

**Text Extracts from  
Leavis, Wittgenstein, Derrida, Hamann, Traherne, Thomas  
Ogden**

‘The [Shakespeare’s] quickness was essential for the apprehending and registering of subtleties and complexities, and the English language in 1600 was an ideal medium for the Shakespearian processes of thought. Born into Dryden’s age, when ‘logic’ and ‘clarity’ had triumphed, Shakespeare couldn’t have been Shakespeare, and the modern world would have been without the proof that thought of his kind was possible. We should have lacked convincing evidence with which to enforce the judgement that neither Racine nor Stendhal represents the greatest kind of creative writer....

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The point to be stressed is that, whatever was gained by the triumph of ‘clarity’, logic and Descartes, the gain was paid for by an immeasurable loss: you can’t, without basic reservations, subscribe to the assumptions implicit in ‘clear’ and ‘logical’ as criteria without cutting yourself off from the most important capacities and potentialities of thought, which of its nature is essentially heuristic and creative.’ (Leavis, *The Living*

*Principle*, 1975, p. 97)

‘The inherited habit [of mind] is exemplified by the editor’s footnote, in my old Arden *Antony and Cleopatra*, to the following passage (Act III, sc. ii) – for obvious reasons I quote more than the footnote immediately points to:

*Antony*

The April’s in her eyes: it is love’s spring,  
And these the showers to bring it on. Be cheerful.

*Octavia*

Sir, look well to my husband’s house: and –

*Caesar*

Octavia?

*Octavia*

I’ll tell you in your ear.

*Antony*

Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can  
Her heart inform her tongue – the swan’s down-feather  
That stands upon the swell at full of tide,  
And neither way inclines.

The Arden footnote, which regards Antony’s last utterance, runs:

It is not clear whether Octavia’s heart is the swan’s down-feather, swayed neither way on the full tide of emotion at parting with her brother to accompany her husband, or

whether it is the *inaction* of heart and tongue, on the same occasion, which is elliptically compared to that of the feather.

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‘It is not clear’ – it *ought* to be clear; that is the implication. The implied criterion, ‘clarity’, entails an ‘either/or’; does the image mean *this* or *that*? The reductive absurdity of the conception of language behind the criterion thus brought up is surely plain. It wouldn’t be enough to say the image has *both* meanings: no one really reading Shakespeare would ask to which it is, or to what, that ‘the swan’s down-feather’ is meant to apply metaphorically, because it would be so plain that the relevant meaning – the communication in which the the image plays its part – is created by the utterance as a totality, and is not a matter of separate local meanings put together more or less felicitously. The force and precision with which Shakespeare’s English imparts its meaning here depend on the impossibility of choosing one of the scholar’s alternatives as right and the clear inapplicability of the question he puts.

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If I were intent on developing the theme of ‘imagery’ I might say

that ‘the swan’s down-feather’ gives us an image of weight – or lightness (lack of weight) – but I have already made the offer of such a comment absurd. For it is plain that the effective ‘as if’ value depends on our simultaneous sense of the massive swell of the tidal water, and that the effect of both depends on our being made by that word ‘swell’ to feel the ‘full of tide’ as a swell of emotion in ourselves. There is in fact a complex play of diverse and shifting analogy such as one might – for there is no dividing line – find oneself discussing under the head of ‘imagery’, ‘imagery’ conceived of as that which makes the difference between mere discursive thought and what we require of art. But we find ourselves, without any sense of a break, observing that movement plays an essential part in the analogical potency of the passage, and we could hardly be happy in bringing that under ‘imagery’. The part played by movement insists on our noticing it in the opening of the speech, and in the closing clause:

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Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can

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Her heart inform her tongue  
and, after the self-contained ‘standing’ poise of the penultimate line, the lapse into

And neither way inclines.

‘Movement’ here, we note, is determined by the meaning which it

serves and completes.’ (*The Living Principle*, 1975, pp102-3)

‘Of course we can’t escape using analogy. I myself for instance have said that minds meet in meaning – meet in a poem. I don’t in any case think that that use of analogy is open to the objection that the Wittgensteinian expositors’ addicted use is open to – that it exemplifies habits of assumption that make intelligent thought about language impossible. Actually ‘meet’ as I use it focuses an insistence that my book is devoted to conveying – making clear in a diversity of ways the nature of what is pointed to. The meaning is not ‘there’ in space, but, without the possibility of ‘meeting’ in the meaning, there would be no world for us and no reality. That is, the ‘meet’ points, as I insist explicitly, to a unique convergent relation – to such a degree unique that ‘relation’ is hardly a satisfying word, though I can’t think of a better. The possibility of such a meeting is assumed in all discussion, the assumption being so inescapable that it needn’t be conscious. Of that kind of meeting no diagram can be drawn; so the ‘imagery’ with which one tries to call it up into conscious recognition won’t have any tendency towards the diagrammatic.’ (*The Living Principle*, 1975, p. 104)

‘We might then pass [from the metaphor he has just been discussing] to one we have already considered – one that, though it is not more difficult, we recognise immediately as not of Dryden’s kind

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Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can  
Her heart inform her tongue – the swan’s down-feather  
That stands upon the swell at full of tide,  
And neither way inclines.

