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Kant and the cognitive value of poetry

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ABSTRACT

In light of Kant's conception of taste, it is rather natural to assume that our aesthetic appreciation of artworks should focus on their formal features. As a matter of fact, Kant acknowledges that part of the significance that beauty and art have for us depends on their relationship to central interests of reason. Nevertheless, he seems to draw a clear distinction between aesthetic value and other kinds of value, such as cognitive and moral value. Therefore, it might seem that art cannot have (and should not be experienced as having) any further end beyond the pleasure of reflection. For this reason, Kant would be an autonomist. However, in this paper I argue that careful consideration of how Kant describes the *experience* triggered by artworks reveals that he is actually an aesthetic cognitivist, though a moderate one. I suggest that the distinctive kind of pleasure that artists aim at producing, and the audience seeks to enjoy, can be achieved only if artworks embody representations of the imagination that occasion processes of thought. Even if artists' intentions and the audience's expectations in approaching an artwork are not cognitive, it seems that the appreciation of form cannot be isolated from significance, and that cognitive value contributes to the overall artistic value of a work. In the paper, I defend this claim with regard to poetry, but argue that it can be extended, to different degrees, to other arts.

KEYWORDS

Kant, Baumgarten, Poetry, Aesthetic Ideas, Aesthetic Cognitivism, Imagination

In his *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790),[1] Kant famously states that fine art has "the reflecting power of judgment […] as its standard".[2] He emphasizes the relevance of the formal features of artworks for our appreciation of them as beautiful and insists that the aesthetic evaluation of a work is not cognitive in nature.[3]

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[1] Throughout the paper, Kant's works are quoted using the standard abbreviations, followed by volume and page number of the Akademie Ausgabe (AA), using the translations of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the *Lectures on Logic* and the *Lectures on Anthropology* (where provided) from the Cambridge Edition of Kant's Works (Cambridge University Press).

[2] KU § 44, AA 05: 306.

[3] Cf. KU 1 and § 15.

Although he acknowledges that part of the significance that beauty and art have for us depends on their relation to central interests of reason,[4] he seems to draw a clear distinction between aesthetic value and other kinds of value, such as cognitive and moral value. It is therefore natural to read his claim that "beautiful art must be free" and that the mind, in contemplating it, "must feel itself to be satisfied and stimulated […] without looking beyond to another end"[5] as meaning that art cannot have (and should not be experienced as having) any further end beyond the pleasure of reflection. In other words, it is natural to characterize Kant's stance as autonomist. In this paper, I will argue against this interpretation by suggesting that careful consideration of how he describes the *experience* triggered by artworks reveals that Kant is actually an aesthetic cognitivist. Considering him as such does not contradict his claim that what is essential in all beautiful art consists in form; indeed, it allows us to make sense of one of his further claims, namely that taking pleasure in a beautiful form "is at the same time culture and disposes the spirit to ideas".[6]

If Kant is an aesthetic cognitivist, then he is surely a moderate one.[7] In his view, artists aim to create beautiful representations of things[8] through the specific medium of their art, and the audience seeks a distinctive kind of pleasure from artworks; it attends to them with the expectation that they will afford a pleasure that animates the mind and its cognitive powers.[9] The point is that

[4] Cf. KU §§ 42, 52, 59.

[5] KU § 51, AA 05: 321.

[6] KU § 52, AA 05: 326.

[7] With the expression 'aesthetic cognitivism' I roughly mean a general conception of artistic value that attempts to explain (i) one way in which art can be of value – i.e. by having, in addition to aesthetic merit, cognitive content – and (ii) the importance of this way of being of value. According to aesthetic cognitivism, art, when at its best, is also a form of understanding. It has (or conveys) cognitive content or prompts cognitive activity. I do not assume that art can give us propositional knowledge, if by this we mean the kind of knowledge at issue in science, since it is hard to believe that art can support its claims with empirical evidence that validates them. Nevertheless, art can improve and refine other kinds of knowledge, such as conceptual, phenomenal, and practical knowledge. Furthermore, it is prudent to avoid generalizations and to limit the claim by saying that some people can learn from some works of art. I have used the expression 'art at its best', as only works of a certain quality – in Kant's terms, "works of genius" – are likely to be epistemically valuable, and our experience of them can foster cognitive abilities and virtues. Aesthetic cognitivism involves a further element, namely the idea that the cognitive value of a work contributes to its value *qua* art. Therefore, aesthetic cognitivism puts forward two claims: (i) the epistemic claim that something can be learned from (some) works of art, or that they can improve or refine our conceptual, perceptual, imaginative, etc., abilities, and (ii) the aesthetic claim that the possible cognitive value of a work of art contributes to its artistic value.

[8] Cf. KU § 48.

[9] Cf. KU § 12.

artists can achieve this aim only if their works embody "ideas, which are fantastic and yet at the same time rich in thought".[10] Assuming that the audience's expectations when approaching an artwork are not cognitive, it therefore seems that the appreciation of form cannot be isolated from significance, from expression. This suggests that artworks may also have cognitive value and that this value contributes to their overall artistic value – or at least this is what I will argue here. More precisely, my claim is that in (good) artworks, both aesthetic and cognitive value are present and interact, since both depend on aesthetic ideas, that is, representations of the imagination that, according to Kant, are embodied and expressed by good artworks.

In this paper, I will defend this claim with regard to poetry, the art to which Kant attributes "the highest rank of all",[11] but I assume that it can be extended, to different degrees, to other arts. The paper proceeds as follows. I begin by sketching the conceptions of poetry and aesthetic ideas presented in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (section 1). I then elaborate on a notion connected to that of aesthetic ideas, namely the notion of spirit, and briefly trace the background of Kant's conception of aesthetic ideas, which can be found in Baumgarten's aesthetics (section 2). In section 3, I deal, if very briefly, with Baumgarten's conception of the cognitive role of poetry and with Kant's comments on it (or on Meier's version of it) in his lectures on anthropology and logic (section 3). When we fully appreciate the careful reading that these latter texts require, their value as sources of observations on poetry becomes clear.[12] Finally, I return to the third *Critique* and the cognitive benefits of poetry (section 4).

[10] KU § 47, AA 05: 309.

[11] KU § 53, AA 05: 326.

[12] Kant gave lectures on logic and anthropology, commenting, respectively, on Baumgarten's *Psychologia empirica*, that is, §§ 504-739 of his *Metaphysica* (1739), and on Georg Friedrich Meier's *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* (1752) (Meier was Baumgarten's pupil and successor in Halle). As Allen W. Wood and Robert B. Louden (the editors of the *Lectures on Anthropology*) note, it is worth considering the transcripts of these lectures, problematic though this material may be, insofar as the anthropology was "the principal site of the development" of Kant's view on aesthetics (I. Kant, *Lectures on logic*, Eng. trans. and ed. by J.M. Young, Cambridge University Press, New York 1992, p. 10). Moreover, aesthetic issues were also discussed in courses on logic, given the conception of aesthetics developed by Baumgarten, who also called it a "gnoseologia inferior" or "ars analogi rationis", as a "scientia cognitionis sensitivae" (A.G. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, Olms, Hildesheim 1961 (anastatic reprint of the edition Frankfurt 1750), § 1, p.1).

1. *Poetry in the Kantian System of Arts*

Kant's examination of poetry is developed in the context of a division of the beautiful arts into different kinds – a set of distinctions that he describes "as an experiment", asking his reader to judge his proposal not "as if it were a deliberate theory" but as "only one of the several experiments that still can and should be attempted".[13] In this "experiment", he begins with a definition of beauty as "the expression of aesthetic ideas".[14] This justifies his division of the arts according to an analogy between art and "the kind of expression that people use in speaking in order to communicate to each other, i.e., not merely their concepts, but also their sensations". As this expression consists "in the word, the gesture, and the tone (articulation, gesticulation, and modulation)", the suggestion is that types of beautiful art can be connected to each of these aspects. Thus we have "the art of speech, pictorial art, and the art of the play of sensations (as external sensory impressions)", namely music and the art of colors.[15] In this tentative division, poetry, together with rhetoric, belong to the "arts of speech": Rhetoric, Kant claims, "is the art of conducting a business (*Geschäft*) of the understanding as a free play of the imagination; poetry that of carrying out a free play of the imagination as a business of the understanding". Shifting from the art to the artist, he then adds: "the orator […] announces a matter of business and carries it out as if it were merely a play with ideas in order to entertain the audience. The poet announces merely an entertaining play with ideas, and yet as much results for the understanding as if he had merely had the intention of carrying on its business".[16]

Interestingly, even though Kant acknowledges the formal differences between poetry and rhetoric (in particular, poetry's use of verse),[17] he does not distinguish between them on this basis, instead

[13] KU § 51, AA 05: 321.

