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his view of life is to go on from Kipling and to add the necessary correctives—not to deny what he has shown. After Kipling there is no excuse for the assumption that all the important things in a man's life happen between the end of one day's work and the beginning of the next. There is no good putting on airs about Kipling. The things he mistook for gods may have been only 'spirits of another sort'; but they are real things and strong.

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Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare

We are often compelled to set up standards we cannot reach ourselves and to lay down rules we could not ourselves satisfy.

LORD COLERIDGE, C.J. (Law Reports, Queen's Bench Division XIV, p. 288 in *Reg. v. Dudley and Stephen*)

Philologists often tell us that our language is full of dead metaphors. In this sentence, the word 'dead' and the word 'metaphors' may turn out to be ambiguous; but the fact, or group of facts, referred to, is one about which there is no great disagreement. We all know in a rough and ready way, and all admit, these things which are being called 'dead metaphors', and for the moment I do not propose to debate the propriety of the name. But while their existence is not disputed, their nature, and their relation to thought, gives rise to a great deal of controversy. For the benefit of any who happen to have avoided this controversy hitherto, I had better make plain what it is, by a concrete example. Bréal in his *Semantics*[1] often spoke in metaphorical, that is consciously, rhetorically, metaphorical language, of language itself. Messrs Ogden and Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning* took Bréal to task on the ground that 'it is impossible thus to handle a scientific matter in metaphorical terms'.[2] Barfield in his *Poetic Diction* retorted that Ogden and Richards were, as a matter of fact, just as metaphorical as Bréal. They had forgotten, he complained, that all language has a figurative origin and that the 'scientific' terms on which they piqued themselves—words like *organism*, *stimulus*, *reference*—were not miraculously exempt. On the contrary, he maintained, 'those who profess to eschew figurative expressions are really confining themselves to one very old kind of figure'—'they are absolutely rigid under the spell of those verbal ghosts of the physical sciences, which today make up practically the whole meaning-system

[1] M. J. A. Bréal, *Semantics: studies in the science of meaning*, trans. Mrs Henry Cust, with a Preface by J. P. Postgate (London, 1900).

[2] C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London, 1923), pp. 4–5.

of so many European minds'.* Whether Ogden and Richards will see fit, or have seen fit, to reply to this, I do not know; but the lines on which any reply would run are already traditional. In fact the whole debate may be represented by a very simple dialogue.

A. You are being metaphorical.

B. You are just as metaphorical as I am, but you don't know it.

A. No, I'm not. Of course I know all about *attending* once having meant *stretching*, and the rest of it. But that is not what it means now. It may have been a metaphor to Adam—but I am not using it metaphorically. What I *mean* is a pure concept with no metaphor about it at all. The fact that it *was* a metaphor is no more relevant than the fact that my pen is made of wood. You are simply confusing derivation with meaning.

There is clearly a great deal to be said for both sides. On the one hand it seems odd to suppose that what we *mean* is conditioned by a dead metaphor of which we may be quite ignorant. On the other hand, we see from day to day, that when a man uses a current and admitted metaphor without knowing it, he usually gets led into nonsense; and when, we are tempted to ask, does a metaphor become so old that we can ignore it with impunity? It seems harsh to rule that a man must know the whole semantic history of every word he uses —a history usually undiscoverable—or else talk without thinking. And yet, on the other hand, an obstinate suspicion creeps in that we cannot entirely jump off our own shadows, and that we deceive ourselves if we suppose that a new and purely conceptual notion of *attention* has replaced and superseded the old metaphor of stretching. Here, then, is the problem which I want to consider. How far, if at all, is thinking limited by these dead metaphors? Is Anatole France in any sense right when he reduces 'The soul possesses God' to 'the breath sits on the bright sky'? Or is the other party right when it urges 'Derivations are one thing. Meanings are another'? Or is the truth somewhere between them?

The first and easiest case to study is that in which we ourselves invent a new metaphor. This may happen in one of two ways. It may be that when we are trying to express clearly to ourselves or to others a conception which we have never perfectly understood, a new metaphor simply starts forth, under the pressure of composition or argument. When this happens, the result is often as surprising and

* Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (London, 1928), p. 140.

illuminating to us as to our audience; and I am inclined to think that this is what happens with the great, new metaphors of the poets. And when it does happen, it is plain that our new understanding is bound up with the new metaphor. In fact, the situation is for our purpose indistinguishable from that which arises when we hear a new metaphor from others; and for that reason, it need not be separately discussed. One of the ways, then, in which we invent a new metaphor, is by *finding* it, as unexpectedly as we might find it in the pages of a book; and whatever is true of the new metaphors that we find in books will also be true of those which we reach by a kind of lucky chance, or inspiration. But, of course, there is another way in which we invent new metaphors. When we are trying to explain, to some one younger or less instructed than ourselves, a matter which is already perfectly clear in our own minds, we may deliberately, and even painfully, pitch about for the metaphor that is likely to help him. Now when this happens, it is quite plain that our thought, our power of meaning, is not much helped or hindered by the metaphor that we use. On the contrary, we are often acutely aware of the discrepancy between our meaning and our image. We know that our metaphor is in some respects misleading; and probably, if we have acquired the tutorial shuffle, we warn our audience that it is 'not to be pressed'. It is apparently possible, in this case at least, to use metaphor and yet to keep our thinking independent of it. But we must observe that it is possible, only because we have other methods of expressing the same idea. We have already our own way of expressing the thing: we could say it, or we suppose that we could say it, literally instead. This clear conception we owe to other sources—to our previous studies. We can adopt the new metaphor as a temporary tool which we dominate and by which we are not dominated ourselves, only because we have other tools in our box.

Let us now take the opposite situation—that in which it is we ourselves who are being instructed. I am no mathematician; and some one is trying to explain to me the theory that space is finite. Stated thus, the new doctrine is, to me, meaningless. But suppose he proceeds as follows.

'You', he may say, 'can intuit only three dimensions; you therefore cannot conceive how space should be limited. But I think I can show you how that which must appear infinite in three dimensions, might nevertheless be finite in four. Look at it this way. Imagine a race of

people who knew only two dimensions—like the Flatlanders.[1] And suppose they were living on a globe. They would have no conception, of course, that the globe was curved—for it is curved round in that third dimension of which they have no inkling. They will therefore imagine that they are living on a plane; but they will soon find out that it is a plane which nowhere comes to an end; there are no edges to it. Nor would they be able even to imagine an edge. For an edge would mean that, after a certain point, there would be nothing to walk on; nothing below their feet. But that *below* and *above* dimension is just what their minds have not got; they have only backwards and forwards, and left and right. They would thus be forced to assert that their globe, which they could not see as a globe, was infinite. You can see perfectly well that it is finite. And now, can you not conceive that as these Flatlanders are to you, so you might be to a creature that intuited four dimensions? Can you not conceive how that which seems necessarily infinite to your three-dimensional consciousness might none the less be really finite?' The result of such a metaphor on my mind would be—in fact, has been—that something which before was sheerly meaningless acquires at least a faint hint of meaning. And if the particular example does not appeal to every one, yet every one has had experiences of the same sort. For all of us there are things which we cannot fully understand at all, but of which we can get a faint inkling by means of metaphor. And in such cases the relation between the thought and the metaphor is precisely the opposite of the relation which arises when it is we ourselves who understand and then invent the metaphors to help others. We are here entirely at the mercy of the metaphor. If our instructor has chosen it badly, we shall be thinking nonsense. If we have not got the imagery clearly before us, we shall be thinking nonsense. If we have it before us without knowing that it is metaphor—if we forget that our Flatlanders on their globe are a copy of the thing and mistake them for the thing itself—then again we shall be thinking nonsense. What truth we can attain in such a situation depends rigidly on three conditions. First, that the imagery should be originally well chosen; secondly, that we should apprehend the exact imagery; and thirdly that we should know that the metaphor is a metaphor. (That metaphors misread as statements of fact are the source of monstrous errors need hardly be pointed out.)

