination as a level of experience where feeling has been transformed by the activity of consciousness. It is a distinct level of experience intermediate between sensation and intellect. It is the point at which the life of thought makes contact with the life of pure psychical experience. (PA,171, and 215) The sensa of the psychical level are raised to the imaginative level by the activity of consciousness.

Language

Collingwood considers all expression to be linguistic, not in the narrow sense of the word of language as mere vocal activity, but as pure utterance. Through his example of a child crying he distinguishes between the cry of a child from pain, and the cry of a child who knows that he is in pain. This is language in its original imaginative form i.e. feeling raised to consciousness.

Collingwood has now discovered that it is language that is both expressive and imaginative. Thus he is able to answer his original question as to the nature of art. Art; if it is expressive and imaginative must be language. ". . . . Artistic activity is the experience of expressing one's emotions; and that which expresses them is the total imaginative theory called language or art. This is art proper." (PA,275)

Painting

In discussing painting Collingwood makes clear that the work of art is not imaginary in the sense of it existing only in the artist's head. It is imaginary in the sense

that it is linguistic or expressive.

"There is no question of 'externalising' an inward experience which is complete in itself and by itself. There are two experiences, an inward or imaginative one called seeing, and an outward or bodily one called painting, which in the painter's life are inseparable, and form one single indivisible experience, an experience which may be described as painting imaginatively." (PA,304-305)

Collingwood has shown that ideas are sensa raised to the level of imagination by consciousness. Therefore, it follows that there are no ideas without corresponding sensa. In the case of a painter these sensa are the visual sensation of colours and shapes, and the tactile sensations of his brushstrokes. Unless these sensa existed there would be nothing out of which his consciousness could generate the imaginative experience of which the painting is a record.

Corruption of consciousness

According to Collingwood, the function of consciousness is to attend to sensa. For example, a man who is angry, if he is conscious of it, is aware that he is feeling the emotion of anger. He is free to do either of two things. He may express his anger or he may subdue it by dominating it. Consciousness can dominate feeling. He is not free, however, to say that he is not angry. If this man pretends that he is not angry, it does not mean that he has not attended to his anger. But he denies having such a feeling and therefore chooses not to dominate nor subdue it. This, for Collingwood, is corruption

of consciousness, and is the root cause of the evils of our society. For if a man chooses to deny feelings that he may own, he is also denying his intellect the truth on which to base his premises. Corruption of consciousness can happen to us all. It may be a temporary lapse in the activity of converting sensa at the psychical level to imaginative ideas.

In art (or language) becoming conscious of emotions is the same as expressing them. Where the artist has tried to express his emotions but failed to do so, he has either refused to accept his emotions as his own or has falsified them. The artist can express only his own emotions, but if he offers his work to an audience he is inviting them to share his imaginative experience. This they can do, only if they have held similar emotions, for there can be evoked only emotions they already possess. Therefore, the artist implicitly says that the emotions which he expresses are held by at least some of the community in which he works.

It can be seen as essential that the artist, above all, records a truthful imaginative experience; that he does not suffer from 'corruption of consciousness'. This is the essential message of "Principles of Art". "The artist must prophesy . . . . in the sense that he tells his audience, at the risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts . . . . As spokesman of his community, the secrets he must utter are theirs. Art is the community's medicine for

the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness."
(PA,336)

PART II

The Total Imaginative Experience

From Collingwood's analysis of art we know that he considers an artwork to be a record of an activity by an artist, which, when looked at by a viewer, may allow him to share in the total imaginative experience that the artist had while painting the picture.

I would like to examine this statement. Is it possible to verify it if I consider it to be true?

For the reason that the only visual artist Collingwood mentions is Cézanne, I will discuss two works by that painter. I have chosen one of Cézanne's still-lifes, "Still life with Plaster Cupid", bearing in mind Collingwood's assertion that the potential for arousing psychological states by an artwork is not to be counted among its qualities as "art proper". Still life has less emotional associations for me than a landscape or a figure painting.