‘It is not clear whether Octavia’s heart is the swan’s down-feather,

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swayed neither way on the full tide of emotion..... or whether it is merely the *inaction* of heart and tongue..... which is compared to that of the feather.’ [Arden Edition note] Dryden would not have left it not clear. And Dryden could not have evoked the appropriate dramatic feeling with that vividness and particularity. When we try to say in what ways the passage is incomparably superior to anything Dryden could have produced, we have to think of metaphor as something more immediate, complex and organic than neat illustrative correspondence. And as we pass from example to example in *Antony and Cleopatra* it becomes less and less easy to suppose that a neat line can be drawn around the

study. (*The Living Principle*, 1975, p.154)

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‘For images come, in the way in which poems do, *somewhere between full concrete actuality and merely ‘talking about’* [my italics, - that is, between *mimesis* and *diegesis*, combining immediacy with repetition, my comment] – their status, their existence, is of the same order; the image is, in this respect, the type of a poem. In reading a successful poem it is as if, with the type of qualifications intimated, one were living that particular action, situation or piece of life; the qualification representing the condition of the peculiar completeness and fineness of art. (Leavis, *The Living Principle*, 1975, p. 110-111)

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From *Johnson and Augustanism: in The Common Pursuit*

Johnson cannot understand that works of art *enact* their moral

valuations. It is not enough that Shakespeare, on the evidence of his works, 'thinks' (and feels) morally; for Johnson a moral judgement that isn't *stated* isn't there. Further he demands that the whole play shall be conceived and composed as statement. The dramatist must start with a conscious and abstractly formulated moral and proceed to manipulate his puppets so as to demonstrate and enforce it. (Leavis, 1952/1962, p. 110/11)

...even when he is Johnson, whose perception so transcends his training, he cannot securely appreciate the Shakespearean creativeness. He will concede almost unwillingly that here we have 'all the force of poetry, that force which calls new powers into being, which embodies sentiment and animates matter...', but as conscious and responsible critic he knows what has to be said of the Shakespearean complexity:

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It is incident to him to be now and then entangled with an unwieldy sentiment, which he cannot well express, and will not reject; he struggles with it awhile, and if it continues stubborn, comprises it in words such as occur, and leaves it to be disentangled and evolved by those who have more leisure to bestow on it. (*Preface to Shakespeare*)



Johnson, the supreme Augustan writer, is never entangled with an unwieldy sentiment, which he cannot well express; the mode of creation suggested by 'comprising' anything in 'words such as occur' is one the Augustan tradition cannot recognise. (Leavis, 1952/1962, p. 109)

*Two Cultures? The Significance of CP Snow*

“But there is a prior human achievement of collaborative creation, a more basic work of the mind of man (and more than the mind), one without which the triumphant erection of the scientific edifice would not have been possible: *that is, the creation of the human world, including language.*”



Rothko

*On Certainty*

§611. Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic.

§612. I said I would 'combat' the other man, - but wouldn't I give him *reasons*? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)

§613. If I now say "I know that the water in the kettle in the gas-flame will not freeze but boil", I seem to be as justified in this "I know" as I am in *any*. 'If I know anything I know *this*'. - Or do I know with still *greater* certainty that the person opposite me is my old friend so-and-so? And

how does that compare with the proposition that I am seeing with two *eyes* and shall see them if I look in the glass? - I don't know confidently what I am to answer here. - But still there is a difference between cases. If the water over the gas freezes, of course I shall be as astonished as can be, but I shall assume some factor I don't know of, and perhaps leave the matter to physicists to judge. But what could make me doubt whether this person here is N.N., whom I have known for years? Here a doubt would seem to drag everything with it and plunge it into chaos.

§614. That is to say: If I were contradicted on all sides and told that this person's name was not what I had always known it was (and I use "know" here intentionally), then in that case the foundation of all judging would be taken away from me.

§615. Now does that mean: "I can only make judgements at all because things behave thus and thus (as it were, behave kindly)"?