[1] The inhabitants in the book by 'A Square' [Edwin A. Abbott], *Flatland. A romance of many dimensions* (London, 1884).

I have now attempted to show two different kinds of metaphorical situation as they are at their birth. They are the two extremes, and furnish the limits within which our inquiry must work. On the one hand, there is the metaphor which we invent to teach by; on the other, the metaphor from which we learn. They might be called the Master's metaphor, and the Pupil's metaphor. The first is freely chosen; it is one among many possible modes of expression; it does not at all hinder, and only very slightly helps, the thought of its maker. The second is not chosen at all; it is the unique expression of a meaning that we cannot have on any other terms; it dominates completely the thought of the recipient; his truth cannot rise above the truth of the original metaphor. And between the Master's metaphor and the Pupil's there comes, of course, an endless number of types, dotted about in every kind of intermediate position. Indeed, these Pupil-Teachers' metaphors are the ordinary stuff of our conversation. To divide them into a series of classes and sub-classes and to attempt to discuss these separately would be very laborious, and, I trust, unnecessary. If we can find a true doctrine about the two extremes, we shall not be at a loss to give an account of what falls between them. To find the truth about any given metaphorical situation will merely be to plot its position. In so far as it inclines to the 'magistral' extreme, so far our thought will be independent of it; in so far as it has a 'pupillary' element, so far it will be the unique expression, and therefore the iron limit of our thinking. To fill in this framework would be, as Aristotle used to say, 'anybody's business'.

Our problem, it will be remembered, was the problem of 'dead' or 'forgotten' metaphors. We have now gained some light on the relation between thought and metaphor as it is at the outset, when the metaphor is first made; and we have seen that this relation varies greatly according to what I have called the 'metaphorical situation'. There is, in fact, one relation in the case of the Master's metaphor, and an almost opposite relation in that of the Pupil's metaphor. The next step must clearly be to see what becomes of these two relations as the metaphors in question progress to the state of death or fossilization.

The question of the Master's Metaphor need not detain us long. I may attempt to explain the Kantian philosophy to a pupil by the following metaphor. 'Kant answered the question "How do I know that whatever comes round the corner will be blue?" by the sup-

position "I am wearing blue spectacles."' In time I may come to use 'the blue spectacles' as a kind of shorthand for the whole Kantian machinery of the categories and forms of perception. And let us suppose, for the sake of analogy with the real history of language, that I continue to use this expression long after I have forgotten the metaphor which originally gave rise to it. And perhaps by this time the form of the word will have changed. Instead of the 'blue spectacles' I may now talk of the *bloospel* or even the *bluspel*. If I live long enough to reach my dotage I may even enter on a philological period in which I attempt to find the derivation of this mysterious word. I may suppose that the second element is derived from the word *spell* and look back with interest on the supposed period when Kant appeared to me to be magical; or else, arguing that the whole word is clearly formed on the analogy of *gospel*, may indulge in unhistorical reminiscences of the days when the *Critique*[1] seemed to me irrefragably true. But how far, if at all, will my thinking about Kant be affected by all this linguistic process? In practice, no doubt, there will be some subtle influence; the mere continued use of the word *bluspel* may have led me to attribute to it a unity and substantiality which I should have hesitated to attribute to 'the whole Kantian machinery of the categories and forms of perception'. But that is a result rather of the noun-making than of the death of the metaphor. It is an interesting fact, but hardly relevant to our present inquiry. For the rest, the mere forgetting of the metaphor does not seem to alter my thinking about Kant, just as the original metaphor did not limit my thinking about Kant; provided always—and this is of the last importance—that it was, to begin with, a genuine Master's metaphor. I had my conception of Kant's philosophy before I ever thought of the blue spectacles. If I have continued philosophical studies I have it still. The 'blue spectacles' phrase was from the first a temporary dress assumed by my thought for a special purpose, and ready to be laid aside at my pleasure; it did not penetrate the thinking itself, and its subsequent history is irrelevant. To any one who attempts to refute my later views on Kant by telling me that I don't know the real meaning of *bluspel*, I may confidently retort 'Derivations aren't meanings.' To be sure, if there was any *pupillary* element in its original use, if I received, as well as gave, new understanding when I used it, then the whole situation will be different.

[1] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason, and other works on the Theory of Ethics*, trans. T. K. Abbott (London, 1879).

And it is fair to admit that in practice very few metaphors can be purely magistral; only that which to some degree enlightens ourselves is likely to enlighten others. It is hardly possible that when I first used the metaphor of the blue spectacles I did not gain some new awareness of the Kantian philosophy; and, so far, it was not purely magistral. But I am deliberately idealizing for the sake of clarity. Purely magistral metaphor may never occur. What is important for us is to grasp that *just in so far* as any metaphor began by being magistral, so far I can continue to use it long after I have forgotten its metaphorical nature, and my thinking will be neither helped nor hindered by the fact that it was originally a metaphor, nor yet by my forgetfulness of that fact. It is a mere accident. Here, derivations are irrelevant to meanings.

Let us now turn to the opposite situation, that of the Pupil's Metaphor. And let us continue to use our old example of the unmathematical man who has had the finitude of space suggested to him (we can hardly say 'explained') by the metaphor of the Flatlanders on their sphere. The question here is rather more complicated. In the case of the Master's metaphor, by hypothesis, the master knew, and would continue to know, what he meant, independently of the metaphor. In the present instance, however, the fossilization of the metaphor may take place in two different ways. The pupil may himself become a mathematician, or he may remain as ignorant of mathematics as he was before; and in either case, he may continue to use the metaphor of the Flatlanders while forgetting its real content and its metaphorical nature.