"Still-life with Plaster Cupid"

"Still life with Plaster Cupid" (1895)(Ill.1)has as its main feature a rather Baroque cupid. It is the central object

and our eyes are drawn to it immediately. Our eyes rest on it because of the definite line drawn behind it, and because the contrast of dark and light is at its most extreme at this point. This contrast is heightened by the difference in colour temperature betweem the breast of the cupid, which is very warm, and the cool brown-blue of the canvas behind it. The line of the canvas in front of the cupid leads our eyes to the edge of the picture; a parallel line, further to the right, brings them back into the picture again. This line is anchored by the circular shape of the apple, which introduces us to the first mysterious use of space.

If, at this point, we are concentrating on what the painted objects represent, we will have difficulty in reading this image. We will have told ourselves that the lines and forms represent a conventional still-life. We assume that if the cupid is resting on a table, the canvas behind the cupid must be on the floor behind the table. The apple at the edge of the canvas must, therefore, be further away than the apples in front of the cupid. It should appear smaller to us than those on the table. Yet Cézanne has painted it larger.

This apple is at the top of a large empty space; yet this space appears to have direction in it. The area where the apple is, is cool and receding, but as it moves down it becomes warmer and so appears closer to us. There is an abrupt lightening of tone, and an increase in the warmth of the colour which signifies the protrusion of the table from the space. This enables us to read the space as the floor.

The curve of the apples at the base of the statuette continues to bring our eyes around to the back of the cupid, where they are led to the left, through the axis of the onion, up onto another plane. On this plane is another curve which supports two circular forms. We read this as a cloth, because we know that cloths are associated with tables. Also, it is blue and appears to be patterned. Yet if we are looking at the picture as a conventional still-life we realise that something is wrong. What is supporting the cloth, and where does it fit into the actual space of the room, if such a room can exist? The cloth appears behind the first line mentioned representing the canvas. Is it on the wall or on the floor?

It is when we compare this picture with "Still-life with Peppermint Bottle" (1890-4)(Ill.2) that we realise that this part of the drapery is a section of another painting. Yet Cézanne, by continuing the stem of the onion on the table through the leg of the table of his other still-life, has deliberately made the space ambiguous. In fact, by continuing the curve of the drapery, he has attempted to deceive us as to the reality of his objects. We are confused as to whether he has painted a picture of apples or apples themselves.

Collingwood on Cézanne

Collingwood states that Cézanne painted like a blind man. By this he meant, we may know what the objects Cézanne has painted feel like, when we look at his paintings. If we take each object in this picture individually, I think we may agree with Collingwood.

If we are sensitive to the language of colour and tone, we may

get a good idea of the shape and solidity of the cupid. Its right side is painted in a light warm tone, therefore it is protruding towards us, in comparison to its left side, which because it is cooler, is receding. Similarly, by looking at the apples, we are now aware of minute changes in form. We can imagine that we feel their weight. They are not merely flat objects. They are solids with a definite relationship to each other in space.

I would question Collingwood's statement with regard to the surfaces of the room. I will imagine myself running my hand over the canvas from left to right. First, my hand goes along the plane of what we know is a painting of a canvas. Then the sharp edge of the next canvas brings my hand up and further out into space. It continues on that new plane until it encounters the statuette which pushes it out in a circular fashion even further. Then my hand comes to the plane, which intellectually I know is a continuation of the canvas, yet it appears closer to the cupid. This plane continues at a different angle (perspectivally incorrect if it is the canvas) to come to the apple on the floor. That is, if we have decided that space is the floor. Its upper boundary is what we assume to be another canvas, for there is the appearance of a sketch of a plaster cast on it.

From this analysis, I can say that I feel the spaces between the objects, but only relative to each other, not in relation to myself or the space I am in. The way in which we perceive the space is shown, not by one point perspective, but as we would be

of it in relation to ourselves, if we were in that particular plane. Therefore, Cézanne forces us to recognise that we are looking at a painted flat surface bounded by four straight lines which has dictated the sacrifice of one point perspective. This painting does allow us, as well, to imagine the solidity of the objects and their own spatial relationships.

