

Fair Warning

Here is a thing.

To one somebody, this "thing" is a totally flourishing universal joyous particular happening deep amazing miraculous indivisible being.

To another somebody, this "same" thing means something which, if sawed in two at the base, will tell you how old it is.

To somebody else, this "selfsame" thing doesn't exist because there isn't a thunderstorm; but if there were a thunderstorm, this "selfsame" thing would merely exist as something to be especially avoided.

To a fourth somebody, this "very selfsame" thing, properly maltreated, represents something called "lumber"; which, improperly maltreated, represents something else called "money"; which represents something else called (more likely than not) "dear."

Somebody number one is a poet. Actually he is alive. His address is: Now. All the other somebodies are unpoets. They all aren't alive. They all merely are not unexisting—in a kind of an unkind of real unreality or When. Here is another thing: whatever happens, everybody cannot turn the Nowman's Now into When; whatever doesn't, nobody can turn the Whenmen's When into Now.

A Poet's Advice to Students

A poet is somebody who feels, and who expresses his feeling through words.

This may sound easy. It isn't.

A lot of people think or believe or know they feel—but that's thinking or believing or knowing; not feeling. And poetry is feeling—not knowing or believing or thinking.

Almost anybody can learn to think or believe or know, but not a single human being can be taught to feel. Why? Because whenever you think or you believe or you know, you're a lot of other people: but the moment you feel, you're nobody-but-yourself.

To be nobody-but-yourself—in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.

As for expressing nobody-but-yourself in words, that means working just a little harder than anybody who isn't a poet can possibly imagine. Why? Because nothing is quite as easy as using words like somebody else. We all of us do exactly this nearly all of the time—and whenever we do it, we're not poets.

If, at the end of your first ten or fifteen years of fighting and working and feeling, you find you've written one line of one poem, you'll be very lucky indeed.

And so my advice to all young people who wish to become poets is: do something easy, like learning how to blow up the world—unless you're not only willing, but glad, to feel and work and fight till you die.

Does this sound dismal? It isn't.

It's the most wonderful life on earth.

Or so I feel.

The Agony of the Artist (With a Capital A)

Variations Upon the Justly Celebrated Old Greek Theme: Know Yourself

There appear to be three kinds of artists in America today. First we have the ultra-successful artist, comprising two equally insincere groups: "commercial artists", who concoct almost priceless pictures for advertising purposes and "fashionable portrait painters", who receive incredible sums for making un- beautifully rich women look richly beautiful. Very few people, of course, can attain the heights of commercial and fashionable art. Next we have the thousands upon thousands of "academicians"—patient, plodding, platitudinous persons, whose loftiest aim is to do something which "looks just like" something else and who are quite content so long as this undangerous privilege is vouchsafed them. Finally there exists a species, properly designated as the Artist (with a capital A) which differs radically from the ultrasuccessful type and the academic type. On the one hand, your Artist has nothing to do with success, his ultimate function being neither to perpetuate the jewelled neck of Mrs. O. Howe Thingumbob nor yet to assassinate dandruff. On the other hand he bears no likeness to the tranquil academician—for your Artist is not tranquil; he is in agony.

Most people merely accept this agony of the Artist, as they accept evolution. The rest move their minds to the extent of supposing that anybody with Art school training, plus "temperament"—or a flair for agony—may become an Artist. In other words, the Artist is thought to be an unsublimated academician; a non-commercial, anti-fashionable painter who, instead of taking things easily, suffers from a tendency to set the world on fire and an extreme sensibility to injustice. Can this be true? If not, what makes an Artist and in what does an Artist's agony consist?

Let us assume that you and I, gentle reader, have decided to become Artists. Of course, such a decision does not necessarily imply artistic inclinations on our part. Quite the contrary. You may have always secretly admired poor Uncle Henry who, after suddenly threatening to become an Artist with a capital A, inadvertently drank himself to death with a small d instead; or someone whom I peculiarly disliked may have patted my

baby curls and prophesied that I would grow up to be a bank president; or both you and I may have previously decided to become everything except Artists, without actually having become anything whatever. Briefly, a person may decide to become an Artist for innumerable reasons of great psychological importance; but what interests us is the consequences, not the causes, of our decision to become Artists.