I will take the second possibility first. From the imagery of the Flatlanders' sphere I have got my first inkling of the new meaning. My thought is entirely conditioned by this imagery. I do not apprehend the thing at all, except by seeing 'it could be something like this'. Let us suppose that in my anxiety to docket this new experience, I label the inkling or vague notion 'the Flatlanders' sphere'. When I next hear the fourth dimension spoken of, I shall say, 'Ah yes—the Flatlanders' sphere and all that.' In a few years (to continue our artificial parallel) I may be talking glibly of the *Flalansfere* and may even have forgotten the whole of the imagery which this word once represented. And I am still, according to the hypothesis, profoundly ignorant of mathematics. My situation will then surely be most ridiculous. The meaning of *Flalansfere* I never knew except through the imagery. I could get beyond the imagery, to that whereof the

imagery was a copy, only by learning mathematics; but this I have neglected to do. Yet I have lost the imagery. Nothing remains, then, but the conclusion that the word *Flalansfere* is now really meaningless. My thinking, which could never get beyond the imagery, at once its boundary and its support, has now lost that support. I mean strictly nothing when I speak of the *Flalansfere*. I am only talking, not thinking, when I use the word. But this fact will be long concealed from me because *Flalansfere*, being a noun, can be endlessly fitted into various contexts so as to conform to syntactical usage and to give an appearance of meaning. It will even conform to the logical rules; and I can make many judgements about the *Flalansfere*; such as *it is what it is*, and has *attributes* (for otherwise of course it wouldn't be a thing, and if it wasn't a thing, how could I be talking about it?), and is a *substance* (for it can be the subject of a sentence). And what *affective* overtones the word may have taken on by that time it is dangerous to predict. It had an air of mystery from the first: before the end I shall probably be building temples to it, and exhorting my countrymen to fight and die for the *Flalansfere*. But the *Flalansfere*, when once we have forgotten the metaphor, is only a noise.

But how if I proceed, after once having grasped the metaphor of the Flatlanders, to become a mathematician? In this case, too, I may well continue to use the metaphor, and may corrupt it in form till it becomes a single noun, the *Flalansfere*. But I shall have advanced, by other means, from the original symbolism; and I shall be able to study the thing symbolized without reference to the metaphor that first introduced me to it. It will then be no harm though I should forget that *Flalansfere* had ever been metaphorical. As the metaphor, even if it survived, would no longer limit my thoughts, so its fossilization cannot confuse them.

The results which emerge may now be summarized as follows. Our thought is independent of the metaphors we employ in so far as these metaphors are optional: that is, in so far as we are able to have the same idea without them. For that is the real characteristic both of the magistral metaphors and of those which become optional, as the Flatlanders would become, if the pupil learned mathematics. On the other hand, where the metaphor is our only method of reaching a given idea at all, there our thinking is limited by the metaphor so long as we retain the metaphor; and when the metaphor becomes fossilized, our 'thinking' is not thinking at all, but mere sound or

mere incipient movements in the larynx. We are now in a position to reply to the statement that 'Derivations are not meanings', and to claim that 'we know what we mean by words without knowing the fossilized metaphors they contain'. We can see that such a statement, as it stands, is neither wholly true nor wholly false. The truth will vary from word to word, and from speaker to speaker. No rule of thumb is possible, we must take every case on its merits. A word can bear a meaning in the mouth of a speaker who has forgotten its hidden metaphor, and a meaning independent of that metaphor, but only on certain conditions. Either the metaphor must have been optional from the beginning, and have remained optional through all the generations of its use, so that the conception has always used and still uses the imagery as a mere tool; or else, at some period subsequent to its creation, we must have gone on to acquire, independently of the metaphor, such new knowledge of the object indicated by it as enables us now, at least, to dispense with it. To put the same thing in another way, meaning is independent of derivation only if the metaphor was originally 'magistral'; or if, in the case of an originally pupillary metaphor, some quite new kind of apprehension has arisen to replace the metaphorical apprehension which has been lost. The two conditions may be best illustrated by a concrete example. Let us take the word for *soul* as it exists in the Romance language. How far is a man entitled to say that what he means by the word *âme* or *anima* is quite independent of the image of *breathing*, and that he means just the same (and just as much) whether he happens to know that 'derivation' or not? We can only answer that it depends on a variety of things. I will enumerate all the formal possibilities for the sake of clearness: one of them, of course, is too grotesque to appear for any other purpose.

1. The metaphor may originally have been magistral. Primitive men, we are to suppose, were clearly aware, on the one hand, of an entity called *soul*; and, on the other, of a process or object called *breath*. And they used the second figuratively to suggest the first—presumably when revealing their wisdom to primitive women and primitive children. And we may suppose, further, that this magistral relation to the metaphor has never been lost: that all generations, from the probably arboreal to the man saying 'Blast your soul' in a pub this evening, have kept clearly before them these two separate entities, and used the one metaphorically to denote the other, while at the same time being well able to conceive the soul unmetaphorically, and

using the metaphor merely as a colour or trope which adorned but did not influence their thought. Now if all this were true, it would unquestionably follow that when a man says *anima* his meaning is not affected by the old image of breath; and also, it does not matter in the least whether he knows that the word once suggested that image or not. But of course all this is not true.

2. The metaphor may originally have been pupillary. So far from being a voluntary ornament or pedagogic device, the ideas of *breath* or *something like breath* may have been the only possible inkling that our parents could gain of the soul. But if this was so, how does the modern user of the word stand? Clearly, if he has ceased to be aware of the metaphorical element in *anima*, without replacing the metaphorical apprehension by some new knowledge of the soul, borrowed from other sources, then he will mean nothing by it; we must not, on that account, suppose that he will cease to use it, or even to use it (as we say) intelligibly—i.e. to use it in sentences constructed according to the laws of grammar, and to insert these sentences into those conversational and literary contexts where usage demands their insertion. If, on the other hand, he has some independent knowledge of the entity which our ancestors indicated by their metaphor of breath, then indeed he may mean something.

I take it that it is this last situation in which we commonly suppose ourselves to be. It doesn't matter, we would claim, what the majestic root GNA really stood for: we have learned a great deal about *knowing* since those days, and it is these more recent acquisitions that we use in our thinking. The first name for a thing may easily be determined by some inconsiderable accident. As we learn more, we mean more; the radical meaning of the old syllables does not bind us; what we have learned since has set us free. Assuredly, the accident which led the Romans to call all Hellenes *Graeci* did not continue to limit their power of apprehending Greece. And as long as we are dealing with sensible objects this view is hardly to be disputed. The difficulty begins with objects of thought. It may be stated as follows.

Our claim to independence of the metaphor is, as we have seen, a claim to know the object otherwise than through that metaphor. If we can throw the Flatlanders overboard and still think the fourth dimension, then, and not otherwise, we can forget what *Flalansfere* once meant and still think coherently. That was what happened, you will remember, to the man who went on and learned mathematics. He

came to apprehend that of which the Flatlanders' sphere was only the image, and consequently was free to think beyond the metaphor and to forget the metaphor altogether. In our previous account of him, however, we carefully omitted to draw attention to one very remarkable fact: namely, that when he deserted metaphor for mathematics, he did not really pass from symbol to symbolized, but only from one set of symbols to another. The equations and what-nots are as unreal, as metaphorical, if you like, as the Flatlanders' sphere. The mathematical problem I need not pursue further; we see at once that it casts a disquieting light on our linguistic problem. We have hitherto been speaking as if we had two methods of thought open to us: the metaphorical, and the literal. We talked as if the creator of a magistral metaphor had it always in his power to think the same concept *literally* if he chose. We talked as if the present-day user of the word *anima* could prove his right to neglect that word's buried metaphor by turning round and giving us an account of the soul which was not metaphorical at all. That he has power to dispense with the particular metaphor of *breath*, is of course agreed. But we have not yet inquired what he can substitute for it. If we turn to those who are most anxious to tell us about the soul—I mean the psychologists—we shall find that the word *anima* has simply been replaced by complexes, repressions, censors, engrams, and the like. In other words the *breath* has been exchanged for *tyings-up*, *shovings-back*, *Roman magistrates*, and *scratchings*. If we inquire what has replaced the metaphorical *bright sky* of primitive theology, we shall only get a *perfect substance*, that is, a *completely made lying-under*, or—which is very much better, but equally metaphorical—a universal Father, or perhaps (in English) a *loaf-carver*, in Latin a *householder*, in Romance *a person older than*. The point need not be laboured. It is abundantly clear that the freedom from a given metaphor which we admittedly enjoy in some cases is often only a freedom to choose between that metaphor and others.