What do I see when I look at this picture? First, I see a cupid in a space which is constantly related to it by colour-tone harmonies. This space is not related perspectivally to the cupid. As I am aware of the properties of certain colours, a blue object, equidistant with a red, will appear further away, because warm colours appear nearer than cool. Therefore, I am able to read the objects in this canvas as forms which are at different distances to me. But the ambiguities of the larger spatial areas make me realise that the forms are relating to themselves, not to me. Cézanne has constructed an autonomous space which is dictated by the picture plane. Being outside that picture plane, I can imagine that I could pick up an apple or touch that statuette, but only if I were in that picture plane myself. I cannot imagine that the picture plane is a continuation of my actual space.

Do we have to take cognisance of the choice of objects Cézanne painted? One critic said that, "the marriage of the heroic-passionate or idyllic to the common-place domestic corresponds to Cezannes complexity as a man." [6] This is not very enlightening. We remember that Collingwood held that the psychological states evoked by representation are nothing to do with the artwork's qualities as art proper. Personally, any painting of a cupid or apples

would not evoke any particular emotion in me. I find it interesting that this particular picture is of three reproductions of artworks, the cupid by Puget, Cézanne's copy of a Michelangelo and a copy of one of his own still-lifes, as well as apples and onions. Yet it appears to me that any other objects would have served as well,as there is no difference in the treatment of any of these objects. After the initial impact of the cupid, our eyes pay as much attention to all the other objects. When we realise that the painted canvases are not fully shown, we know that only certain parts of them were considered of importance to Cézanne. The curved base of "The Flayed Man" corresponds exactly to the base of the statuette, and the table of the Peppermint bottle still-life becomes the stem of the onion. It would appear that these "extras" were used for the formal qualities needed by this particular picture.

I believe that Cézanne presents us with a picture of objects as he saw them over a long period of time. The fractional alterations in tone and colour would not be possible to see unless the objects had been closely studied. Cézanne said himself "It takes me a long time to realise my sensations."

How do I feel when I look at this picture? First, I get pleasure from the sense of the correctness of the canvas, from the knowledge that the surface appears in total harmony. Everything is held to the mid-range of tonal value, which

gives an immediate unity to the picture.

Secondly, I have a certain surprise at my recognition of the disparity in size of the apples. I question the ambiguity of the onion leaves and the table leg in the right-hand corner. I realise that one-point perspective is not being used in this picture, yet these objects appear satisfactorily in their own space. This makes me aware of how untrue to our own perception is one-point perspective. It was originally designed as a method for making architectural plans, and it became the convention for picture making. But we do not see the world through one eye right in the centre of our foreheads.

Finally, I am aware of feeling in my hands. I am clenching them as if I were about to touch and move these objects. I can imagine how heavy the objects are and how they would feel if I lifted them.

Collingwood makes clear that these tactile sensations that I experience are not actual motor sensations. I do not have to move my fingers, that is a personal whim, I could merely imagine that I am doing so. That I can imagine I feel sensation in my fingers is in reaction to the sense impressions I receive when looking at "Still-life with Plaster Cupid".

How can I know that my reaction to Cezanne's painting is not purely subjective? Did I not merely bring to this painting my own imaginative experience?

Collingwood holds that the imaginative experience we have is induced by what the artist painted. It is akin to that of the artist who, when he was painting, was in possession of an experience which was not merely that of seeing what he was painting and the colours he was putting on canvas. If we see certain colours the artist painted, we may assume that our colour vision is like his. Similarly, we may assume the imaginative experience we receive on looking at a picture is akin to that of the artist.

Is there any way to prove this statement of Collingwoods. It seems reasonable to accept it as true, but absolute verification appears to be impossible.

Let us take a further example of the work of Cézanne to see if it can throw light on the question. If we compare "Mont St. Victoire" (ILL.3) to a photograph of the mountain in reality (ILL.4), we see that the picture by Cézanne presents us with a completely different image. We can therefore assume that Cézanne, instead of rendering the scene topographically, wished to present another aspect of the countryside of Aix.