Having made this momentous decision, how shall we proceed? Obviously, we shall go to Art School. Must not people learn Art, just as people learn electricity or plumbing or anything else, for that matter? Of course, Art is different from electricity and plumbing, in that anybody can become an electrician or a plumber, whereas only people with temperament may become Artists. Nevertheless, there are some things which even people with temperament must know before they become Artists and these are the secrets which are revealed at Art school (how to paint a landscape correctly, how to make a face look like someone, what colours to mix with other colours, which way to sharpen pencils, etc.). Only when a person with temperament has thoroughly mastered all this invaluable information can he begin to create on his own hook. If you and I didn't absorb these fundamentals, reader, we could never become Artists, no matter how temperamental we were. I might try and try to paint Mr. Monadnock in the distance and you might try and try to draw Aunt Lucy fullface with her nose looking as if it stuck out and we couldn't, because we were ignorant of the eternal laws of value and perspective. So to Art school let us go immediately.

At Art school, we proceed to learn all there is to know about Art (and then some) from the renowned Mr. Z, who was formerly a pupil of the great Y. But this does not mean that Mr. Z paints exactly like the great Y. No indeed. In the first place, Mr. Z couldn't if he tried. In the second place, Mr. Z has developed an original style of his own, as every Artist must do if he is to be worthy of the name. Take, for instance, the great Y himself. He studied at various times under X, W and V and only came into the full possession of his own great powers shortly before his untimely death. Furthermore, X, W and V, before becoming the famous masters which they were, served humble apprenticeships with U, T and S, who taught them the techniques of those prodigious geniuses R and Q, the former of whom was P's favorite pupil, while the latter surpassed even his master O. Our statement that we are studying with Mr. Z at Art school is therefore violently erroneous. We are not really

studying with Mr. Z at all. We are really studying, through Mr. Z, with the great Y and through him with the illustrious X, W and V and through them with the glorious U, T and S and through them with the mighty R and Q and through them with those unbridled giants of the neo-renaissance, P and O. It seems almost too wonderful to be true, doesn't it?

Thanks to all these great techniques, our own technique improves amazingly. Mt. Monadnock and Aunt Lucy's nose lose all their terrors. The former, with two or three of my expert brush-strokes, obediently inherits a subjective distance of five miles. The latter, with several enlightened touches of your pencil, magnificently bounds into high relief. Mr. Z is beside himself with pleasure and we are graduated *summa cum laude* from Art school. If you and I didn't have temperament, we should now become ordinary humdrum academicians. But, being temperamental, we scorn all forms of academic guidance and throw ourselves on the world, eager to suffer—eager to become, through agony, Artists with a capital A. Our next problem is to find the necessary agony. Where is it, gentle reader?

You answer: the agony lies in the fact that we stand no chance of being appreciated—although America talks Art night and day and American millionaires buy more Art every year than all the rest of mankind put together—because, to our Oil Oligarchs, Peanut Princes, Soap Sultans and other Medicis, "jenyouwine" Art means *foreign* Art. The Art which is the most "jenyouwine" and which brings the most dollars is dead as well as imported; but (and here we have a diabolic refinement of agony) certain more elastic American multi-millionaires are beginning to purchase work by living European painters. A Chewing-gum King, for example, who formerly liked nothing but Rembrandts and Velasquez, can now be induced to fall for a Segonzac or two, or perhaps a Matisse, a Picasso, or even a Dérain. Meanwhile American patrons of Art (or rather the connoisseurs who do the selecting for these patrons and the galleries which do the selling to them) boycott *l'Art américain*. Not only is there a complete absence of taste anent the domestic product, but once an Artist is found guilty of being a native of the richest country on earth he must choose between spiritual prostitution and physical starvation. What monstrous injustice!