Certain reassurances may, indeed, be held out. In the first place, our distinction between the different kinds of metaphorical situation can stand; though it is hardly so important as we had hoped. To have a choice of metaphors (as we have in some cases) is to know more than we know when we are the slaves of a unique metaphor. And, in the second place, all description or identification, all direction of our own thought or another's, is not so metaphorical as definition. If, when challenged on the word *anima*, we proceed to define, we shall

only reshuffle the buried metaphors; but if we simply say (or think) 'what I am', or 'what is going on in here', we shall have at least something before us which we do not know by metaphor. We shall at least be no worse off than the arboreal psychologists. At the same time, this method will not really carry us far. 'What's going on here' is really the content of *haec anima*: for *anima* we want '*The sort of thing* that is going on here', and once we are committed to *sorts* and *kinds* we are adrift among metaphors.

We have already said that when a man claims to think independently of the buried metaphor in one of his words, his claim may sometimes be allowed. But it was allowed only in so far as he could really supply the place of that buried metaphor with new and independent apprehension of his own. We now see that this new apprehension will usually turn out to be itself metaphorical; or else, what is very much worse, instead of new apprehension we shall have simply words—each word enshrining one more ignored metaphor. For if he does not know the history of *anima*, how should he know the history of the equally metaphorical words in which he defines it, if challenged? And if he does not know their history and therefore their metaphors, and if he cannot define *them* without yet further metaphors, what can his discourse be but an endless ringing of the changes on such *bluspels* and *Flalansferes* as seem to mean, indeed, but do not mean? In reality, the man has played us a very elementary trick. He claimed that he could think without metaphor, and in ignorance of the metaphors fossilized in his words. He made good the claim by pointing to the knowledge of his object which he possessed independently of the metaphor; and the proof of this knowledge was the definition or description which he could produce. We did not at first observe that where we were promised a freedom from metaphor we were given only a power of changing the metaphors in rapid succession. The things he speaks of he has never apprehended *literally*. Yet only such genuinely literal apprehension could enable him to forget the metaphors which he was actually using and yet to have a meaning. Either literalness, or else metaphor understood: one or other of these we must have; the third alternative is nonsense. But literalness we cannot have. The man who does not consciously use metaphors talks without meaning. We might even formulate a rule: the meaning in any given composition is in inverse ratio to the author's belief in his own literalness.

If a man has seen ships and the sea, he may abandon the metaphor

of a *sea-stallion* and call a boat a boat. But suppose a man who has never seen the sea, or ships, yet who knows of them just as much as he can glean, say from the following list of *Kenningar*—sea-stallions, winged-logs, wave-riders, ocean-trains. If he keeps all these together in his mind, and knows them for the metaphors they are, he will be able to think of ships, very imperfectly indeed, and under strict limits, but not wholly in vain. But if instead of this he pins his faith on the particular *kenning*, *ocean-trains*, because that *kenning*, with its comfortable air of machinery, seems to him somehow more safely prosaic, less flighty and dangerous than its fellows, and if, contracting that to the form *oshtrans*, he proceeds to forget that it was a metaphor, then, while he talks grammatically, he has ceased to think of anything. It will not avail him to stamp his feet and swear that he is literal; to say 'An *oshtran* is an *oshtran*, and there's an end. I mean what I mean. What I mean is what I say.'

The remedy lies, indeed, in the opposite direction. When we pass beyond pointing to individual sensible objects, when we begin to think of causes, relations, of mental states or acts, we become incurably metaphorical. We apprehend none of these things except through metaphor: we know of the ships only what the *Kenningar* will tell us. Our only choice is to use the metaphors and thus to think something, though less than we could wish; or else to be driven by unrecognized metaphors and so think nothing at all. I myself would prefer to embrace the former choice, as far as my ignorance and laziness allow me.

To speak more plainly, he who would increase the meaning and decrease the meaningless verbiage in his own speech and writing, must do two things. He must become conscious of the fossilized metaphors in his words; and he must freely use new metaphors, which he creates for himself. The first depends upon knowledge, and therefore on leisure; the second on a certain degree of imaginative ability. The second is perhaps the more important of the two: we are never less the slaves of metaphor than when we are making metaphor, or hearing it new made. When we are thinking hard of the Flatlanders, and at the same time fully aware that they *are* a metaphor, we are in a situation almost infinitely superior to that of the man who talks of the *Flalansfere* and thinks that he is being literal and straightforward.

If our argument has been sound, it leads us to certain rather remarkable conclusions. In the first place it would seem that we must be content with a very modest quantity of thinking as the core of all

our talking. I do not wish to exaggerate our poverty. Not all our words are equally metaphorical, not all our metaphors are equally forgotten. And even where the old metaphor is lost there is often a hope that we may still restore meaning by pointing to some sensible object, some sensation, or some concrete memory. But no man can or will confine his cognitive efforts to this narrow field. At the very humblest we must speak of things in the plural; we must point not only to isolated sensations, but to groups and classes of sensations; and the universal latent in every group and every plural inflection cannot be thought without metaphor. Thus far beyond the security of literal meaning all of us, we may be sure, are going to be driven by our daily needs; indeed, not to go thus far would be to abandon reason itself. In practice we all really intend to go much farther. Why should we not? We have in our hands the key of metaphor, and it would be pusillanimous to abandon its significant use, because we have come to realize that its meaningless use is necessarily prevalent. We must indeed learn to use it more cautiously; and one of the chief benefits to be derived from our inquiry is the new standard of criticism which we must henceforward apply both to our own apparent thought and to that of others. We shall find, too, that real meaning, judged by this standard, does not come always where we have learned to expect. *Flalansfere* and *bluspels* will clearly be most prevalent in certain types of writers. The percentage of mere syntax masquerading as meaning may vary from something like 100 per cent. in political writers, journalists, psychologists, and economists, to something like forty per cent. in the writers of children's stories. Some scientists will fare better than others: the historian, the geographer, and sometimes the biologist will speak significantly more often than their colleagues; the mathematician, who seldom forgets that his symbols are symbolic, may often rise for short stretches to ninety per cent. of meaning and ten of verbiage. The philosophers will differ as widely from one another as any of the other groups differ among themselves: for a good metaphysical library contains at once some of the most verbal, and some of the most significant literature in the world. Those who have prided themselves on being literal, and who have endeavoured to speak plainly, with no mystical tomfoolery, about the highest abstractions, will be found to be among the least significant of writers: I doubt if we shall find more than a beggarly five per cent. of meaning in the pages of some celebrated

'tough-minded' thinkers, and how the account of Kant or Spinoza stands, none knows but heaven. But open your Plato, and you will find yourself among the great creators of metaphor, and therefore among the masters of meaning. If we turn to Theology—or rather to the literature of religion—the result will be more surprising still; for unless our whole argument is wrong, we shall have to admit that a man who says *heaven* and thinks of the visible sky is pretty sure to mean more than a man who tells us that heaven is a state of mind. It may indeed be otherwise; the second man may be a mystic who is remembering and pointing to an actual and concrete experience of his own. But it is long, long odds. Bunyan and Dante stand where they did; the scale of Bishop Butler, and of better men than he, flies up and kicks the beam.