On first looking at the picture, my initial reaction is a recognition of the mountain shape. This tells me that the picture represents a landscape. Therefore, I know that the mountain is in front of the sky and the landmass lies anterior to the mountain. The next sensation I have is of movement, this is generated by the small intense brush strokes which go in different directions; vertically in the land area,

diagonally across the mountain and in a circular fashion in the sky. Looking at the tone colour contrasts, in the same way as I looked at the still-life, I can know that this landmass is not flat. It is a tightly knit mass of projections and depressions, which is held together by the dark, close harmony of tone. The light areas are rendered by the juxtaposition of colours, not by tonal differences. The path appears to be very light because it is a warm ochre beside a slightly darker but much cooler green-blue. I can imagine that this landscape is vibrating, possibly in the way the earth appears to shimmer on a very hot summer's day.

From my own experience I know that this is a work that took a long time to accomplish. The surface has been built up gradually in thin strokes of paint. I would also read it as a record of experience, a record of many acts of vision, of many acts of attention to subtle changes occurring in the landscape, and the resulting alterations to the marks on the canvas.

I would hope that this is what Cézanne intended me to see, yet I cannot be sure. It appears to me as if Cézanne was discovering for himself how this scene appeared to him. The emotion that this picture evokes in me is a satisfied feeling of "Yes, the countryside is just like that." I am pleased that a feeling I have about landscape, a recognition of its complexity and its coherence, are demonstrated in this painting.

My experience of looking at these two pictures of Cézanne would seem to corroborate Collingwood's assertion that the artist tries to express his emotions to himself, and that we, the audience, are in the position of overhearers or unseen participants. The sense impressions caused by the colours and shapes of these pictures I transformed by the action of my consciousness into ideas about objects and landscape. Can I say that my imaginative experience is similar to Cézanne's as he was painting? Collingwood holds that such is the case, moreover, that if we do not share the experience of someone who has merely looked at the landscape, but we share the more complex experience of someone who has painted it. Collingwood holds that as an artist paints his knowledge of his subject grows. He becomes aware of hitherto unseen relationships. Compared to his initial knowledge of his subject, his awareness has developed enormously. He now can distinguish between subtle visual differences, and also may have a sense of the objects' mass, their relative warmth or coolness, their spatial relationships. As well as which, while painting he will have had other sense experiences of sound and smell, for example.

From my own experience I can bear out the truth of Collingwood's assertion that the artist does not know in advance what emotions he will express. A friend of mine, who is crippled with rheumatoid arthritis, consented to sit for her portrait. She is elderly and lives alone. The first oil sketch I did showed a pathetic little person, huddled in a

chair, her eyes frightened and lonely. There were many technical reasons why this painting did not succeed. But I was dissatisfied for some reason I could not analyse, and I knew that, even if I resolved all the colour relationships and drawing problems, I still would not be happy with the picture. So I decided to start a new canvas, to begin with no preconceptions and with no particular emotional message to deliver. I realised that before I began the first sketch I had been intent on saying "Look at this poor unfortunate woman. How sad she is." Now I determined to paint what I saw, and to let whatever would emerge without prior censorship from me.

The resulting picture is a portrait of an indomitable old lady who has great dignity and demands no pity. It is a much more truthful statement about this friend of mine than the first sketch. She is a woman of great moral strength although physically crippled. To have painted her as a tragic figure was my own false judgement of her, through my lack of knowledge not only of her but also of my own feelings about old age and infirmity. Prior to painting her, I would have said "how terrible it must be to be like her" whereas now I have enormous respect and admiration for someone who survives with an enjoyment of life despite seemingly insuperable disabilities.

I have known this lady for some years and often been in her company,yet when working on her portrait, I saw her in a different way, in a way in which I had not done until I

painted her. I saw her in her space, her space bounded by her chair which is held in place by marked horizontal lines which imply the physical constraint in which she lives. Her face is in shadow from the light behind her, yet this is the area where there is most colour and tone contrast therefore it is dominant. Her hands are tiny and deformed, yet as they are in an area of lesser tonal contrast they are not obvious. I would like to think that they are painted in a matter of fact manner. The circular movement from her right hand, through her shoulders and left hand onto her knee is emphasized by the two arms of the chair. This creates a sense of shallow space, which implies the limited movement available to her. I find it impossible to judge my own recent work, and as this is only the second portrait I have painted, I am sure it must have many weaknesses. However, I can say that while painting this lady I found that my feelings about her were other than I imagined. I now know that I admire her, and see her as an extremely strong and highly self-motivated person, much more to be emulated than pitied. Hopefully, these are the emotions that are expressed in this portrait.