Wait a moment, reader. It is silly of all these rich compatriots of ours to surround themselves with pictures which they cannot possibly appreciate and do not really enjoy. Yet what have we ourselves done to merit the consideration of contemporary Medicis in particular or (which is vastly more important)

of mankind in general? You will reply that we decided, for one reason or another, to become Artists; that we attended Art school, where we learned all there is to know about Art (and then some) through Mr. Z; that, having revelled in value and perspective to the extent of making Mt. Monadnock's slopes retire and Aunt Lucy's nostrils behave, we were graduated from Art school with highest honours; that, in consideration of the foregoing facts, we should be encouraged to create on our own hook instead of being driven to the wall by foreign competitors.

Well and good—but let me show you a painting which cost the purchaser a mere trifle and which is the work (or better, *pléy*) of some illiterate peasant who never dreamed of value and perspective. How would you categorize this bit of anonymity? Is it beautiful? You do not hesitate: yes. Is it Art? You reply: it is primitive, instinctive, or uncivilized Art. Being "uncivilized," the Art of this nameless painter is immeasurably inferior to the civilized Art of painters like ourselves, is it not? You object: primitive Art cannot be judged by the same standards as civilized Art. But tell me, how can you, having graduated from an Art school, feel anything but scorn for such a childish daub? Once more you object: this primitive design has an intrinsic rhythm, a life of its own, it is therefore Art.

Right, gentle reader! It is Art because it is *alive*. It proves that, if you and I are to create at all, we must create with *today* and let all the Art schools and Medicis in the universe go hang themselves with yesterday's rope. It teaches us that we have made a profound error in trying to *learn* Art, since whatever Art stands for is whatever *cannot* be learned. Indeed, the Artist is no other than he who unlearns what he has learned, in order to know *himself*; and the agony of the Artist, far from being the result of the world's failure to discover and appreciate him, arises from his own personal struggle to discover, to appreciate and finally to express himself. Look into yourself, reader; for you must find Art there, if at all.

At this you protest vigorously: but suppose I follow your curious advice, suppose I look into myself and suppose I do not find Art? What then? Do you mean to tell me that I must forever abandon my hope of becoming an Artist?

Absolutely! Art is not something which may or may not be acquired, it is something which you are not or which you are. If a thorough search of yourself fails to reveal the presence of this something, you may be perfectly sure that no amount of striving, academic or otherwise, can bring it into your life. But if you *are* this something—then, gentle reader, no amount of

discrimination and misapprehension can possibly prevent you from becoming an Artist. To be sure, you will not encounter "success", but you will experience what is a thousand times sweeter than "success". You will know that when all's said and done (and the very biggest Butter Baron has bought the very last and least Velasquez) "to become an Artist" means nothing; whereas to become alive, or one's self, means everything.

Burlesque, I Love It!

Enlightened scholars have doubtless written learned treatises on the relation of burlesque to the satyr choruses, to *The Frogs* and *The Birds*, to Roman comedy, to PUNCHINELLO and BRIGHELLA, to the "afterpieces" of the minstrel show, to the whole fundamental structure of uncivilized and civilized theatre from prehistoric Then to scientific Now; if they haven't, they ought to be ashamed of themselves. As for your shameless correspondent, he's never even looked up "burlesque" in an encyclopedia and he never intends to. I've seen, in the past thirty years of my proletarian life, a lot of burlesque shows (and I hope to see a lot more) but for no other reason than that burlesque appeals to me. If it doesn't appeal to you, by all means don't read any farther.

Boston's Howard Athenaeum emanated, about 1912, a filth which may never again be equalled—a filth which bore some-what the same relationship to mere "dirt" that a sunset does to a lighted match. The unparalleled intensity of this filth was due, I imagine, to suppression: that quaintly exaggerated sense of civic virtue which produced a certain Mr. Sumner and a certain Watch and Ward Society, and, in particular, a day when Gertrude Hoffman and her young dancers were ordered to disport themselves in nothing less than wrist-and-ankle-length underwear. Even so, she was called Dirty Gertie.