It will have escaped no one that in such a scale of writers the poets will take the highest place; and among the poets those who have at once the tenderest care for old words and the surest instinct for the creation of new metaphors. But it must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting forward the imagination as the organ of truth. We are not talking of truth, but of meaning: meaning which is the antecedent condition both of truth and falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but nonsense. I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition. It is, I confess, undeniable that such a view indirectly implies a kind of truth or rightness in the imagination itself. I said at the outset that the truth we won by metaphor could not be greater than the truth of the metaphor itself; and we have seen since that all our truth, or all but a few fragments, is won by metaphor. And thence, I confess, it does follow that if our thinking is ever true, then the metaphors by which we think must have been good metaphors. It does follow that if those original equations, between good and light, or evil and dark, between breath and soul and all the others, were from the beginning arbitrary and fanciful—if there is not, in fact, a kind of psycho-physical parallelism (or more) in the universe—then all our thinking is nonsensical. But we cannot, without contradiction, believe it to be nonsensical. And so, admittedly, the view I have taken has metaphysical implications. But so has every view.

19

High and Low Brows

Quick, quick.—Fling *Peregrine Pickle* under the toilet—throw *Roderick Random* into the closet—put *The Innocent Adultery* into *The Whole Duty of Man*—cram *Ovid* behind the bolster—there—put *The Man of Feeling* into your pocket—so, so—now lay *Mrs Chapone* in sight, and leave Fordyce's *Sermons* open on the table.

SHERIDAN

Aristotle often begins his argument with what he calls an Isagoge, a collection of instances which is not, if I understand the matter, intended (like Mill's induction) to prove a general principle, but merely to open our eyes to it. The following instances are meant to form such an isagoge.

1. Not many years ago a lady whose studies I was attempting to supervise, propounded a literary theory of general application which I found myself unable to accept. Applying the elenchus after my fashion I inquired whether her theory would cover *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. After a silence of some minutes, she asked me if I thought there was any use in introducing such an example into a serious literary discussion. I replied that *Peter Rabbit* was a book and certainly not so bad a book that it could be left outside the classification 'literature'. The lady, who is as honest as she is learned (and whom I mention here with all respect), was not prepared to call *Peter Rabbit* 'bad'. 'Trivial' was the word she finally fixed on. But she was quite sure that doctrines about 'literature' need not apply to it.

2. I have heard of a preparatory school where the library regulations divide the contents of the library into two classes: Good Books and Books. The boys are allowed to take out two Good Books for every one Book. To read a Good Book is meritorious, to read a Book only tolerable. At the same time, those responsible for the regulations have hesitated to label as 'bad' the books which they thus contrast with the 'good'.

3. I have heard the Head of a great college* praise the novels of Anthony Hope and conclude by declaring with enthusiasm, 'They

* I have learned since that I misunderstood him, but as my Isagoge is meant for pure illustration, not proof, I have thought it no dishonesty to let the example stand.

are the best "bad" books I've ever read.' Here, it will be seen, the word 'bad' is actually used but used in a sense which admits, inside the class Bad, distinctions of good, better, and best.

4. I have often heard—and who has not?—a plain man praise even to rapture the delightful merits of some favourite story and end with the humble reservation, 'Of course, I know it's not real literature.'

I trust that these four instances are already making clear to you what it is I want to discuss. In all of them we see a distinction made between two kinds of book, to the one of which a certain honour is attached, and to the other a certain note of ignominy. Yet in spite of this there is a reluctance to identify this distinction with the plain distinctions of good from bad or better from worse. Those who uphold the distinction prefer to call the inferior class popular, common, commercial, cheap, trashy, or the like, and the superior class literary, classical, serious, or artistic. In our own time the two odious adjectives *Lowbrow* and *Highbrow* have been introduced as the names of the two classes and bid fair to oust all their rivals. There will also be noticed in the first, third, and fourth of my instances a suggestion that the lowbrow works are so different in kind from the highbrow that they have a goodness and badness of their own, a servile virtue and servile vice peculiar to themselves, that they are to be judged by peculiar standards, and that what is said of literature *simpliciter* is not said of them.

Now it seems to me that in this popular distinction there is some confusion between degrees and kinds of merit. If the lowbrow books are really a special kind of book I do not see how they can be inferior to the high. You cannot be beaten by a man unless you enter the same competition with him, nor overtaken by a man (as Chesterton observes) unless you both run in the same direction. At present the distinction is certainly used to allow us the satisfaction of despising certain authors and readers without imposing on us the labour of showing that they are bad. It is also used, I find, to allow people to enjoy lowbrow art without gratitude on the one hand or shame on the other, and those who would hesitate to say, 'Let's go and see something bad' will cheerfully say 'Let's go to a lowbrow film.' The whole distinction seems to be made in order to enable us to have it both ways.

In the following paper I propose two questions. (1) Is the class of lowbrow books (or 'books' simply as at the Preparatory School)

really the class of bad books? (2) If not, is the distinction useful in some other way?[1]

As soon as we approach the first question we notice that even if all the lowbrow books—which I am going to call Class A—are in fact bad, even so the distinction between lowbrow and highbrow—or between class A and class B—will not coincide with the distinction between bad books and good books, for the very obvious reason that class B contains bad books too. *Gorbuduc* and Glover's *Leonidas* and Dyer's *Fleece*, Gabriel Harvey's hexameters and Johnson's *Irene*, Tennyson's tragedies and Southey's epics—all these are classical enough, serious enough, and literary enough, in all conscience. If they entered the school library it would certainly be as Good Books, not as Books. And it will hardly be denied that some of them are bad. In fact, as soon as we look at the question from this point of view, it becomes apparent that class A is not simply the class of bad books. Mere failure does not infallibly give the right of entry to it. If all the books in it are bad it must be with some special sort of badness—an A badness.

But are they all bad? As I have not read the novels of Anthony Hope, I cannot, though my third instance invites me, select them for analysis; but perhaps Rider Haggard will do as well, for his books are certainly in the A class and, in my opinion, some of them are good—are therefore 'good "bad" books' as the Head of that college would say. And of his books I select *She*. If I ask myself why it is that I have more than once read *She* with enjoyment, I find that there is every reason why I should have done so. In the first place the story makes an excellent approach; the central theme is suffered, in the first chapters, to woo us across great distances of space and time. What we are presently to see at close quarters is seen at first, as it were, through the wrong end of the telescope. This is a fine exercise in the art of alluring—you may see the same thing at work in the opening of the *Utopia*, in the second act of *Prometheus Unbound*, and in the early books of the *Odyssey*. In the second place it is a quest story, which is an attractive thing. And the object of the quest combines two strong appeals—it is the 'fountain of youth' theme and the *princesse lointaine* in one. Finally, the withdrawal or conclusion,

[1] Lewis later wrote *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, 1961) in which the 'experiment' consists in judging literature itself by the way men read it. His purpose is, as he says, 'to discover how far it might be plausible to define a good book as a book which is read in one way, and a bad book as a book which is read in another' (p. 1).