§616. Why, would it be *unthinkable* that I should stay in the saddle however much the facts bucked?

§617. Certain events would me into a position in which I could not go on with the old language-game any further. In which I was torn away from the *sureness* of the game.

Indeed, doesn't it seem obvious that the possibility of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts?

§618. In that case it would seem as if the language-game must '*show*' the facts that make it possible. (But that's not how it is.)

Then can one say that only a certain regularity in occurrences makes induction possible? The 'possible' would of course have to be '*logically possible*'.

§253. 'At the bottom of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded.'

§57. 'Now might not "I *know*, I am not just surmising, that here is my hand" be conceived as a proposition of grammar? Hence *not* temporally - But in that case isn't it like *this* one: "I know, I am not just surmising, that I am seeing red"?

And isn't the consequence "So there are physical objects" like: "So there are colours"?

§102. Might I not believe that once, without knowing it, perhaps is a state of unconsciousness, I was taken far away from the earth - that other people even know this, but do not mention it to me? But this would not fit into the rest of my convictions at all. Not that I could describe the system of these convictions. Yet my convictions do form a system, a structure.

§103. And now if I were to say "It is my unshakeable conviction that etc.", this means in the present case too that I have not consciously arrived at the conviction by following a particular line of thought, but that it is anchored in all my *questions and answers*, so anchored that I cannot touch it.

§104. I am for example also convinced that the sun is not a hole in the vault of heaven.

§105. All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument.

The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life.'

### *Philosophical Investigations*

§398. "But when I imagine something, or even actually see objects, I have got something which my neighbour has not."—I understand you. You want to look about you and say: "At any rate only I have got THIS."—What are these words for? They serve no purpose.— Can one not add: "There is here no question of a 'seeing'—and therefore none of a 'having'—nor of a subject, nor therefore of T either"? Might I not ask: In what sense have you got what you are talking about and saying that only you have got it? Do you possess it? You do not even see it. Must you not really say that no one has got it? And this too is clear: if as a matter of logic you exclude other people's having something, it loses its sense to say that you have it. But what is the thing you are speaking of? It is true I said that I knew within myself what you meant. But that meant that I knew how one thinks to conceive this object, to see it, to make one's looking and pointing mean it. I know how one stares ahead and looks about one in this case—and the rest. I think we can say: you are talking (if, for example, you are sitting in a room) of the 'visual room'. The

'visual room' is the one that has no owner. I can as little own it as I can walk about it, or look at it, or point to it. Inasmuch as it cannot be Any one else's it is not mine either. In other words, it does not belong to me because I want to use the same form of expression about it as about the material room in which I sit. The description of the latter need not mention an owner, in fact it need not have any owner. But then the visual room cannot have any owner. "For"—one might say—"it has no master, outside or in." Think of a picture of a landscape, an imaginary landscape with a house in it.—Someone asks "Whose house is that?"—The answer, by the way, might be "It belongs to the farmer who is sitting on the bench in front of it". But then he cannot for example enter his house.

§399. One might also say: Surely the owner of the visual room would have to be the same kind of thing as it is; but he is not to be found in it, and there is no outside.

§400. The Visual room' seemed like a discovery, but what its discoverer really found was a new way of speaking, a new comparison; it might even be called a new sensation.

§401. You have a new conception and interpret it as seeing a new object. You interpret a grammatical movement made by yourself as a quasi-physical phenomenon which you are observing. (Think for example of the question: "Are sense-data the material of which the universe is made?") But there is an objection to my saying that you have made a 'grammatical' movement. What you have primarily discovered is a new way of looking at things. As if you had invented a new way of painting; or, again, a new metre, or a new kind of song.—

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*Philosophical Investigations* §610.

‘Describe the aroma of coffee.—Why can't it be done? Do we lack the words? And for what are words lacking?—But how do we get the idea that such a description must after all be possible? Have you ever felt the lack of such a description? Have you tried to describe the aroma and not succeeded?’