[14] KU § 51, AA 05: 320.

[15] On Kant's division of the arts, see S. Mathisen, 'Kants System der schönen Künste (§§ 51-54)', in O. Höffe (ed.), *Immanuel Kant. Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2008, pp. 173-188.

[16] KU § 51, AA 05: 320-321.

[17] On this see A.C. Ribeiro, *Intending to Repeat: A Definition of Poetry*, in "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", 65, 2, 2007, pp. 189-201. Kant clearly does not overlook the role of prosody. Precisely to the contrary, he claims that each poem requires two things, namely "syllabic meter (*Sylbenmaas*)" – that is, the dynamic relation between sounds, through which poetry imitates music – and "rhyme (*Reim*)". He was perfectly aware that the quantity of syllables is less determined in modern languages, and this contributed to the importance given to rhyme: "Rhyme is a melody, but only in the West", where it is now "indispensable[,] for we have no orderly prosody, but instead can arbitrarily use various words. Hence rhyme serves to give our verses more interconnection.

focusing on the distinct aims pursued by each art. The orator "announces a matter of business"; his aim, one can conjecture, is to instruct, to produce some sort of belief, but in order to entertain the audience, he carries it out "as if it were merely a play with ideas".[18] By contrast, the poet aims at "a mere play with ideas, but accomplishes something that is worthy of business, namely providing nourishment to the understanding in play, and giving life to its concepts through the imagination".[19]

Thus a cognitive effect seems to be built into Kant's very definition of poetry: although the poet's aim is not a cognitive one, his work provides "food" for the understanding while it entertains it. This becomes even clearer if we consider why Kant, when comparing the aesthetic value of the various beautiful arts, attributes "the highest rank of all" to poetry. On his view, poetry

> expands the mind by setting the imagination free and presenting, within the limits of a given concept and among the unbounded manifold of forms possibly agreeing with it, the one that connects its presentation with a fullness of thought to which no linguistic expression is fully adequate, and thus elevates itself aesthetically to the level of ideas. It strengthens the mind by letting it feel its capacity to consider and judge of nature, as appearance, freely, self-actively, and independently of determination by nature, in accordance with points of view that nature does not present by itself in experience either for sense or for the understanding, and thus to use it for the sake of and as it were as the schema of the supersensible. It plays with the illusion which it produces at will, yet without thereby being deceitful; for it itself declares its occupation to be mere play, which can nevertheless be purposively employed by the understanding for its own business.[20]

Rhyme also helps the memory". However, Kant acknowledged that it is also possible to compose (*dichten*) without rhyme and "syllabic measure". This is the case with "poetic prose" (V-Anth/Mron, AA 25: 1282; cf. also V-Anth/Mensch, AA 25: 992; Anth § 71, AA 07, 248).

[18] According to Kant, thanks to his "skill in speaking (eloquence and style)" and "a lively presentation in examples" (KU § 53, AA 05: 327), the orator both provides something that he has not promised, namely "an entertaining play of the imagination", and takes something away from what he has promised, namely "the purposive occupation of the understanding" (KU § 51, AA 05: 321). Rhetoric is a fine art through a kind of failure, that is, in providing less than it promises. If on the one hand rhetoric can degenerate into the art of "deceiving by means of beautiful illusion" (KU § 53, AA 05: 327), on the other hand it can find a kind of artistic redemption when it is combined "with a painterly presentation of its subjects as well as objects in a *play*". For Kant, this is one of those combinations thanks to which "beautiful art is all the more artistic" (KU § 52, AA 05: 326). In a play, the action is often portrayed through the expression of the characters' thoughts and feelings in eloquent discourses that follow "the rules of euphony in speech" and show "propriety in expression" (KU § 53, AA 05: 327).

[19] KU § 51, AA 05: 321.

[20] KU § 53, AA 05: 326-327. A further reason for the high ranking of poetry could be the following. Introducing the principle of his division of the arts, Kant observes that "only the combination" of words, gesture and tone "constitutes the speaker's complete communication. For thought, intuition, and sensation are thereby conveyed to the other simultaneously and united" (KU § 51, AA 05: 320). As we will see, poetic language also has figurative and musical features. Therefore, poetry can come close to complete com-

He puts forward three reasons for poetry's high standing, and the reader of the third *Critique* will immediately notice that the phrasing of the first two follows the description of aesthetic ideas offered just before, in § 49, where Kant claims that "the faculty of aesthetic ideas can reveal itself in its full measure" in the art of poetry.[21] Kant clearly views the value of poetry as being rooted in its particular connection to aesthetic ideas. The third reason mentioned by Kant indirectly explains the distinction between poetry and rhetoric, understood as the deceptive "art of persuasion",[22] since it suggests that poetry produces representations that, while perhaps untrue, are not falsehoods. I will return to this point in section 3. For now, I wish to turn to a notion that is clearly crucial to Kant's conception of poetry, namely that of aesthetic ideas.

1.1 *Poetry and Aesthetic Ideas*

To introduce the notion of aesthetic ideas, I wish to recall a further clue that Kant provides regarding the connection between poetry and these ideas, namely his statement that poetry "owes its origin almost entirely to genius".[23] This claim is interesting because, according to Kant, one can explain this creative talent "in terms of the faculty of aesthetic ideas".[24] Genius, he states,

> really consists in the happy relation, which no science can teach and no diligence learn, of finding ideas for a given concept on the one hand and on the other hitting upon the expression for these, through which the subjective disposition of the mind that is thereby produced, as an accompaniment of a concept, can be communicated to others.[25]

Kant observes that genius is a natural gift – a talent that, although it must be trained, depends not on learning but on the subject's disposition[26] and involves two interrelated abilities: a creative talent of the imagination for finding ideas, and an expressive

munication on the part of the (poetic) speaker. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), Kant points out that poetry wins the prize "over rhetoric" because it is "at the same time music (singable) and tone; a sound that is pleasant in itself, which mere speech is not". But, he adds, "poetry wins the prize […] over every other beautiful art" because "poets also speak to the understanding […]. A good poem is the most penetrating means of enlivening the mind" (Anth § 71, AA 07: 247).

[21] KU § 49, AA 05: 314.
[22] KU § 53, AA 05: 327.
[23] KU § 53, AA 05: 326.
[24] KU § 57 Anm. I, AA 05: 344.
[25] KU § 49, AA 05: 317.
[26] Cf. KU §§ 46-47.

ability. This latter talent, Kant explains, "is really that which is called spirit".[27] I will address this notion below. For now, let us focus on the first aspect of genius.