which is always the difficulty in quest stories, is effected by unexpected means which are nevertheless, on the author's suppositions, sufficiently plausible. In the conduct of the story the detail is mostly convincing. The characters who are meant to be amiable are amiable and those who are meant to be sinister are sinister. The goodness of *She* is grounded, as firmly as that of any book whatever, on the fundamental laws of the imagination. But there is badness in it as well as goodness. Two things deter us from regarding it as a quite satisfactory romance. One of them is the continuous poverty of the style, by which, of course, I do not mean any failure to conform to certain *a priori* rules, but rather a sloth or incompetence of writing whereby the author is content always with a vague approximation to the emotion, the reflection, or the image he intends, so that a certain smudging and banality is spread over all. The other fault is the shallowness and folly of the things put into the mouth of She herself and offered us for wisdom. That She, in her secular loneliness, should have become a sage, is very proper, and indeed essential to Haggard's story, but Haggard has not himself the wisdom wherewith to supply her. A poet of Dante's depth could have given her things really wise to say; a poet of Shakespeare's address would have made us believe in her wisdom without committing himself.

If my analysis is correct, *She* is not a 'good "bad" book' in the sense of being a good specimen of a bad kind; it is simply good and bad, like many other books, in the sense that it is good in some respects and bad in others. And those who have read it with enjoyment have been enjoying real literary merits, and merits which it shares with the *Odyssey* or *The Life and Death of Jason*. Certainly, it is not a *very* good book, but since its vices are not sufficient to overwhelm its virtues (as the experience of many wiser readers than I has proved) it is better, say, than *Leonidas* or the *Epic of Hades*. In other words, this book of the A class is better than some books of the B class. It is better by every test; it shows more skill in the author and produces more pleasure in the reader; it is more in touch with the permanent nature of our imagination; it leaves those who have read it richer. And with this, the attempt to identify the classes A and B with the classes bad and good or worse and better has surely collapsed.[1]

[1] For more detailed criticism of Haggard's romances see Lewis's essays, 'On Stories' *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (London, 1966), pp. 5 ff. and 'Haggard Rides Again', *Time and Tide*, vol. XLI (3 September 1960), pp. 1044–5.

We must now cast about for some other possible definition of the two classes; and it comes at once into my mind that the lady in my first instance ruled *Peter Rabbit* out as 'trivial'. Perhaps the A class consists of trivial, and the B class of grave, or weighty, or momentous books. I think that those who use the A–B antithesis very often have something of this sort in their mind, but it is difficult to fix the exact sense of any of the words they use to express it. It is clear that the contrast cannot be simply between comic and serious, for then the stories in our Parish Magazine would be labelled B and *Le Misanthrope*, A. It might be argued, no doubt, that Molière's play, though comic, is momentous as touching life at many points and dealing with the depths of our nature, and this might furnish the ground for a restatement of the distinction—B books being 'momentous' in the sense just suggested, while A books touch us only superficially, or concern only highly specialized areas of our consciousness. But this would make *The Importance of Being Earnest* an A. Nor is it clear that all the books already in the A class are thus superficial. They are often accused of being 'sentimental'; and this charge, on inspection, often conceals an admission that their appeal is to emotions very basic and universal—to the same emotions that are concerned in great tragedies. Even Dr Richards's *Boosey Ballad*,* which is not only A but bad simply, has a theme that Petrarch might not have disdained. Indeed, the more I look into it the more I am convinced that any contrast of weighty and frivolous, solid and slight, deep and shallow, must cut right across the A and B distinction. How many of the most perfect things are, after all, trifles! The weighty and frivolous are kinds of literature, and in each kind we shall find good A's, bad A's, good B's, and bad B's. This is not what we are looking for.

Among the lowbrows themselves I find that the distinction is often based on style. When the plain man confesses that the books he delights in are not 'real Literature' he will often, if pressed, explain this by saying that they 'haven't got style' or 'style and all that'. And when the plain man has been captured and made into a pathetically willing and bewildered university student he will sometimes praise the great works which he has dutifully read and not enjoyed, for the excellence of their style. He has missed the jokes in the comedy, remained unmoved by the tragedy, failed to respond to the suggestions of the lyric, and found the episodes of the romance uninteresting;

* See his *Principles of Literary Criticism*, ch. 24.

utterly at a loss to explain the value traditionally set on what has proved to him so tedious, he hands it over to the thing he knows least about, to a mysterious entity called Style, which is to him merely what occult forces were to the old scientists—an *asylum ignorantiae*. He does so because he has a radically false conception of style. He thinks of it not as the linguistic means by which the writer produces whatever results he desires but as a sort of extra—an uncovenanted pedantry tacked on to the book proper, to gratify some specifically 'literary' or 'critical' taste which has nothing to do with the ordinary pleasures of the imagination. It is for him a meaningless addition which, by a convention, gives access to a higher rank—like the letters Esq. after a man's name on an envelope. Now it must be confessed that the highbrows sometimes talk of style in a way which gives their weaker brethren some excuse for such misconceptions; but I think that most of them, in a cool hour, would admit that 'Style', in the sense in which the lowbrow uses the word, does not exist. When we say that the descriptions of country in *She* are marred by their deficiency of style, we do not mean (as the ignorant suppose) that they are good as descriptions but lacking in some abstractly 'literary' and undescriptive grace which might have been superadded; we mean that they are imperfect descriptions; and we call their imperfection 'stylistic' because it is due not to faults in the author's conception but to his careless or insensitive language. A better choice of epithets, and those distant mountains would have stood out sharper on the horizon; a well chosen metaphor, and the whole picture, now dimly discerned through seas of wasteful words, would have printed itself for ever on the inner eye; a nobler rhythm, and the sense of space and movement would have been given us, not left, as it now is, for us to infer. Turn from *She* to almost any page in *Eōthen*, and you will soon see what style in a descriptive passage means. There is no class of books which can be 'good in their own way' without bothering about style. There are books in which what the author is saying imperfectly, partly failing to say, is sufficiently interesting to keep us reading in spite of his failure. Though he has done only half his work, we are content to do some of it for him. Such books are books defective in style. And they do not come only in class A. Scott, Dickens, Byron, Spenser, Alanus, and Apuleius have detestable faults of style, but they are usually put in class B. St Paul, despite some passages of striking beauty, seems to me to write badly, but he is hardly an A; and I have

found in the style of Donne, Chapman, Meredith, Saintsbury, and others, obstacles to the enjoyment of what they have to give me as great as those I find in Rider Haggard. It is not important here that any reader should agree with the instances I am choosing; what matters is the recognition that badness of style (like triviality) will be found in B books. It cannot be made the basis of a dichotomy between two kinds of book.