*Freud and the Scene of Writing* Derrida

‘That the present in general is not primal but, rather, reconstituted, that it is not the absolute, wholly living form which constitutes experience, that there is no purity of the living present—such is the theme, formidable for metaphysics, which Freud, in a conceptual scheme unequal to the thing itself, would have us pursue. This pursuit is doubtless the only one which is exhausted neither within metaphysics nor within science. Since the transition to consciousness is not a derivative or repetitive writing, a transcription duplicating an unconscious writing, it occurs in an original manner and, in its very secondariness, is originary and irreducible. Since consciousness for Freud is a surface exposed to the external world, it is here that instead of reading through the metaphor in the usual sense, we must, on the contrary, understand the possibility of a writing advanced as conscious and as acting in the world (the visible exterior of the graphism, of the literal, of the literal becoming literary, etc.) in terms of the labor of the

writing which circulated like psychical energy between the unconscious and the conscious. The “objectivist” or “worldly” consideration of writing teaches us nothing if reference is not made to a space of psychical writing. (We might say: of transcendental writing in the event that, along with Husserl, we would see the psyche as a region of the world. But since this is also the case for Freud, who wants to respect simultaneously the Being-in-the-world of the psyche, its Being-situated, and the originality of its topology, which is irreducible to any ordinary intraworldliness, we perhaps should think that what we are describing here as the labor of writing erases the transcendental distinction between the origin of the world and Being-in-the-world. Erases it while producing it: the medium of the dialogue and misunderstanding between the Husserlian and Heideggerian concepts of Being-in- the-world.)’

‘Writing is unthinkable without repression. The condition for writing is that there be neither a permanent contact nor an absolute break between strata: the vigilance and failure of censorship. It is no accident that the metaphor of censorship should come from the area of politics concerned with the deletions, blanks, and disguises of writing, even if, at the beginning of the *Traumdeutung*, Freud seems to make only a conventional, didactic reference to it. The apparent exteriority of political censorship refers to an essential censorship which binds the writer to his own writing.

If there were only perception, pure permeability to breaching, there would be no breaches. We would be written, but nothing would be recorded; no writing would be produced, retained, repeated as legibility. But pure perception does not exist: we are written only as we write, by



the agency within us which always already keeps watch over perception, be it internal or external. The “subject” of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is a system of relations between strata: the Mystic Pad, the psyche, society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found. In order to describe the structure, it is not enough to recall that one always writes for someone; and the oppositions sender-receiver, code-message, etc., remain extremely coarse instruments. We would search the “public” in vain for the first reader: i.e., the first author of a work. And the “sociology of literature” is blind to the war and the ruses perpetrated by the author who reads and by the first reader who dictates, for at stake here is the origin of the work itself. The sociality of writing as drama requires an entirely different discipline.’

From Saussure *Course in Linguistics*, quoted by Derrida in *Differance*  
‘Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds *that existed before the linguistic system*, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it.’

Derrida, part of *Differance*

‘So much so that the detours, locutions, and syntax in which I will often have to take recourse will resemble those of negative theology, occasionally even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology. Already we have had to delineate that *différance* is not, does

not exist, is not a present-being (*on*) in any form; and we will be led to delineate also everything that it is not, that is, everything; and consequently that it has neither existence nor essence. It derives from no category of being, whether present or absent. And yet those aspects of *différance* which are thereby delineated are not theological, not even in the order of the most negative of negative theologies, which are always': concerned with disengaging a superessentiality beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastening to recall that God is refused the predicate of existence, only in order to acknowledge his superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being. Such a development is not in question here, and this will be confirmed progressively. *Différance* is not only irreducible to any ontological or theological - ontotheological - reappropriation, *but as the very opening of the space in which ontotheology - philosophy - produces its system and its history, it includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return.*'

Part of *JG Hamann's Letter to I Kant, 1759*

'The Attic philosopher, Hume, needs faith if he is to eat an egg, and drink a glass of water..... If he needs faith for food and drink, why does he deny faith when he is judging of matters that are higher than sensuous eating and drinking.....

If only Hume were sincere, consistent with himself. – All his errors aside, he is like Saul amongst the prophets. I only want to quote one passage that will show one can speak the truth in *jest*, and without awareness or desire, even if one is the greatest doubter, and, like the serpent, wants to doubt even what God said. Here it is: 'the Christian

religion was not only at first attended with miracles, but even today cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity. And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to *custom* and *experience...*’ ”

From T Traherne: *Centuries of Meditations*

‘The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things..... I knew not that they were born or should die; But all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places.’

The very poetically literate psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden, in *Creative Readings: Essays on Seminal Analytic Works*, writes about Winnicott: “What Winnicott has to offer to an analytic reader could not be said in any other way, (which is to say that the writing is extraordinarily resistant to paraphrase).....In recent years I have found that the only way I can do justice to studying and reading Winnicott is to read his papers aloud, line by line, as I would a poem, exploring what the

language is doing, in addition to what it is saying. It is not an exaggeration to say that a great many passages from Winnicott's papers well deserve to be called prose poems. These writings meet Tom Stoppard's (1999) definition of poetry as "the simultaneous compression of language and expansion of meaning" (p. 10)."

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