To understand the first part of the passage just quoted, we should recall that beautiful art is a kind of intentional activity.[28] Not unlike the artisan, the (fine) artist pursues an end, e.g. dealing with a certain theme, by constructing a verbal artifact (e.g. by writing a poem) with certain formal features, or by painting a landscape, etc. If what is called 'a given concept' in the passage is just the artist's end, then finding ideas for the presentation of that concept lies at the core of artistic creation. The 'ideas' in question are aesthetic ideas, which Kant describes as follows:

> In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations (*Teilvorstellungen*) in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language.[29]

The passage is rich and complex, as Kant seems to shift between the point of view of the artist and that of the audience. The former seems to be at issue when he speaks, as in the passage on genius quoted at the beginning of this section, of a disposition of the mind that is produced when one finds ideas for a given concept; the latter is suggested in the lines just quoted. Here, Kant speaks of a feeling that is connected to the flow of representations, resulting from the aesthetic idea associated with a given concept by the imagination, namely (if I am not mistaken), with the concept that the artist wants to present (or to deal with) through the medium of her art. Kant points out that the representation of the imagination belongs to the presentation of the concept; however, it is not a mere intuition corresponding to it, as an exemplification of a concept usually is. In fact, he emphasizes that in presenting the concept, this representation occasions further thinking, without its being possible for any concept, "to be adequate to it": It occasions a process of thinking which, Kant claims, "no language fully attains or can make intelligible",[30] whence the "much that is unnameable" that is added to the (given) concept.

[27] KU § 49, AA 05: 317.

[28] Cf. KU Einl. VIII, AA 05: 193, §§ 43-44 and § 47, AA 05: 310.

[29] KU § 49, AA 05: 316.

[30] KU § 49, AA 05: 314. In § 57, Kant will specify that an aesthetic idea is "an intuition (of the imagination) for which a concept can never be found adequate" (KU § 57, AA 05: 342).

The quote above also suggests that the triggering of much thinking by the aesthetic idea depends on the manifold of partial representations with which it is combined in the free use of the imagination, namely when the imagination is not used for cognition. I take a partial representation to be part of the manifold contained in a representation of (the concept of) something, considered as the whole. As such, it can prompt associations, combinations of thoughts, etc., that do not solidify in a presentation (*exhibition*) of a concept. A similar point is made by Kant, taking from the vocabulary of art treatises the notion of an "attribute":

> Those forms which do not constitute the presentation of a given concept itself, but, as supplementary representations (*Nebenvorstellungen*) of the imagination, express only the implications connected with it and its affinity with others, are called (aesthetic) *attributes* of an object whose concept, as an idea of reason, cannot be adequately presented. Thus Jupiter's eagle, with the lightning in its claws, is an attribute of the powerful king of heaven, as is the peacock of the splendid queen of heaven. They do not, like *logical attributes*, represent what lies in our concepts of the sublimity and majesty of creation, but something else, which gives the imagination cause to spread itself over a multitude of related representations, which let one think more than one can express in a concept determined by words; and they yield an *aesthetic idea*, which serves that idea of reason instead of logical presentation, although really only to animate the mind by opening up for it the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations.[31]

Kant first offers a definition and then an example to explain it. Jupiter's eagle clarifies that aesthetic attributes are representations that do not constitute the presentation of a given concept; namely, they are not the object given in intuition, which corresponds to it; they only express the implications of the concept at issue or its affinity with other concepts. In fact, the representation 'eagle' does not belong to the concept of a deity; associated with this concept, however, it may recall the idea of regality, which is contained in or connected to it and is one of its logical attributes, along with power and justice, which the lightning in the eagle's claws – the lightning bolts of retribution – may evoke, suggesting both the rapidity and the unpredictability with which the eagle swoops down on its prey, and through it how divine punishment may strike.[32] Moreover, the

[31] KU § 49, AA 05: 315.

[32] Logical attributes represent "what lies in our concepts". Kant also calls them 'marks', meaning "that in a thing which constitutes a part of the cognition of it, or – what is the same – a partial representation (*Partialvorstellung*), insofar as it is considered as ground of cognition of the whole representation" (Log, AA 09: 58). Aesthetic attributes "go alongside (*zur Seite gehen*)" (KU § 49, AA 05: 315) logical ones: the imagination produces them in addition to logical attributes; they are associated with them but, as the eagle example clarifies, do not contribute to the presentation of the concept, the content of which is constituted by logical attributes.

lightning could recall the light of creation that breaks the darkness and thereby God's creative presence in the world, etc.[33] Kant presumably expected his readers to be able to spell out these and many other associations through which, he claims, we can approximate a presentation of the rational idea of divinity[34] or yield the aesthetic idea that serves it "instead of logical presentation".[35]

According to the passage under consideration, aesthetic attributes yield an aesthetic idea by inviting the imagination to spread itself over a multitude of related representations that make one think more than can be conceptually grasped. A final point to note is that, although Kant claims that an aesthetic idea may serve an idea of reason "instead of logical presentation", he suggests that its main function is that of animating the mind, which it does precisely "by opening up for it the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations".[36] He thereby seems to suggest that what may appear to be a cognitive function of these representations of the imagination is actually only an aesthetic one. As we will see, however, this is not his last word on the subject.

For the purposes of this paper, it is worth recalling an important remark in the lines that immediately follow. Kant claims that an effect on the mind such as that just described is occasioned not only in painting or sculpture, "where the names of the attributes are commonly used", but also in poetry, which derives "the spirit" that animates its works "solely from the aesthetic attributes of the objects, which go alongside the logical ones". These attributes, Kant claims, rephrasing a now familiar point, "give the imagination an impetus to think more, although in an undeveloped way, than can be comprehended in a concept, and hence in a determinate linguistic expression".[37] To illustrate this claim, he then offers two poetic examples. I will briefly touch on the first, before moving on to the notion of spirit invoked by Kant. Kant quotes the following verse, attributed to Friedrich II of Prussia:

[33] See S. Budick, *Kant and Milton*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) and London 2010, p. 298, who also hints at a possible source of this passage from § 49 in Meier's *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften* (Halle 1754-1759) (see ivi, pp. 283-286).

[34] Cf. KU § 49, AA 05: 314.

[35] KU § 49, AA 05: 315.

[36] One of the reasons why Kant calls 'ideas' representations of the imagination is that they "at least strive toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience, and thus seek to approximate a presentation of concepts of reason (of intellectual ideas), which gives them the appearance of an objective reality". While these concepts can be thought, their objects cannot become contents of our experience. Through aesthetic ideas, they are made sensible (KU § 49, AA 05: 314). Further ahead in the text, he will touch on a second reason.

[37] KU § 49, AA 05: 315.

Let us depart from life without grumbling and without regretting anything, leaving the world behind us replete with good deeds. Thus does the sun, after it has completed its daily course, still spread a gentle light across the heavens; and the last rays that it sends forth into the sky are its last sighs for the well-being of the world.[38]

In his comment on these lines,[39] Kant underscores how "the great king"

animates his idea of reason of a cosmopolitan disposition even at the end of life by means of an attribute that the imagination (in the recollection of everything agreeable in a beautiful summer day, drawn to a close, which a bright evening calls to mind) associates with that representation, and which arouses a multitude of sensations and supplementary representations for which no expression is found.[40]

This comment recalls the process through which aesthetic attributes yield an aesthetic idea. 'Animates' is a key word in the passage: As we have seen, according to Kant, an aesthetic idea serves primarily to animate the mind, and it (or the attributes that yield it) animates the mind insofar as it is, so to speak, an invitation to thought.[41] At base, what the lines he quotes offer is a way to apprehend an aspect of life. By associating a virtuous person's departure from life with a sunset on a beautiful day, the poetic speaker invites the reader to adopt a way of apprehending that moment or thinking about it; he suggests what we might call a "frame" for it that Kant seems to consider both apt and aesthetically pleasurable as a way of characterizing the (focal) subject.[42] The king's verse may not be particularly original or inspiring, but it is important to grasp what is implied by Kant's choice to quote it, namely that part of the value of this poem depends on the experiential and emotional responses that the framing situation (a sunset on a beautiful summer's day) evokes and causes us to transfer to the focal subject – a wealth of thoughts and feelings that, while not fully determined

[38] KU § 49, AA 05: 315-316.

[39] As it is recalled in the editorial notes of the English translation of the third *Critique*, the lines quoted by Kant in their German translation are the conclusion of Friedrich's poem *Au Maréchal Keith, Imitation du troisième livre de Lucrèce: "Sur les vaines terreurs de la mort et les frayeurs d'une autre vie"*. The original reads: "Oui, finissons sans trouble, et mourons sans regrets,/En laissant l'Univers comblé de nos bienfaits./Ainsi l'Astre du jour, au bout de sa carrière,/Répand sur l'horizon une douce lumière,/Et les derniers rayons qu'il darde dans les air/Sont les derniers soupirs qu'il donne à l'Univers" (I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by P. Guyer, Eng trans. by P. Guyer and E. Matthews, Cambridge University Press, New York 2000, p. 382).