Less extraordinary than the Howard's filth was the ugliness of its girls—but not much less. Your correspondent used to sit up in the Non Si Fuma and even there they'd make your eyes wince. Yet so differently were these harpies deformed, I swear that in all my experience with the Old Howard (as it was affectionately called) I never saw one member of a chorus who in any way, shape, or manner resembled another member. The era of interchangeable parts had not put in its standardizing appearance. Those were indeed Ye Goode Olde Days.

Most significantly, the filth and ugliness of the Howard performed a very definite function. This function consisted in the framing of a mammoth collective picture of Mother with a capital M. Never have I seen and heard the maternal instinct glorified with such boundless, not to say delirious, enthusiasm, as in that unholy of unholies. The very bozo who had just distorted a harmless popular ditty to include all known forms of

The New Art

The New Art has many branches,—painting, sculpture, architecture, the stage, literature, and music. In each of these there is a clearly discernible evolution from models; in none is there any trace of that abnormality, or incoherence, which the casual critic is fond of making the subject of tirades against the new order.

It is my purpose to sketch briefly the parallel developments of the New Art in painting, sculpture, music, and literature.

I.

Anyone who takes Art seriously, who understands the development of technique in the last half century, accepts Cézanne and Matisse as he accepts Manet and Monet. But this brings us to the turning point where contemporary criticism becomes, for the most part, rampant abuse, and where prejudice utters its storm of condemnation. I refer to that peculiar phase of modern art called indiscriminately, "Cubism," and "Futurism."

The name Cubism, properly applied, relates to the work of a small group of ultra-modern painters and sculptors who use design to express their personal reaction to the subject, i.e.—what this subject "means" to them,—and who further take this design from geometry. By using an edge in place of a curve a unique tactual value is obtained.

Futurism is a glorification of personality. Every so-called "Futurist" has his own hobby; and there are almost as many kinds of painting as artists. For instance, one painter takes as his subject sounds, another, colors. A third goes back to old techniques; a fourth sees life through a magnifying glass; a fifth imposes an environment upon his subject proper, obtaining very startling effects; a sixth concerns himself purely with motion,—in connection with which it is interesting to note the Japanese painters' wholly unrealistic rendering of the force of a river.

The painter Matisse has been called the greatest exponent of Cubist sculpture. At the 1912 exhibition the puzzled crowd in front of Brancusi's "Mlle. Pogany" was only rivalled by that which swarmed about the painting called "Nude Descending a

a "commencement part", given by the author at Sanders Theatre on the occasion of his graduation from Harvard, and published in the *Harvard Advocate*, June 1915

Staircase." "Mlle. Pogany" consists of a more or less egg-shaped head with an unmistakable nose, and a sinuous suggestion of arms curving upward to the face. There is no differentiation in modelling affording even a hint of hands; in other words, the flow of line and volume is continuous. But what strikes the spectator at first glance, and focusses the attention throughout, is the enormous inscribed ovals, which everyone recognizes as the artist's conception of the subject's eyes. In this triumph of line for line's sake over realism we note the development of the basic principles of impressionism.

II.

Just as in the case of painting, it is a French school which brought new life to music; but at the same time, Germany has the honor of producing one of the greatest originators and masters of realism, Richard Strauss.

The modern French school of music finds its inspiration in the personal influence of César Franck. Debussy, Ravel and Satie all owe much to this great Belgian, who (like Maeterlinck and Verhaeren), was essentially a man of their own artistic nationality.

It is safe to say that there will always be somebody who still refuses to accept modernism in music; quoting in his defense the sovereign innovator, Beethoven! On a par with the sensation produced by the painting and sculpture of the Futurist variety was the excitement which the music of Strauss and Debussy first produced upon audiences. At present, Debussy threatens to become at any moment vulgarly common; while Strauss is fatuous in his clarity beside Schönberg; who, with Stravinsky, is the only god left by the public for the worship of the esthetes.

Erik Satie is, in many respects, the most interesting of all modern composers. Nearly a quarter of a century ago he was writing what is now considered modern music. The most striking aspect of Satie's art is the truly extraordinary sense of humor which prompts one of his subjects, the "sea cucumber," to console himself philosophically for his lack of tobacco.

