

June 1961

READING 5a

Last Thursday there was some confusion due to forgetting that these Meetings are not merely for imparting information but are, in themselves, part of the practical training in *Attention!* When we are listening to something here we should be trying to be in a state of attention as near 100% as possible; that is to say, simply listening and absorbing like a sponge. In that way we can actually be in the top room. But what nearly always happens is that old ideas, associations, habits of thought take over so that we fall back again into the basement; and then the conversation goes on in the basement and, of course, confusion follows. What took someone great care to write, because he made efforts (over several days perhaps) to write from the top room, becomes quickly spoiled.

You were introduced to the *practical* interpretation of the symbol of the four-roomed house, for it was explained in terms of *Attention*, and attention can only be practical – it is no good at all having theories about attention. That symbol can be used in many ways – philosophical and theoretical, but the highest of all (and the only one we want to pursue at this stage) is the practical; so you were asked to forget all the rest. If by trying to attend we become aware of the limitations of our own attention, we may understand why works of creative genius are only possible in the top room with 100% attention, and we might digress for a few minutes to give some examples:

1) From Beethoven:

I carry my ideas about me for a long time, often a very long time, before I commit them to writing. My memory is so good that I never forget a theme that has once come to me, even if it is a matter of years. I alter much, reject and try again until I am satisfied. Then, in my head, the thing develops in all directions, and, since I know precisely what I want, the original idea never eludes me. It rises before me, grows, I hear it, see it in all its size and extension, standing before me like a cast, and it only remains for me to write it down, which is soon done when I can find the time; for sometimes I take up other work, though I never confuse that with the other. You will ask where I find my ideas: I hardly know. They come uninvited, directly or indirectly. I can almost grasp them with my hands in the open air, in the woods, while walking, in the stillness of the night, early in the morning, called up by moods which the poet translates into words, I into musical tones. They ring and roar and swirl about me until I write them down in notes.

(Recorded in Alexander Wheelock Thayer's *Life*)

2) From Mozart:

When I am, as it were, completely myself, entirely alone, and of good cheer – say, travelling in a carriage, or walking after a good meal, or during the night when I cannot sleep; it is on such occasions that my ideas flow best and most abundantly. Whence and how they come, I know not; nor can I force them. Most ideas that please me I retain in memory, and am accustomed, as I have been told, to hum them to myself. If I continue in this way, it soon occurs to me how I may turn this or that morsel to account, so as to make a good dish of it, that is to say, agreeable to the rules of counterpoint, to the peculiarities of the various instruments, etc.

All this fills my soul, and, provided I am not disturbed, my subject enlarges itself,

becomes methodised and defined, and the whole, though it be long, stands almost complete and finished in my mind, so that I can survey it, like a fine picture or a beautiful statue, at a glance. Nor do I hear in my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them, as it were, all at once. What a delight this is I cannot tell! All this inventing, this producing, takes place in a lively dream. Still, the actual hearing of the 'tout ensemble' is, after all, the best. What has been thus produced I do not easily forget, and this is perhaps the best gift I have my Divine Maker to thank for.

When I proceed to write down my ideas, I take out of my bag of memory, if I may use that phrase, what has been previously collected into it in the way I have mentioned. For this reason the committing to paper is done quickly enough, for everything is, as I said before, already finished; and it rarely differs on paper from what it was in my imagination. At this occupation I can, therefore, suffer myself to be disturbed; for whatever may be going on around me. I write, and even talk, but only of fowls and geese, and of the children – Gretel or Barkol, or some such matter. But why my productions take from my hand that particular form and style that makes them Mozartish, and different from the works of other composers, is probably owing to the same cause which renders my nose so large or so aquiline, or in short, makes it Mozart's, and different from those of other people. For I really do not study or aim at any originality.

(Sitwell's *Mozart*, p.151. Letter to a certain Baron)

3) From *Inspiration and Poetry*:

In these rapturous moments inspiration and criticism may seem an oddly assorted pair, but it is a remarkable fact that the greatest poets are usually able to combine them. Good evidence comes from Pushkin, who in the very frenzy of creation, when words and ideas were galloping through his mind, was able to apply a relentless criticism and selection and to reduce everything to a serene and flawless harmony. A friend describes his manner of work:

'He used to write hundreds of lines in a day. If he did not happen to arrange his thoughts in verse, he expressed them in prose. Then he corrected what he had written, sometimes suppressing three-quarters of the first version. I have seen in his possession sheets of paper so crossed out that it was impossible to decipher anything above the erased lines, in such a way that one did not find a single clean space on the paper.'