[40] KU § 49, AA 05: 316.

[41] I owe this expression to P.W. Bruno, *Kant's Concept of Genius. Its Origin and Function in the Third Critique*, Continuum, London 2010, p. 136.

[42] I am here applying concepts and terms suggested by E. Camp, *Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments*, in "Midwest Studies in Philosophy", 33, 2009, pp. 107-130, pp. 110-111 and p. 118.

by the poem, are "adequate to what it expresses".[43] Kant makes a good point here, as in many cases the value of a poem consists, at least in part, in the value of following the thought process that it initiates by offering a perspective on its subject.[44]

Kant's example is important for another reason as well. It suggests that the meaning of a poem cannot be reduced to sentence meaning: poetry (often) communicates meaning figuratively, imagistically.[45] I will return to this in section 4. For now, however, I wish to turn to the notion of spirit. We have already encountered two different but related uses of this word. As we have seen, Kant calls 'spirit' the genius talent of hitting upon the expression of aesthetic ideas through which the subjective disposition of the mind produced by them can be communicated to others.[46] He also calls 'spirit' a feature of successful works of art, however, originating from the animating effect of aesthetic attributes.

2. *On the Concept of Spirit*

To sketch what Kant means by 'spirit', I will begin with the second of the two uses of the word mentioned above. We find an interesting occurrence of it at the end of § 48 of the third *Critique*. The section is devoted to the relation between genius and taste, and at its close Kant observes that a would-be work of beautiful art such as a poem or a piece of music can fail in two ways, namely insofar as one perceives in it either "genius without taste" or "taste without genius".[47] The first case is that of works that, while they perhaps do not lack originality and ideas, are not brought "in line with the understanding"; that is, the ideas that they contain are not expressed in a way that makes them communicable. The result is therefore "nothing but nonsense".[48] The second case is that of products that, while "it is expected that they ought, at least in part, to reveal themselves as beautiful

[43] Angela Breitenbach makes this point about art in general (see A. Breitenbach, *One Imagination in Experiences of Beauty and Achievements of Understanding*, in "British Journal of Aesthetics", 60, 1, 2020, pp. 71-88, p. 74).

[44] P. Lamarque, 'Semantic Finegrainedness and Poetic Value', in J. Gibson (ed.), *The Philosophy of Poetry*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, pp. 18-36, p. 31 makes this point.

[45] Discussing the question of poetic meaning, John Gibson claims that we often have to look beyond a poem's language and "toward something this language creates, something fundamentally imaginative and not linguistic" (J. Gibson, *The Question of Poetic Meaning*, in "Nonsite", 4, 2011, http://nonsite.org/article/the-question-of-poetic-meaning, accessed 22/08/20, p. 8). I think that Kant would sympathize with this view.

[46] See KU § 49, AA 05: 317.

[47] KU § 48, AA 05: 312.

[48] KU § 50, AA 05: 319.

art", are such that we find that they lack something, even if we find "nothing in them to criticize as far as taste is concerned". Diagnosing the fault, Kant changes a crucial word: he says not that they are without genius, but that they are "without spirit". A poem, he claims, "can be quite pretty and elegant, but without *spirit*".[49]

Having said this, he shifts from a quality in the work to a quality in the artist, defining spirit, "in an aesthetic significance", as "the animating (*belebende*) principle in the mind"[50] and as "originality of thought (*Originalität des Gedanken*)".[51] That (and how) the two uses of the word are connected becomes immediately clear when Kant claims that the "material" that this principle uses to animate the soul "is that which purposively sets the mental powers into motion, i.e., into a play that is self-maintaining and even strengthens the powers to that end".[52] It is worth noting that this description closely recalls that of the state of mind – the harmonious interplay of the understanding and the imagination – on which taking pleasure in the beautiful rests.[53] Not by chance, it will turn out that the "material" Kant is speaking of consists in aesthetic ideas, that the imagination, in forming these ideas, is both free and in agreement with the understanding, that spirit, from an aesthetic point of view, is just "the faculty for the presentation of aesthetic ideas",[54] and that aesthetic ideas are precisely what a work must express in order to count as beautiful (as Kant will suggest shortly after, in § 51).

It follows that a work that lacks spirit will lack beauty as well and, ultimately, will fail to have an animating effect on the soul. Artistic beauty seems to require that, in addition to conforming to taste, an artwork must demonstrate a capacity to have this animating effect on the audience. 'Animation' emerges as a crucial term – one that, as I hope to show, can also help us to understand how

[49] KU § 49, AA 05: 313.
[50] KU § 49, AA 05: 313.
[51] Anth § 71, AA 07: 248.
[52] KU § 49, AA 05: 313.
[53] See KU Einl. VII and §§ 9 and 12. Briefly, according to Kant, the pleasure we take in the beautiful is connected with the mere apprehension (*apprehensio*) of the form of an object of intuition and expresses "nothing but the suitability of that object to the cognitive faculties that are in play in the reflecting power of judgment, insofar as they are in play". He assumes that the apprehension of forms in the imagination cannot take place without the reflecting power of judgment's comparing them "to its faculty for relating intuitions to concepts". If in this comparison the imagination is "unintentionally brought into accord with the understanding, as the faculty of concepts, through a given representation and a feeling of pleasure is thereby aroused", then the object must be regarded as purposive for the reflecting power of judgment and called beautiful (KU Einl. VII, AA 05: 189-190).
[54] KU § 49, AA 05: 314.

aesthetic and cognitive value interact in a work of art.

2.1 *Letter and Spirit*

'To animate' is a verb that, in different forms, often occurs in the sections we are examining. A telling case is the definition of the aesthetic idea quoted above, in which Kant claims that an aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination associated with a given concept, which allows for the addition to it (*hinzu denken läßt*) "of much that is unnameable, the feeling of which animates (*belebt*) the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language".[55] The animation of the cognitive faculties is put in relation to the combination of the spirit with the letter. Kant is likely referring to the well-known Pauline distinction and opposition between letter and spirit – "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life".[56]

This Pauline trope is multifaceted, but the aspect that is most relevant here is the suggestion of a meaning ('spirit') that exceeds the surface sense of a text and therefore prompts (hermeneutical) reflection.[57] Kant seems to connect this prompting of thoughts with Spirit's life-giving power, but he replaces the Pauline Spirit with his aesthetic notion of spirit. Kantian spirit – "in an aesthetic significance" – gives spirit to the artwork through the aesthetic attributes that yield the aesthetic idea, and expressing this idea animates the mind (of the observer). A work that has spirit is simply a work that, in presenting a concept (a theme) prompts a process of thought that cannot be fully attained by language[58] – that cannot be encapsulated by the 'letter' – for it cannot be made fully intelligible through concepts. It is a work that opens a wealth of possible conceptual determinations, and thus of significance. The products of genius are clearly great art: works we are inclined to return to and further explore.

As we have seen, for Kant it is indeed a feature of (successful) poetry that it offers, for the presentation of a given concept, a form that connects the presentation "with a fullness of thought to which no linguistic expression is fully adequate".[59] He also describes this fullness of thought by saying that the representation of the imagination "aesthetically enlarges the concept itself

[55] KU § 49, AA 05: 316.
[56] 2 Cor 3, 6; see also Rm 2, 29 and 7, 6.
[57] On this see P.S. Fiddes and G. Bader (eds.), *The Spirit and the Letter. A Tradition and a Reversal*, Bloomsbury, London 2013.
[58] Cf. KU § 49, AA 05: 314.
[59] KU § 53, AA 05: 326.

in an unbounded way".[60] This is a curious expression, and what it means is unclear. I suppose that Kant is suggesting that the concept is made richer by an overflow of the intuitive content that is added to it by the "creative" imagination. But in what sense 'richer', if, as he says, the representation of the imagination "gives more to think about than can be grasped and made distinct in it"?[61] This impossibility of making it "distinct", recalling Baumgarten's confused representations, may provide a clue in this regard.