From this experience, I agree with Collingwood's statement that art is an activity in which the artist tries to discover his own emotions, and that this is done as he expresses them.

I also agree with Collingwood when he said that what we get from a work of art can be divided into two parts. To return to the example of Cezanne, there is the simple experience of looking at the picture, seeing its colours and forms, recognising the objects; secondly there is the imaginary experience, the sensation of weight, the realisation of space, the warmth of the day. To know whether or not we share Cézanne's experience, Collingwood states that as art is language the same rules apply that would if we were talking to someone. We may have "an empirical and relative assurance becoming progressively stronger as conversation proceeds based on the fact that neither party seems to be talking nonsense" (PA, 251)

Collingwood points out, we readily accept the fact that we may only partially understand a great writer: for example, few people can read 'Ulysses' for the first time without a key, yet there is enough that is intelligible that provokes an interest in trying to understand the whole book. We can accept that the lack of understanding may be with us, rather than Joyce was writing gibberish. Yet it is accepted by many that a picture should be comprehensible at first glance, although it may have taken months to accomplish. This may spring from the fact that we have all been taught how to read, yet there is an assumption "anyone can see, we are born seeing" Whereas a painting is not just a visual representation, it is a record of a total experience. It may be as complex as any

book and may need as much time and effort if it is to yield its imaginative experience. Collingwood states "In proportion as the artist is a great one, we can be pretty certain that we have only caught his meaning partially and imperfectly." (PA,p309)

From Collingwood's discussion of the criteria for "art proper", if we agree with his hypothesis,we can now be in a position to discuss the "merits" of a work of art. The question I asked in the foreward about why we consider Van Gogh's work to be great art can be answered.

"Marat Assassiné"

It is interesting to surmise how Collingwood would differentiate between different works of art. It is not unreasonable to think that he would consider "Marat Assassiné" by David (ill.5) an example of art as magic. It is a painting that even now demands a strong reaction from the viewer. Its impact on people, to whom Marat would have been known personally, must have been violent. It would have heightened their grief and rage at Marat's death. David presents Marat as a martyr,and the pose is deliberately reminiscent of Christ being taken from the cross. We know that Marat suffered from a skin disease, yet David shows him as unblemished with an expression of holiness and resignation on his face.

This is a great work of art; yet in Collingwood's terms it is art as magic, not art proper. Collingwood would not dismiss this kind of art as having no value. He

insists that magical art is a necessity to society" . . in a civilization that is rotten with amusement, the more magic we produce the better."(PA,278) The point Collingwood stresses is that it is of primary importance that the artist be fully aware of what he is doing and that the audience must also be aware of the artist's motives. In this picture, David has subordinated his artistic skill to the aim of producing a piece of art that will evoke patriotic emotions together with fear and anger at the death of a hero. As such, it is very successful, and satisfied the members of the assembly by whom it was commissioned.

In Collingwood's opinion, an artist who is strongly politically motivated produces "art proper" when his art is an expression of what it is like to be so motivated, and without which expression the artist himself cannot know what his exact feelings are. "But if he begins by knowing what they are, and uses his art for purpose of converting others to them, he will not be feeding his art on his political emotions, he will be stifling it beneath them." (PA

Collingwood's division of what is generally held to be "art" clarified the criteria we may choose when trying to evaluate art works. We realise that the first question we can ask ourselves is "what is the function of this particular artwork?" This enables us, if we wish, to place artworks in the different categories Collingwood has elaborated.