Another common way of using the distinction tends to fix on 'popular' as the best adjective for class A. 'Popular' art is supposed to aim at mere *entertainment*, while 'real' or 'serious' art aims at some specifically 'artistic' or 'aesthetic' or even 'spiritual' satisfaction. This is an attractive view because it would give those who hold it a ground for maintaining that popular literature has its own good and bad, according to its own rules, distinct from those of Literature proper. The popular novel aiming only at passing the reader's time, the popular comedy content to raise a laugh, and be forgotten, the popular tragedy which only wants to give us 'a good cry', would have their low, separate, legitimate places. And since I observe that many of my highest-browed acquaintances spend much of their time in talking of the vulgarity of popular art, and therefore must know it well, and could not have acquired that knowledge unless they enjoyed it, I must assume that they would welcome a theory which justified them in drinking freely of that fountain without forfeiting their superiority. But there is a troublesome difficulty in this form of the distinction. We know, without going to look, that the Good Books in that preparatory school library would include the novels of Scott and Dickens. But these, in their own day, were popular *entertainment*, best sellers. Some of the contemporary highbrows may retort that they ought never to have been allowed into the B class. I do not agree, but let us concede it. Let us even concede the same about Scott's poems, and about Byron, which were also once A's and are now B's. But what of Fielding, of Malory, of Shakespeare and all his colleagues? Of the metrical romances? Of Ovid, scribbled on the walls at Pompeii? What of Molière, finding the best judge of his work in the old woman who never failed to laugh in the same place as the audience—the audience whom he wrote to please? What, in another art, of Mozart's operas? It is not sufficient to say that a work designed for the popular market may sometimes, by a happy freak, outshoot its mark. The thing has happened too often to be called a

freak. What survives from most ages is chiefly either the work that had some religious or national appeal, or else the popular, commercial work produced for entertainment. I say 'chiefly' because the work of the 'pure' artists is not always ephemeral; a little, a very little, of it survives. But the great mass of literature which now fills class B is the work of men who wrote either piously, to edify their fellows, or commercially, to earn their living by 'giving the public what it wanted'.

This leads to the very interesting conclusion that the B's of one age have most often been the A's of another. We are sometimes warned by the supporters of difficult new movements in literature not to imitate our fathers in stoning the prophets; those who dislike Pound or Joyce are told 'so you would have disliked Wordsworth and Shelley if you had lived then'. The warning may be useful, but clearly it should be supplemented by another—'Beware how you scorn the best sellers of today; they may be classics for the intelligentsia of the Twenty-Third Century.'

If our age is known to posterity not as that of Eliot and Auden but as that of Buchan and Wodehouse (and stranger things have come to pass), Buchan and Wodehouse will then be B's and little boys will get good marks for reading them. Shakespeare and Scott, once A's, are now B's. If we could find what it is that the mere passage of time does to a book, we should have found out something about the real nature of the A and B distinction. And surely, it is obvious that what time does to a book is to make it difficult. There are indeed other operations of time. It makes a book more widely known or spreads on it that rich patina we now enjoy in Virgil or Malory; but neither of these would furnish the basis for a B class since this is to include contemporary books as well. We want a quality which some books have at once but which mere time can confer on books that originally lacked it; and difficulty seems to be the quality required. It would be amusing if difficulty turned out to be the real criterion of Literature, Good Books, or classics—if a comedy which was mere commercial art as long as every one could see the jokes became aesthetic and spiritual as soon as you need commentators to explain them. Yet I think this comes much nearer to the ground of the distinction actually made than any of the hypotheses we have yet discussed.

A distinction simply between easy and difficult books is a reasonable one; and it is certainly better to be able to enjoy both kinds than to

be limited to the easy. A man who has hitherto relished only the easy and now learns to relish the difficult as well, may properly be said to have improved his taste, for enlargement, other things being equal, is improvement. But there is a great difference between improvement in this sense—the mere enlargement of a taste which may already have been perfectly good within its own limits—and improvement in the sense of correction or of conversion from the bad to the good. There is also a great difference between the easy and the bad. No book can be bad because it is easy or good because it is hard: a book may be bad because it is hard. If ease and difficulty is the real antithesis behind the A and B distinction, then the distinction is being widely misused and from the true premise 'it is better to advance to the difficult books (without leaving the easy ones) if you can' some draw the false conclusions that the difficult books are better and that you can advance to them only by leaving the easy ones behind. We shall see presently the psychological causes of this error.

Closely connected with this form of the distinction is that other which makes 'vulgarity' the criterion of an A book. It might be sufficient in answer to this to inquire what sense can possibly be given to the word Vulgar which will apply to the work of Beatrix Potter, John Buchan, George Birmingham, P. G. Wodehouse, 'Somerville and Ross', and a dozen more writers of the A class. But Vulgar is a word so difficult and, in our days, so ubiquitous that perhaps we should examine it more closely. It seems to me to have two principal meanings. In its first sense it is a purely privative term meaning 'not refined', 'not subtle or delicate or many-sided'. What is vulgar in this sense (cf. 'the vulgar tongue') may be perfectly good: to lack refinement or subtlety when refinement or subtlety are not required is no blemish. Thus the line

Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty[1]

is, in its context, good and yet 'vulgar' because it expresses a conception of love neither elevated nor discriminating, and this is all that the song requires. The very same line would be vulgar in a bad sense if any one were absurd enough to put it into the mouth of Launcelot addressing Guinevere after he has broken the bars or Zeus addressing Danae as he merges from the shower of gold. From this point of view we might admit that all A literature is and ought to be irreproachably 'vulgar'. It ought to deal strongly and simply with strong, simple

[1] *Twelfth-Night*, II, iii, 54.

emotions: the directness, the unelaborate, downright portraiture of easily recognizable realities in their familiar aspects, will not be a fault unless it pretends to be something else. If it essays, without delicacy, that which demands delicacy, it will then become faultily vulgar; but the whole art of good A writers stands upon not doing so. But there is a second sense of Vulgar; it may be used to mean something essentially and, in the long run, morally, bad: the base, the mean, the ignoble. These terms themselves are ambiguous, but perhaps an example will make the matter clear. The best instance I know of Vulgarity in this evil sense occurs in Chapman's *Iliad*. Homer has said of the old men on the wall,

Οἱ δ' ὡς οὖν εἶδονθ' Ἑλένην ἐπὶ πύργον ἰοῦσαν,
ἦκα πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἔπεα πτερόεντ' ἀγόρευον.[1]

Chapman translates

when they sawe the powre
Of beautie, in the Queene ascend; euen those *cold-spirited* Peeres,
Those wise, and almost withered men, found *this heate* in their yeares,
That they were forc't (though whispering) to say, &c.[2]

I do not mean, of course, that the suggestion of senile eroticism which Chapman has foisted on the original is in itself and necessarily vulgar; a man might make good lines, whether comic or tragic, even on this subject. But to have let it creep in here of all places, to be unaware of gulfs of difference between this and anything Homer need be supposed to have meant, argues an ungentle heart and a bestial ignorance of the whole hierarchy of human feelings. It is something more than lack of delicacy where delicacy is required (though of course it is that too); it is a fatal, unconscious welcome held out to the lower when the lower has offered to usurp the place of the higher, 'a downward appetite to mix with mud'. And we cannot here avoid such words as Lower and Higher, for Vulgar, in its deeper sense, is really a term of moral reproof. It has nothing to do with the distinction of popular and classic. It is low hearts and not low brows that are vulgar.*

We have now made a fairly determined effort to find some useful

* Another example, more venial, but perhaps even clearer, of such vulgarity, occurs when Dryden renders *Quare agite, o tectis, iuvenes, succedite nostris* (*Aen.* I, 627), 'Enter, my noble guest, and you shall find, If not a costly welcome, yet a kind.' The descent here is to the 'genteel'. Cf. Gavin Douglas's excellent version of the same line.