2.2 *Excursus: Aesthetic Ideas as the Heir of Confused Representations*

Without entering into the details of Baumgarten's aesthetics,[62] for our purposes it is sufficient to recall that the "father of aesthetics",[63] arguing from a Leibnizian standpoint, described as 'confused' those representations that derive from the senses[64] and which therefore have two defining characteristics: while they are sufficient for recognizing things and distinguishing them from other things – and in this sense are 'clear' – we cannot enumerate or analyze, namely make *distinct*, their distinguishing features. In fact, for a representation to be confused, it is necessary that its marks are not distinct from each other.[65] Baumgarten considered these representations (the confused clarity of which he also labelled "extensive clarity")[66] highly poetic, and he therefore recommend their use in poetry.[67] Now, extensive clarity is a function of confusion, namely of the number of marks (*notae*) of the thing represented together in a single representation. This means that in a sense representation that is extensively clearer than others, more parts of the sensed object will be represented. For Baumgarten, the term 'confused' has a positive connotation. Confused/*confusus* derives from the Latin verb *confundere*, which is a compound of the prefix '*con'* ('together' or 'with') and *fundere*. Interestingly, the latter word, in addition to meaning 'to fuse', also means 'to spread out' and 'to

[60] KU § 49, AA 05: 315.
[61] KU § 49, AA 05: 315.
[62] See S. Tedesco, *L'estetica di Baumgarten*, Aesthetica, Palermo 2000 for a detailed presentation of Baumgarten's theory.
[63] On this see Amoroso 2000, pp. 37-70.
[64] See A.G. Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (Lateinisch-Deutsch), ed. by H. Paetzold, Meiner, Hamburg 1983, § 3, p. 8.
[65] Ivi, § 13, p. 14.
[66] See ivi, §§ 16-17, p. 16.
[67] A fine sketch of Baumgarten's argument for this claim is offered by F.C. Beiser, *Diotimas's Children. German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, p. 128.

extend' – whence, as Frederick Beiser notes, "Baumgarten's choice of the term *extensive*".[68]

We can read the aesthetic enlargement of a concept through an aesthetic idea, of which Kant speaks, as a transformation of Baumgarten's extensive clarity.[69] It is significant that both kinds of representations, namely Baumgarten's extensive clear sense representations and Kant's aesthetic ideas (and through them aesthetically enlarged concepts), are involved in the aesthetic success of a poem – poetry, as we have seen, is the art in which, according to Kant, the faculty of aesthetic ideas "can reveal itself in its full measure".

A further point is worth considering. Extensive clarity is a characteristic of sense representations, and sense representations are of individual things. It follows that the greater a representation's extensive clarity (that is, its poetic character), the more accurately it will represent its object, or the more it is determined. Thus, Baumgarten arrives at the conclusion that it is poetic that the things to be represented in a poem are as determined as possible, namely are individuals, since individuals are completely determined:[70] the domain of poetry is the vast realm of particular things.

Kant partly makes a similar point. Aesthetically enlarged concepts are not sense representations, but they are enlarged through aesthetic ideas, which are "inner intuitions" – that is, presumably, particular mental representations: the inner picturing of thoughts or images of some sort. One reason that Kant puts forward to explain why aesthetic ideas, although they are representations of the imagination, are indeed called 'ideas', is that "no concept can be fully adequate to them".[71] Aesthetic ideas may be both similar to ordinary images (e.g. of a table) and dissimilar to them, as no determinate concept is completely adequate to them. According to Kant, one way in which this inadequacy may arise is when "the poet ventures […] to make that of which there are examples in experience, e.g., death, envy, and all sorts of vices, as well as love, fame, etc., sensible beyond the limits of experience, with a completeness that goes beyond anything of which there is an example in nature, by means of an imagination that emulates the

[68] Ivi, p. 127.

[69] This is also shown, in a much more detailed way, by C. La Rocca, 'Das Schöne und das Schatten. Dunkle Vorstellungen und ästhetische Erfahrung zwischen Baumgarten und Kant', in H. F. Klemme, M. Pauen, M.-L. Raters (eds.), *Im Schatten des Schönen. Die Ästhetik des Häßlichen in historischen Ansätzen und Aktuellen Debatten*, Aisthesis Verlag, Bielefeld 2006, pp. 19-64.

[70] See Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, cit., §§ 18-19, pp. 16-18.

[71] See footnote 36.

precedent of reason in attaining to a maximum".[72] Love, vice, envy, and the like are abstract concepts, dissimilar to rational ideas insofar as they can have empirical instances. As Mojca Kuplen observes, however, "there is no single and concretely perceivable object that would correspond to such concepts", as their full meaning "extends beyond" their empirical instantiation.[73] For example, the concept of love involves phenomenological features, emotional aspects, beliefs, intentions, moral aspects, etc., that cannot be completely presented in an example in ordinary experience. So, Kant could be envisaging poetic presentations of love, vice, etc., that are so rich and detailed that they display a completeness akin to that of reason in its search for a maximum. Through them, a poet may offer what could be called a case or an aspect of love *par excellence*.

Interestingly, this view has a sort of precedent in an example put forward in the *Logik Blomberg*, a *Nachschrift* from the 1770s. This example can be applied, without relevant changes, to the "experience-oriented"[74] aesthetic ideas we are dealing with here. Discussing *claritas extensiva* as "the right path to liveliness, in that it brings with it much sensibility", it is asserted that the completion of the perfections of all our cognitions "is finally to give them sensibility, so that one represents the universal in particular circumstances and cases and thinks of the *abstractum in concreto* in a single, individual sensible case", as when "I think of friendship, true love, and the mutual helpfulness that flows from these, in the case of Damon and Pythias. Here, then, I think the universal in individual cases. But in this way my cognition becomes lively".[75]

As the editor of the lectures on logic recalls, Damon and Pythias were "two young Pythagoreans, whose loyalty to one another epitomizes true friendship. Pythias was condemned to death for plotting against Dionysius I of Syracuse, but he was allowed to leave to settle his affairs when Damon offered to die in his place if his friend did not return. Pythias returned just in time, and Dionysius was so moved by their friendship that he set both men free".[76] What

[72] KU § 49, AA 05: 314.

[73] M. Kuplen, *Cognitive Interpretation of Kant's Theory of Aesthetic Ideas*, in "Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics", 56/12, 1, 2019, pp. 48-64, p. 53.

[74] I owe the term 'experience-oriented' to S. Matherne, *The Inclusive Interpretation of Kant's Aesthetic Ideas*, in "British Journal of Aesthetics", 53, 2013, pp. 21-39.

[75] V-Lo/Blomberg § 135, AA 24: 129.

[76] Kant, *Lectures on logic*, cit., editorial notes p. 676. Kant was probably familiar with the story via the third book of Cicero's *De officiis*. Bernard Williams's famous case of Jim and the Indians (see J.J. Smart and B. Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1973, pp. 98-99) could be a contemporary version of

the passage from the lectures suggests is that a literary description of a case will better depict friendship than the abstract concepts of the philosopher. In fact, since the philosopher "considers many objects and cognizes little in many objects […] his cognitions are […] universal".[77]

According to this transcript, in poetry "one seeks to put forth marks that are coordinate with one another, of which one is immediately aware in the thing to be described, in order to make the concept of the thing lively. By this means one reaches aesthetic perfection in a cognition".[78] A concept that possesses liveliness, a quality that it acquires "through a multitude and a combination of coordinated representations", is "very rich, pregnant, beautiful".[79]

What infuses a concept with life is therefore extensive clarity, namely a multitude and a combination of coordinated representations. This is not far from what Kant claims about the activity of the imagination "in an aesthetic respect". Unlike its use in cognition, where it is "under the constraint of the understanding and is subject to the limitation of being adequate to its concept", in the aesthetic case "the imagination is free to provide, beyond that concord with the concept, unsought extensive undeveloped material for the understanding, of which the latter took no regard in its concept, but which it applies, not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, for the animation of the cognitive powers, and thus also indirectly to cognitions".[80]

Liveliness, as the example of Damon and Pythias suggests, can also bring about "a greater correctness" in our cognition, as "we frequently omit, and have to omit, *in abstracto* marks which actually belong to the nature of the thing". These marks "can be restored when one considers the thing *in concreto*". Therefore, poets "can

the point made in the lecture.