The function of "Marat Assassiné", in my opinion, was to act as an inspiration to the people of the assembly and to give them a worthy hero-martyr whose ideals they would continue to follow. They would discharge the emotions generated by this picture into the affairs of their own practical lives. This is precisely what Collingwood calls magical art.

As a contrast, we may say that the function of some of Renoir's paintings is merely to charm or to titillate. They are beautiful pictures, which are very enjoyable to look at, redolent of summer days and beautiful girls. We do not feel, however, that our emotions evoked by these pictures will make any change in our lives. We enjoy the pictures for themselves. This is amusement art for Collingwood.

It must be understood that it is essential that each artwork is individually judged, one cannot say that Renoir produced amusement art all the time. But many of his paintings with their lack of individuality in his nudes, seem to be a repetition of the same expression of his delight in beautiful women. Whereas in Collingwood's terms, expression must always be specific, and original. The fact that the 'Renoir Girl' is recognisable as such, although Renoir worked from different models, would seem to point to Renoir, having chosen a certain type of beauty, was content to re-use it in many of his paintings. One only has to compare his portraits with those of Cézanne which are remarkably individual.

Collingwood reserves the accolade of "art proper" for art which is superior, in his opinion, to all others. We are free to accept his judgement or not, but to me his criteria appear very sound. The subject matter of an artwork that is art proper must appear to the artist as something worthy of his devotion. It is to the expression of this imaginative vision of his that the artist devotes his all skill and artistry.

Notes

1. John Berger. Ways of Seeing. London: B.B.C. and Penguin Books, (1972), 1976. pp.

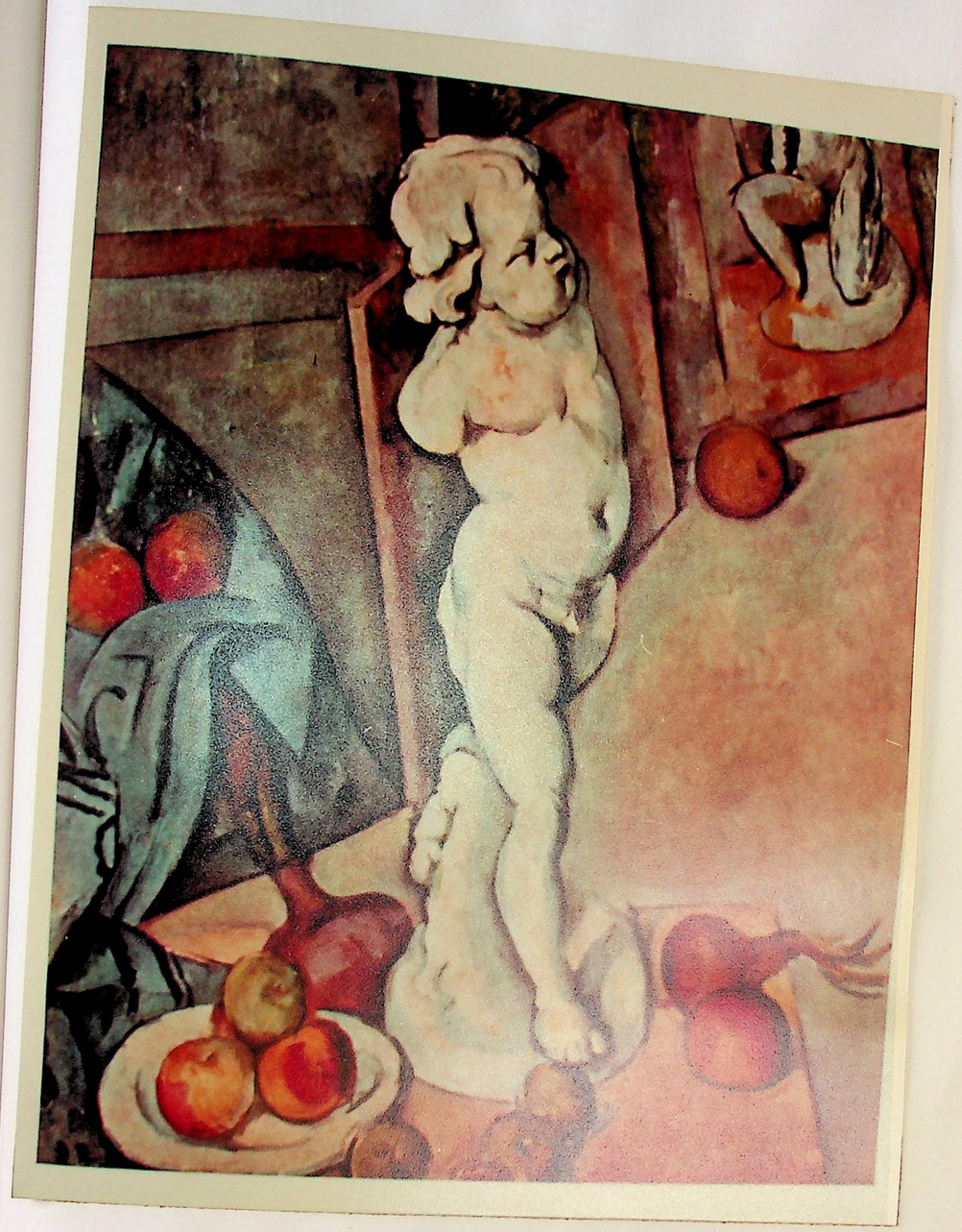
2. R. G. Collingwood. The Principles of Art. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1938), 1981. References to this book will be made in the text as PA.