[1] *Iliad*, III, 154–5.

[2] *Homer Prince of Poets, Translated according to the Greeke, in twelue Bookes of his Iliads* (London, [1610?]), p. 43.

meaning for the separation of literature into the two classes of classical and popular, Good Books and Books, literary and commercial, highbrow and lowbrow, and we have failed. In fact, the distinction rests upon a confusion between degrees of merit and differences of kind. Our map of literature has been made to look like an examination list—a single column of names with a horizontal line drawn across it, the honour candidates above that line, and the pass candidates below it. But we ought rather to have a whole series of vertical lines representing different kinds of work, and an almost infinite series of horizontal lines crossing these to represent the different degrees of goodness in each kind. Thus 'Simple Adventure Story' is a vertical line with the *Odyssey* at the top and Edgar Wallace at the bottom; Rider Haggard, R. L. Stevenson, Scott, William Morris will be placed on horizontal lines crossing 'Adventure Story' at such heights as we may decide. 'Psychological Story' is a separate column, with its own top (Tolstoy or another) and its own bottom. With such a picture in our minds we should avoid the confusion of those who say to a boy, 'You should not read trash like *King Solomon's Mines*. Try Meredith.' Such an exhortation urges him at once to move horizontally, from one kind to another, and vertically, from the less good to the better. But you are also doing something worse; you are instilling into his mind a notion (often henceforward indelible) that the pleasure he already has in not very good books is of a quite different nature from anything he is to expect in 'real literature'—that the latter is something to be read 'in school', an affair of marks and School Certificates and conceit and self-improvement.

I believe that this misconception is likely to grow and to be one day no longer confined to schoolboys. There are many circumstances which encourage it. Until quite modern times the reading of imaginative literature in a man's own tongue was not regarded as meritorious. The great authors of the past wrote to entertain the leisure of their adult contemporaries, and a man who cared for literature needed no spur and expected no good conduct marks for sitting down to the food provided for him. Boys at school were taught to read Latin and Greek poetry by the birch, and discovered the English poets as accidentally and naturally as they now discover the local cinema. Most of my own generation, and many, I hope, of yours, tumbled into literature in that fashion. Of each of us some great poet made a rape when we still wore Eton collars. Shall we be thought immodest if we claim that most of

the books we loved from the first were good books and our earliest loves are still unrepented? If so, that very fact bears witness to the novelty of the modern situation; to us, the claim that we have always liked Keats is no prouder than the claim that we have always liked bacon and eggs.

For there are changes afoot. The growth of English Schools at Universities, the School Certificate, and the Educational Ladder—all excellent things—may yet produce unexpected results. I foresee the growth of a new race of readers and critics to whom, from the very outset, good literature will be an accomplishment rather than a delight,[1] and who will always feel, beneath the acquired taste, the backward tug of something else which they feel merit in resisting. Such people will not be content to say that some books are bad or not very good; they will make a special class of 'lowbrow' art which is to be vilified, mocked, quarantined, and sometimes (when they are sick or tired) enjoyed. They will be sure that what is popular must always be bad, thus assuming that human taste is *naturally* wrong, that it needs not only improvement and development but veritable conversion. For them a good critic will be, as the theologians say, essentially a 'twice-born' critic, one who is regenerate and washed from his Original Taste. They will have no conception, because they have had no experience, of spontaneous delight in excellence. Their 'good' taste will have been acquired by the sweat of their brows, its acquisition will often (and legitimately) have coincided with advancement in the social and economic scale, and they will hold it with uneasy intensity. As they will be contemptuous of popular books, so they will be naïvely tolerant of dullness and difficulty in any quack or sloven who comes before them with lofty pretensions; *all* literature having been as hard to them as that, so much an acquired taste, they will not see the difference. They will be angry with a true lover of literature who does not take pains to unravel the latest poetical puzzle, and call him a *dilettante*. Having obtained the freedom of Parnassus at a great price, they will be unable to endure the nonchalance of those who were free-born.

[1] Those who have read Lewis's autobiography will remember how he lost his literary innocence when, at Malvern College (or 'Wyvern', as he calls it), he began to learn about the glories of literature. He met there, he recalls, 'a world in which a taste for such things was almost meritorious. I felt as Siegfried felt when it first dawned on him that he was not Mime's son. What had been "my" taste was apparently "our" taste ... And if "our" taste, then—by a perilous transition—perhaps "good" taste or "the right taste". For that transition involves a kind of Fall. The moment good taste knows itself, some of its goodness is lost.' (*Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (London, 1955), p. 103.)

The cure for this is not to remove the Educational Ladder, the English Schools, nor the Certificate examinations. If the danger is recognized it can be combated by teaching and by criticism at every point. Those in the predicament I have described can combat it in themselves if they will. A very little attention will soon discover in any 'lowbrow' book what is really good and really bad, and will show us the very same kinds of goodness and badness in books that are lowbrow. A little patience, a little humility, and all will be well. It is the vanity of new acquisitions and the lazy desire for over-simplification which threatens to impound a hundred books, some irredeemably bad, some excellently good, in a class which can be dismissed from criticism. A man ought not to be ashamed of reading a good book because it is simple and popular, and he ought not to condone the faults of a bad book because it is simple and popular. He should be able to say (altering the names to suit his own judgement), 'I read Buchan and Eliot for the same reason, because I think them good; I leave Edgar Wallace and Ezra Pound unread for the same reason, because I think them bad.' It is by no means for the protection of bad books that I wish the distinction of high- and lowbrow abolished. That distinction itself protects bad books. As it robs excellent A books of deserved praise, it teaches its victims to tolerate bad A books. Why was Dr Richards reading a bad book when he had influenza?* Was it not that in his illness he needed an easy book, and having lumped all easy books together as contemptible, he made no further distinctions? That is the usual result of having a pariah class. Slavery, while depressing the slave of noble character, allows the vile slave liberties never conceded to the free servant. Those who most despise the class from which prostitutes are recruited are not necessarily those who abstain from fornication. And indeed, I am often shocked at what slips out sometimes about the recreational reading, the off-duty intellectual amusements, of those who are sternest in their contempt for popular art and demand least pleasure of the art they approve.†

* See *Practical Criticism* (1929), p. 257. I am sorry to have to mention in this context an admission whose candour deserves so much imitation and a critic whose works are almost the necessary starting-point for all future literary theory. But the point is very important, and *magis amica veritas*.

† A full treatment of the subject broached in this essay would demand consideration of the historical theory that there is some peculiarity in our own age really producing an unprecedented cleavage between the Few and the Many, and imposing on popular

taste the need of veritable conversion. My own view is that such a situation exists, but that the Highbrow-Lowbrow distinction is one of the things that have helped to produce it. If the people have never shown less taste for good books, it is also true that those capable of writing good books have seldom taken less pains to please the people, or, indeed, so freely insulted them. There are members of the *intelligentsia* at present (some of them socialists) who cannot speak of their cultural inferiors except in accents of passionate hatred and contempt. Certainly it is fatal to approach this or any other quarrel with the assumption that all the faults are on one side: and just as certainly, in all quarrels the task of conciliation belongs *jure divino* to the more reasonable of the two disputants.