[77] V-Lo/Blomberg § 135, AA 24: 127. A further example is offered in a discussion on the distinction between the extensive distinctness pursued by the poet and the intensive one pursued by the philosopher. The poet "piles marks one upon another. The philosopher, however, describes the same thing with intensive distinctness[;] he looks, namely, not to the multitude of the marks, but rather he seeks to represent really clearly and distinctly only a few marks, indeed, where possible, only a single one" (V-Lo/Blomberg § 28, AA 24: 57). Extensive distinctness is then connected to the liveliness of a cognition: "E.g., in a description of spring I represent it in a lively way through a multitude of marks coordinate with one another. The poet does it thus. He shows, e.g., the budding flowers, the new green of the forests, the cavorting herds, the renewed rays of the sun, the lovely, charming air[,] the revival of the whole of nature" (V-Lo/Blomberg § 135, AA 24: 126).

[78] V-Lo/Blomberg § 135, AA 24: 126. On the role of this notion, see K. Pollok, *Kant's Theory of Normativity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017, pp. 40-43.

[79] V-Lo/Blomberg § 250, AA 24: 252. Traces of this view surface in Kant's "apology for sensibility" in § 8 of the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) (see AA 07: 143).

[80] KU § 49, AA 05: 317.

frequently be very helpful to the philosopher".[81] Kant's position in the third *Critique* seems more moderate; there, he speaks of an indirect application to cognition of the material provided by the imagination. However, his talk of the "nourishment" provided by poetry to the understanding seems to be a restatement of this point. By giving life to the concepts of the understanding "through the imagination", poetry, it seems, also offers food for thought. But is it really a cognitive value that is at issue in this nourishment, and if so, what kind? How does it relate to the "free play of the imagination" that poetry carries out?[82] I will begin to answer these questions by substantiating Kant's description of poetry with further material from his lectures on logic and anthropology.

3. *Aesthetic and Cognition: Remnants of Aesthetic Rationalism?*

In Kant's lectures on anthropology, the aim of poetry is often described by using the word 'entertainment (*Unterhaltung*)'. Thus, in the *Menschenkunde* (WS 1781/82), we read that the "main purpose (*Hauptabsicht*)" of poetry (*Dichtkunst*) is the entertainment of our imagination and emotions; however, it is immediately added that in this the understanding is also involved, such that poetry entertains the mind in the most harmonious action.[83] First of all, the understanding is involved in poetry in the role of rule-giver. As the Mrongovius transcript reads, "[p]oetry is an occupation of sensibility, arranged by the understanding".[84] Poetry, another transcript likewise affirms, is the great culture of our "sensitive cognition (*Sinnlichen Erkentnisse*), and the understanding is only the means to put the representations in order".[85] The idea that the understanding organizes poetry's occupation with sensibility (otherwise the imagination would be without order and absolutely

[81] V-Lo/Blomberg § 135, AA 24: 129. Abstract concepts, Kant maintains, are often only "glittering poverty (*schimmernde Armseligkeiten*)" (Anth § 9, AA 07: 145). Incidentally, studies in cognitive science quoted by Kuplen (Kuplen, *Cognitive Interpretation of Kant's Theory of Aesthetic Ideas*, cit.) suggest that perceptual information plays an important role in our comprehension and full understanding of abstract thoughts.

[82] KU § 51, AA 05: 321.

[83] Cf. V-Anth/Mensch, AA 25: 982-983.

[84] Anth/Mron, AA 25: 1279.

[85] V-Anth/Busolt, AA 25: 1468. Interestingly, the role of the understanding here is similar to that of the formal devices of poetry. In fact, for Kant, the poetic play of the imagination needs verses, "*Sylbenmaas*" or rhythmic movement (*taktmässigen Gang*), because by means of them "the imagination is bound to certain rules, and the rhythmic affects our mind more" (V-Anth/Busolt, AA 25: 1467). The arrangement of words in verses blends freedom with necessity. In a good poem, "rhyme happily brings the thought to conclusion" (Anth § 71, AA 07: 248).

chaotic) is nicely expressed in the *Anthropologie Mrongovius* (WS 1784/1785), where we read that in poetry the understanding "must shine through (*hervorscheinen*)".[86] According to a modest reading, this expression could simply mean that, even if poetry does not aim at truth, a poet does not have license to say what he will: he must always observe "an analogue of truth (*ein Analogon der Wahrheit*)"; e.g., the conditions of his story should agree with the assumed character.[87] This means that the poet's freedom in imagining is limited through the condition of possibility.[88]

Admittedly, the relation between poetry and truth is tricky. As we have seen, in the third *Critique* Kant maintains that poetry "plays with the illusion which it produces at will, yet without thereby being deceitful". The "rationalist" background of the transcripts from which I am quoting, reflected in their vocabulary, is cognitively more liberal, for according to the rationalist conception, the mind is essentially a power of representation: all mental states are representations of something in the world. Again, a brief reference to Baumgarten may be helpful.

Baumgarten dealt with the intriguing question of poetic truth in an elegant way, building on a distinction between two kinds of fiction, namely those that he called *heterocosmica*, which are about something impossible in the actual world, and those that he called *utopica*, which are about something that is impossible in every possible world.[89] As no representation is possible when it comes to the latter, clearly only the former can be the object of poetic representation. According to his *Metaphysica* (see §§ 90, 92), there is a notion of metaphysical truth that equates to conformity with the universal principles of non-contradiction, reason and sufficient reason. As not only existent but also merely possible things conform to such principles, it follows that the poet can engage in fiction and still know something (metaphysically) true.

In his *Aesthetica* (1750), Baumgarten then defines metaphysical truth as objective: it is truth that concerns things in themselves. From this he distinguishes the subjective truth, namely the truth of our representations: these are true insofar as they represent true objects. Subjective truth can be of two forms: it is logical if my representations are distinct; it is aesthetic if they are mingled with many sense representations.[90] Having claimed that aesthetic

[86] V-Anth/Mron, AA 25: 1279.
[87] V-Anth/Parow, AA 25: 323.
[88] V-Anth/Parow, AA 25: 326.
[89] Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, cit., § 52, p. 40.
[90] See Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, cit., §§ 423-424, pp. 269-270. On Baumgarten's

truth is known through the senses, Baumgarten further states that in aesthetic truth the mind descends to the *singularia* – this does not happen with the objects of science – and represents objects of both the actual and other possible worlds. With regard to this latter case, he speaks of *veritas heterocosmica*, worrying not about whether the objects are real in this world but only about whether they are possible in a certain connection to things.[91] The reproduction of individuality could then be considered the standard of aesthetic truth.[92] It therefore seems that two domains of truth are open to poetry: the domain of truths concerning the *singularia* of the actual world (with regard to which poetry can recover the richness of ordinary experience that is lost in the process of abstraction required by logical truth)[93] and the domain of heterocosmic truths.