3. R. G. Collingwood. Autobiography. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939.

4. Collingwood is referring to the PreRaphaelite Brotherhood in particular.

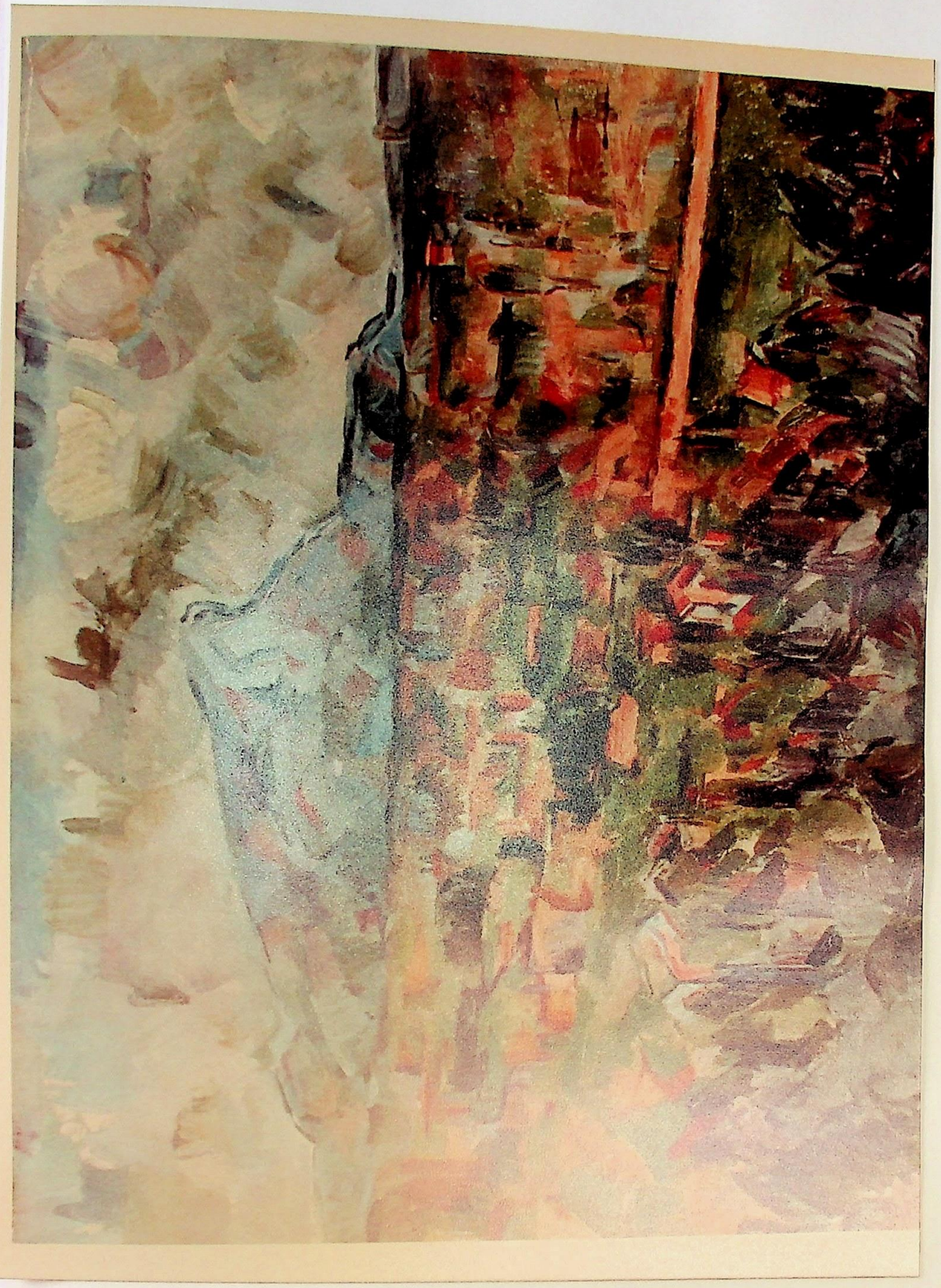
5. Donagan, Alan. The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood. Oxford: 1962.