The "Five Orchestral Pieces" of Arnold Schönberg continue to be the leading sensation of the present day musical world. Their composer occupies a position in many respects similar to that of the author of the "Nude Descending a Staircase." I do not in the least mean to ridicule Schönberg;—no lawlessness could ever have produced such compositions as his,

which resemble bristling forests contorted by irresistible winds. His work is always the expression of something mysteriously terrible,—which is probably why Boston laughed.

I have purposely left until the last the greatest theorist of modern music,—Scriabin. Logically, he belongs beside Stravinsky, as leader of the Russian school. But it is by means of Scriabin that we may most readily pass from music to literature, through the medium of what has been called "sense-transference," as exemplified by the color music of the "Prometheus."

This "Poem of Fire" is the consummation of Scriabin's genius. To quote the Transcript: "At the first performance, by the Russian Symphony Society, on March 20, for the first time in history a composer used a chromatic color score in combination with orchestration. . . . At the beginning of the orchestration, a gauze rectangle in about the position of a picture suspended on the back wall became animated by flowing and blending colors. These colors were played by a 'color-organ' or 'chromola,' having a keyboard with fifteen keys, and following a written score."

III.

The suggestion of an analogy between color and music leads us naturally to the last branch of the New Art,—to wit, literature. Only the most extreme cases will be discussed, such as have important bearing upon the very latest conceptions of artistic expression.

I will quote three contemporary authors to illustrate different phases and different degrees of the literary parallel to sound painting—in a rather faint hope that the first two may prepare the way for an appreciation of the third. First Amy Lowell's "Grotesque" affords a clear illustration of development from the ordinary to the abnormal.

"Why do the lilies goggle their tongues at me
When I pluck them;
And writhe and twist,
And strangle themselves against my fingers,
So that I can hardly weave the garland
For your hair?
Why do they shriek your name
And spit at me
When I would cluster them?
Must I kill them
To make them lie still,

And send you a wreath of lolling corpses
To turn putrid and soft
On your forehead
While you dance?"

In this interesting poem we seem to discern something beyond the conventional. The lilies are made to express hatred by the employment of grotesque images. But there is nothing original in the pathetic fallacy. No one quarrels with Tennyson's lines

"There has fallen a splendid tear
From the passion-flower at the gate"—

Let us proceed further,—only noting in the last three lines that brutality which is typical of the New Art,—and consider the following poem by the same author:

"THE LETTER"

"Little cramped words scrawling all over the paper
Like draggled fly's legs,
What can you tell of the flaring moon
Through the oak leaves?
Or of an uncurtained window, and the bare floor
Spattered with moonlight?
Your silly quirks and twists have nothing in them
Of blossoming hawthorns.
And this paper is chill, crisp, smooth, virgin of loveliness
Beneath my hand.
I am tired, Beloved, of chafing my heart against
The want of you,
Of squeezing it into little ink drops,
And posting it.
And I scald alone, here under the fire
Of the great moon."

This poem is superb of its kind. I know of no image in all realistic writing which can approach the absolute vividness of the first two lines. The metaphor of the chafed heart is worthy of any poet; but its fanciful development would have been impossible in any literature except this ultra-modern.
I shall now quote from a sonnet by my second author, Donald Evans:

"Her voice was fleet-limbed and immaculate,
And like peach blossoms blown across the wind
Her white words made the hour seem cool and kind,
Hung with soft dawns that danced a shadow fête.
A silken silence crept up from the South,
The flutes were hushed that mimed the orange moon,
And down the willow stream my sighs were strewn,
While I knelt to the corners of her mouth."

In the figure "Her voice was fleet-limbed," and the phrase "white words," we have a sought-for literary parallel to the work of the "sound painters." It is interesting to compare Dante's expressions of a precisely similar nature, occurring in the first and fifth cantos, respectively, of the *Inferno*—"dove il Sol tace," and "in loco d'ogni luce muto."