As for Kant's position on this tangled topic, at least as documented in the lectures on logic, a first thing that can be observed is that he initially seems to grant that "for aesthetic perfection, truth is […] required". At the same time, he admits that

> with the aesthetically perfect we do not require as much truth as with the logically perfect. With the aesthetic, something may be true only *tolerabiliter*. In this way it is aesthetically true that Milton represents the angels in the paradise lost as quarreling, and caught up in battle, for who knows whether this cannot occur.[94]

In the *Wiener Logik* (from the early 1780s) we find a specification of aesthetic or subjective truth in terms of "the agreement of cognition with the subject's mode of thought". Aesthetic truth, it is claimed, concerns how something appears "to our senses and seems to be". According to this transcript, the poet only needs this kind of truth. This conception is nicely exemplified as follows: "The sun sinks into the water, says the poet. If he were to say that the earth turns on its axis, then he would assimilate to logical truth and not be a poet".[95] To be a poet, one has to pursue aesthetic truth; however, as it is stated in the *Logik Jäsche*, truth, as "the ground of unity through the relation of our cognition to the object", and therefore of the harmonious union of unity and

conception of truth, see S. Tedesco, *L'estetica di Baumgarten*, cit., pp. 113-127.

[91] See Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, cit., § 441, p. 281.

[92] In connection with poetry, Baumgarten also uses the notion of verisimilitude (see Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, cit., §§ 478, 492, 502, 584). Beiser takes this notion to refer to "what is *like* truth but not truth itself" (Beiser, *Diotimas's Children. German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*, cit., p. 154). This may be too strong. Baumgarten seems to suggest that the poet remains in the field of truth; he only moves away from the truth that is proved, namely from certainty (see Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, cit., § 483, p. 309).

[93] See Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, cit., §§ 556-564.

[94] V-Lo/Blomberg § 27, AA 24: 56.

[95] V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 810.

manifoldness – recall that "*ordo plurium in uno*" is Baumgarten's definition of metaphysic truth[96] – "remains the *conditio sine qua non*" of aesthetic perfection, "the foremost negative condition, apart from which something cannot please taste universally", since "mere manifoldness without unity cannot satisfy us".[97]

A very similar passage can be found in the *Wiener Logik*, in which Kant specifies that truth or logical perfection is a merely negative condition, since in the aesthetic case cognition is not the principal end, "which consists in pleasantness and agreement of sensibility. Because, however, no satisfaction can arise where the understanding does not join in and uncover errors, with aesthetic perfection there can be no contradictions. No man, accordingly, can make progress in things of taste unless he has made logical perfection his basis".[98] The role of truth as agreement with the universal principles of being seems to be taken on by the understanding as rule-giver. A conception along these lines is also endorsed in the third *Critique*, since Kant admits that "the scientific element in any art […], which concerns truth in the presentation of its object, […] is to be sure the indispensable condition (*conditio sine qua non*) of beautiful art, but not the art itself".[99]

It is clear that the more Kant moves away from the rationalist conception of the mind and toward a strict distinction between sensibility and understanding, the more he tends to deny that we know the world through sensation, or that aesthetic perception is a form of knowledge.[100] In the *Logik Dohna-Wundlacken* (a transcript deriving from lectures given in the early 1790s), subjective truth, namely the truth with which the poet is concerned, is directly equated to "universal illusion": "The poetic – it is claimed – is always true aesthetically, seldom logically".[101] 'Aesthetically true' is glossed in the *Logik* as "nothing more than a universal semblance".[102]

However, it is also important to consider that in his lectures on anthropology, Kant had elaborated the distinction between illusion and deception (*Betrug*) that surfaces in the third *Critique*. Illusion is an appearance that does not deceive but may please[103] and that remains after it has been revealed, whereas a (fraudulent) deception

[96] See A.G. Baumgarten *Metaphysica* (editio 7) (facsimile reproduction of the edition Halae Magdeburgicae, 1779), 1963, § 89, p. 24.

[97] Log, AA 09: 39.

[98] V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 810-811.

[99] KU § 60, AA 05: 355.

[100] See Anth § 7 Anm., AA 07: 140-141 for a clear statement of what Kant considers a "great error of the Leibniz-Wolffian school". On Kant's farewell to perfectionism, see Pollok, cit., Ch. 1.

[101] V-Lo/Dohna, AA 24: 709.

[102] Log, AA 09: 39.

[103] V-Anth/Pillau, AA 25: 745.

disappears when it is unmasked. Furthermore, while in the case of illusion "we often do not want to know the truth",[104] in the case of deception "we do indeed want to know the truth, but are not always acquainted with it". "We often want illusion, but never deception".[105] On the basis of this distinction, Kant suggests that there is a difference between fictionalizing (*dichten*) in lying and in poetry. A poet goes along with the convention that he is supposed to lie to us, but this is a completely different form of lying than that of the liar or the deceiver.[106] Poetry "does not trick, for its aim is directed not at the understanding but at entertainment, and in the case of poetry I even want to be tricked".[107] This is just what the imagination "as a productive cognitive faculty" does when, as Kant claims in the third *Critique*, it creates "as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it".[108]

In addition to distinguishing between illusion and deception, Kant also points out a difference between poetic untruth and error: "In poetic representations, cognitions (*Erkenntnisse*) are untrue (*unwahr*) but are not errors, for one knows that they are untrue". An error is "set in opposition to truth as a contrary", for it is not "a mere lack of cognition and of truth, but a hindrance to these as well", like a space in the soul that is filled up with "erroneous cognitions".[109] As poetic representations do not aim at truth, do not occupy, as it were, a space in the cognitive storehouse of our mind, they do not belong to it and therefore are not an obstacle to knowledge. But if they do not belong to it, how can they be helpful for knowledge or have cognitive value of any kind? That they *can* have it seems to be suggested in a passage from the *Logik Jäsche*:

> […] no one may hope to make progress in the belles lettres if he has not made logical perfection the ground of his cognition. It is in the greatest possible unification of logical with aesthetic perfection in general, in respect to those cognitions that are both to instruct and to entertain, that the character and the art of the genius actually shows itself.[110]

[104] "From poets I want only entertainment; but whether the thing is true or not does not concern me" (V-Anth/Mron, AA 25: 1281).

[105] Cf. V-Anth/Mron, AA 25: 1253.

[106] Cf. V-Anth/Parow, AA 25: 322.

[107] V-Anth/Mron, AA 25: 1279.

[108] KU § 49, AA 05: 314. On Kant's concept of creative imagination, see S. Matherne, 'Kant's Theory of Imagination', in A. Kind (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, Routledge, London and New York 2016, pp. 55-68 and G. Zöller, '"The Faculty of Intuition A priori". Kant on the Productive Power of the Imagination', in G. Gentry, K. Pollok (eds.), *The Imagination in German Idealism and Romanticism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019, pp. 66-85.

[109] V-Anth/Mron, AA 25: 1224.

[110] Log, AA 09: 39.

Things may be more complicated than they seem, however.

3.1 *A Kantian Version of The* Miscere Utile Dulci

The first sentence of the passage just quoted reaffirms the fundamental, although negative, role of truth in art. Since logical perfection consists in the agreement of cognition with the object, it sets as a condition for progress in the *belles lettres* that the *littérateur* must ground his work in truth.[111] The second sentence adds something new and interesting, however, as it hints at cognitions "that are both to instruct and to entertain" and suggests that genius shows itself in the realization, in them, of the greatest possible combination of aesthetic and logical perfection, namely of subjective and objective truth. The expression used in the passage recalls the famous claim in Horace's *Ars poetica*: "*Omne tulit punctum*, *qui miscuit utile dulci*, *Lectorem delectando pariterque monendo*" (342-343). Horace was imagining a competition between different kinds of poetry. In fact, some lines before the one just quoted, he writes: "*Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae*" (335-337). Assuming that this categorization is not evaluative, the "Omne tulit punctum" sentence could be read as Horace's answer to the question "What is the best option?" He is suggesting that, given these three options, the best choice is the one that does both things, i.e. a blend of practical advice and beautiful writing.

However, in spite of the critical success of the *topos* of *miscere utile dulci*, it is not clear whether poetry should pursue both aims, namely to instruct and to entertain, and the question arises as to whether instruction and entertainment are to be bound together or separated. To mention a modern example, in his influential *Les beaux art réduit à un même principe* (1746), Charles Batteux divided the fine arts, which he had reduced to the single principle of the imitation of beautiful nature, into two categories: those arts the aim of which is pleasure, and those that combine pleasure and usefulness. He placed music, poetry, painting, sculpture, and dance in the first category, and eloquence and architecture in the second. Interestingly, he considered theater a combination of all arts.[112]

As for the passage from the *Logik Jäsche*, what makes its appli-

[111] Although the expression *belles lettres* usually meant 'Greek and Latin, eloquence and poetry', in this context I take it to refer to the latter.