6. Meyer Schapiro. Cezanne. New York: Abrams.



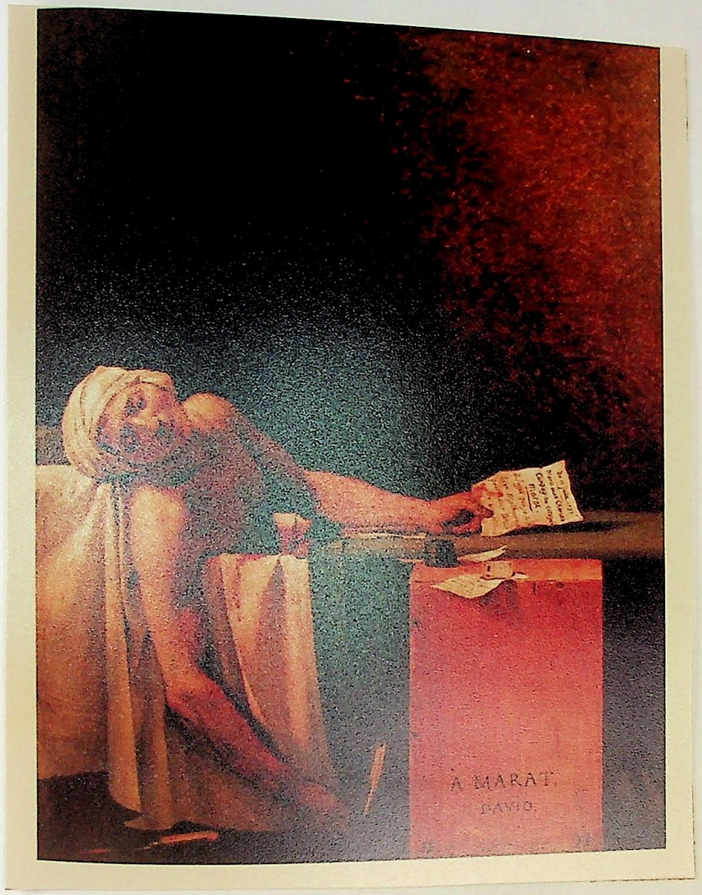
1. "Still-life with Plaster Cupid". c. 1895. Paul Cezanne.

2. "Still-life with Peppermint Bottle" 1890. Paul Cezanne.



3. "Mont St. Victoire" 1904-1906. Paul Cezanne

4. Mont St. Victoire from a photograph c.1904



5. "Marat Assassiné" Jean-Louis David. 1793.

6. "Portrait of C. R." Eithne Carr

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