From Donald Evans to Gertrude Stein is a natural step,—up or down, and one which I had hoped the first two might enable us to take in security. Gertrude Stein subordinates the meaning of words to the beauty of the words themselves. Her art is the logic of literary sound painting carried to its extreme. While we must admit that it is logic, must we admit that it is art?

Having prepared the way, so far as it is possible, for a just appreciation, I now do my best to quote from the book "Tender Buttons," as follows:

(1) A sound.

Elephants beaten with candy and little pops and chews all bolts and reckless, reckless rats, this is this.

(2) Salad Dressing and an Artichoke.

Please pale hot, please cover rose, please acre in the red stranger, please butter all the beefsteak with regular feel faces.

(3) Suppose an Eyes * * *

Go red, go red, laugh white.

Suppose a collapse is rubbed purr, is rubbed purget.

Little sales ladies little sales ladies

Little saddles of mutton.

Little sales of leather and such a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful beautiful.

The book from which these selections are drawn is unquestionably a proof of great imagination on the part of the author, as anyone who tries to imitate her work will discover for himself. Here we see traces of realism, similar to those which made the "Nude Descending a Staircase" so baffling. As far as these "Tender Buttons" are concerned, the sum and substance

of criticism is impossible. The unparalleled familiarity of the medium precludes its use for the purpose of esthetic effect. And here, in their logical conclusion, impressionistic tendencies are reduced to absurdity.

The question now arises, how much of all this is really Art? The answer is: we do not know. The great men of the future will most certainly profit by the experimentation of the present period. An insight into the unbroken chain of artistic development during the last half century disproves the theory that modernism is without foundation; rather we are concerned with a natural unfolding of sound tendencies. That the conclusion is, in a particular case, absurdity, does not in any way impair the value of the experiment, so long as we are dealing with sincere effort. The New Art, maligned though it may be by fakirs and fanatics, will appear in its essential spirit to the unprejudiced critic as a courageous and genuine exploration of untrodden ways.

Gaston Lachaise

To get rid altogether of contemporary "sculpture" is perhaps the surest way of appreciating the achievement of Lachaise. This coup of unadulterated intelligence has already been given by Mr. W. H. Wright in four sentences which I lift from the masterly sixth chapter of Modern Painting--

"After Michelangelo there was no longer any new inspiration for sculpture. After Cézanne there was no longer any excuse for it. He made us see that painting can present a more solid vision than that of any stone image. Against modern statues we can only bump our heads: in the contemplation of modern painting we can exhaust our intelligences."

I say masterly, because so long as the author keeps one or more eyes on Cézanne it must be admitted by any intelligent person that his analysis is unspeakably correct. Were the entire book devoted to a consideration of Cézanne our own task would be confined to proving that Lachaise does not produce "modern statues." Unfortunately this is not the case. Elsewhere the author remarks that Swinburne brought the rhymed lyric to its highest development. And at one point he mentions that "the aesthetic possibilities of the human form were exhausted by" his old friend Michelangelo, with which it is a trifle difficult to agree. How about the renowned Pablo? Or, to take two far from colossal geniuses: Lembrach, in his lean girl at the Armory Show (1913), and Brancusi, in his Princesse Bonaparte at the Independent of is it three years past, did something more than exciting. In the first case a super-El Greco-like significance was pitilessly extorted from the human form, in the second the human form was beautifully seduced into a sensual geometry. In his feeling for his material, moreover, Brancusi showed for some time genuine originality. But he reached an impasse very soon. Judging from the recent bumps and buttons at the De Zayas Gallery he is at present as dead as a doornail.

from The Dial, February 1920. E. E. Cummings has long championed the artistry of Gaston Lachaise. For an exhibition of the sculptor's work at the Weyhe Gallery, N.Y.C. (December 27, 1955-January 28, 1956), Mr. Cummings wrote:

"It was many years ago that The reborn Dial saluted Gaston Lachaise. Those years comprise (among other drolleries) a complete reversal of public taste, 'nonobjective art,' once anathematized, being now *de rigueur*. By contrast, the achievement of Lachaise remains passionately and serenely itself—a marvel and a mystery: the spontaneous and inevitable expression of one fearlessly unique human being."