Pushkin's manuscripts confirm this account. Since he composed with great speed, it is clear that in his case inspired energy was countered and disciplined almost simultaneously by an extremely sharp critical sense, and we can understand why he himself insisted that the impulse to write is properly called 'enthusiasm' and the critical activity 'inspiration'. In his case the two were so closely associated that it is hard to distinguish between them, and the work of correction is certainly quite as inspired as the first onrush of words and ideas.

It is tempting to see in Pushkin's method a clue to Shakespeare's, of which we know little more than Ben Jonson's often-quoted words:

'I remember, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare that in his writing, (whatsoever he penn'd), hee never blotted out line. My answer hath beene: "Would he had blotted a thousand!" Which they thought a malevolent speech.'

That Shakespeare wrote his plays in an inspired rush of energy we can hardly doubt. And though, of course, he may not always write at the top of his powers, he maintains an astonishing, an incredible, level. That he did not work like Pushkin is clear enough. Jonson's word is final against it. But it is at least likely that with him the creative activity

was so closely connected with a critical sense, and with a clear idea of what he wanted to say, and what was worth saying, that in the very act of shaping words in his head, he did the same kind of thing that Pushkin did on paper.

(Sir Maurice Bowra's *Inspiration and Poetry*)

4) From Shelley:

Poetry is not like reasoning... A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconsistent wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure...

(Shelley's *A Defense of Poetry*)

5) Painting:

I have spent long hours gazing at Velazquez's final masterpiece (Las Meniñas – well hung in a room by itself at the Prado and often cited as the 'first Impressionist painting'); it's clear that into this picture Velasquez put the whole of his artistic experience; that it was painted very rapidly; yet every brush stroke counts and no part of it could have been rubbed out or repainted. For the hands of the artist and of the maids of honour, and the portraits of the King and Queen in the mirror, a few deft strokes suffice. (See also Sir Kenneth Clark's *Looking at Pictures*.)

Try, if it interests you, to find other first-hand examples of the creative process.

But we were saying that, if one isn't a genius, it is no good trying to get to that top room only by direct effort. It would be like trying to earn a living by hoping to pick up money in the street. For us, that top room only becomes available when we have established connection with the Fourth Room. This is the measure of the following passage (St. Luke 12: 35):

Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord when he will *return from the wedding*; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching... And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

It is on 'return from the wedding' that 100% attention becomes possible and the first experiences are always when you least expect it, just as the moments of inspiration are completely unexpected for the creative artist.

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But now, what about this wedding to which the Gospels are full of reference, just as in the East there are so many references to Yoga or *Union*? To bring about this wedding special methods are necessary. In times past it was considered necessary to renounce everything, to give up career and family, even one's name and all one's *external* possessions, and live for many years as a hermit or in a monastery. Such methods as continuous internal prayer combined with bowing to the ground, fasting, the minimum of sleep and two-hourly religious rituals day and night had to be observed. But now, over the last fifteen months we have been testing a method

which can give the same results in a far shorter time and in the midst of ordinary life; and we have proved its efficacy. But it is left for the individual to take advantage of it or not – that is his private concern.

Without being specific, we can describe *in general how such a method could work*. Suppose for a short period each day we could renounce everything so that there is a complete emptiness, complete silence of the heart, complete nothingness. Then, since Nature abhors a vacuum, the miraculous energy from those Higher Centres in the Fourth Room would rush in through that narrow doorway and the wedding would take place. I have told you that one must ‘travel light’, one requires something upon which to focus the mind, but even the shortest possible prayer is too complicated, too heavy. That, in brief, is the principle underlying this method.

Once the wedding has taken place then the practice of full attention becomes a natural, effortless thing, and all the rooms in the house become available to us as required – much of what we do is best done mechanically, but some things we want to do require 100% attention.

Now let me repeat, the method is not for discussion here; if anyone wants it let them write to me a letter marked ‘personal’. It is understood that it is most successful when it comes at the right moment – when the individual is ready for it.

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