[112] Ch. Batteux, *Les beaux art réduit à un même principe*, Durand, Paris 1746, p. 6 and p. 45.

cation to poetry problematic is that it refers to a group of sections in Meier's *Auszug* (§§ 22-34) that are devoted to the perfection of learned cognition (*gelehrte Erkenntniss*). For Kant, instruction and entertainment have different grounds – according to the lectures, subjective truth and distinction, respectively. And yet he (like Meier) also acknowledges that, although aesthetic and logical perfection can conflict, instruction can benefit from entertainment. With an incorrect attribution, in a lecture on logic, we read the following: "Horace says, You should be *suaviter in modo*, i.e., pleasant in manner, *sed fortiter in re*, i.e., thorough in method (*gründlich in der Methode*). The first is aesthetic perfection, the second logical".[113] The sentence also occurs in the Mrongovius transcript of Kant's lectures on anthropology, where it is preceded by the claim that "in some cognitions, logical and aesthetic worth (*Werth*)", namely instruction and entertainment, "are found together (*finden … zusammen statt*)", and where the '*fortiter in re*' is glossed as "*wichtig im Inhalt*", that is, important or significant in content.[114] This joint occurrence of aesthetic and logical perfection seems to match Horace's critical preference.

However, it is not clear whether the reference here is really to poetry. According to the *Menschenkunde*, truth and intellectual cognitions "improve very much through poetic expression. Truth uttered (*hervorgebracht*) in sentences, in verses, by far surpasses the prosaic expression, and everyone takes pleasure in learning them by heart".[115] This statement is followed by the remark that a verse has something in itself "by which a thought completely penetrates us (*uns ganz durchdringt*) as through a vehiculum".[116]

The point expressed in these lines is significant. They highlight the importance of literary achievement: It is not by chance that are we inclined to think that the encapsulation of general observations in memorable words is part of what makes authors "great".[117] But the view they present implies a separation of con-

[113] I. Kant, *Logik Hechsel*, in I. Kant, *Lectures on logic*, Eng. trans. and ed. by J.M. Young, Cambridge University Press, New York 1992, p. 416.

[114] V-Anth/Mron, AA 25: 1228. As both the editors of the lectures on anthropology and the editor of the lectures on logic recall, the quotation comes not from Horace but from the fifth Jesuit general Aquaviva's (1543-1615) *Industriae ad curandos animae morbos* (1606).

[115] As we have seen, Kant emphasizes that meter, rhyme, alliteration, and the like, besides creating a rhythm that tends to be pleasing, help us to understand and remember what is being said in a poem. On these related functions of formal poetic devices, see A.C. Ribeiro, *Toward a Philosophy of Poetry*, in "Midwest Studies in Philosophy", 33, 2009, pp. 61-77, pp. 72-74.

[116] V-Anth/Mensch, AA 25: 992.

[117] See on this P. Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2009, pp. 232-234, who nonetheless suggests that what we likely admire in these

tent and form which seems to conflict with Kant's ultimate conception of genius, according to which genius involves both a creative talent for ideas *and* expressive ability. The "happy relation" of form and content (or aboutness) of which Kant speaks hints at a holistic kind of unity, at the idea of "a subject-realized-in-just-this-way", to borrow an expression by Peter Lamarque.[118] "Aquaviva's" view better applies to those products that belong to science and that please because they are "in accordance" with taste. As Kant emphasizes, however, this does not make them beautiful works of art: "The pleasing form which one gives to [them]", he claims, "is only the vehicle of communication and a manner, as it were, of presentation".[119] There is a *modus aestheticus* or *manner* "of putting thoughts together in a presentation" which has "no other standard than the feeling of unity in the presentation"; this manner is valid for beautiful art,[120] but, according to Kant, it is not a sufficient condition for something's counting as (fine) art.[121]

There are contents that can be expressed both in verse and in prosaic language and that are perhaps better communicated through verse, but poetry, Kant seems to think, cannot be reduced to the versification of content. So what space is left for the unification, in poetry, of cognitive and aesthetic value? Since both in the lectures and in the third *Critique* Kant points out that the main aim of poetry is, in the wording of the lectures, "to entertain", a more natural way to construct its cognitive value is to think of it as external to aesthetic value, a sort of side effect of a good poem. Is it in this way that "with all good poets" nourishment is given to the understanding,[122] or does Kant's conception of poetry allow for a closer connection between aesthetic and cognitive value? In the next and final section, I will try to show that there are reasons to attribute the second alternative to Kant.

cases, more than profundity of thought, is precision of expression.

[118] Lamarque, 'Semantic Finegrainedness and Poetic Value', cit., p. 29. A similar idea seems to be suggested by the transcript itself, in the observation that the rhyme is at its best when it is made in such a way that one is surprised to find the relevant word natural and believes that no better word or thought could be found to replace it (see V-Anth/Mensch, AA 25: 992).

[119] KU § 48, AA 05: 313. The same holds for "a moral treatise, or even a sermon": they can have "in themselves this form of beautiful art, though without seeming studied; but they are not on this account called works of beautiful art" (KU § 48, AA 05: 313).

[120] KU § 49, AA 05: 318-319.

[121] On the other hand, he finds it ridiculous that "someone speaks and decides like a genius […] in matters of the most careful rational inquiry" (KU § 47, AA 05: 310).

[122] V-Anth/Mron, AA 25: 1281; KU § 51, AA 05: 321.

4. *Kant's Moderate Aesthetic Cognitivism*

We have seen passages from the lectures that suggest that, insofar as poetry is an occupation of sensibility, arranged by the understanding, the role of the latter is simply to bring some kind of order to the representations of the imagination and to prevent contradictions between them. However, there are also hints at a stronger involvement of the understanding. In the *Menschenkunde*, we read that the understanding "must be […] secretly and unnoticedly instructed" by a poem, otherwise that poem will not be appreciated; if the understanding is not present, then even though our senses are entertained, the poem will be "insipid and tasteless (*fade und unschmackhaft*)".[123]

Tellingly, we also encounter a reformulation of the dictum from the first *Critique* to the effect that "[i]ntuitions without thoughts yield no knowledge, but thoughts without intuition are reflections without a subject, therefore both of them must be united (*Anaschauen ohne Gedanken giebt keine Erkennyniß, aber Gedanken ohne Anschauung sind Betrachtungen ohne Stoff, daher muß beides vereinigt warden*)".[124] The suggestion is that intuitions and thoughts must be combined; however, it is also pointed out that "one of them must shine out (*hervorleuchten*)", that is, "the main thing must be placed in one of them". Either the understanding or the imagination must set the end; since in poetry the most important thing is to engage the imagination, the understanding must always "come along (*hinzukommen*)", as if only casually (*nebenbei*). The point is then exemplified as follows: "when the poet adorns (*ausschmückt*) a whole succession of thoughts with images (*Bildern*), the beautiful must immediately shine, but the understanding must only come later (*hinterher kommen*) and the thought must not immediately shine through (*hervorscheinen*), but only in the aftertaste".[125]

These passages also shed light on the cognitive role that aesthetic ideas might play. As we have seen, aesthetic ideas are intuitions. However, since they cannot be brought to determinate concepts, they outrun the possibility of cognition. In a sense, they arouse a desire to know but also invalidate the means to knowledge. How they can nevertheless have a cognitive function is filled in by the passage just quoted, as it suggests that, while striking in their beau-

[123] V-Anth/Mensch, AA 25: 986-987.

[124] V-Anth/Mensch, AA 25: 987.

[125] V-Anth/Mensch, AA 25: 987-988; see also Anth § 71, AA 07: 246. While playing with the imagination, the poet meets the understanding by means of concepts, and thereby "improves and enlivens (*cultiviert und belebt*) it". What is beautiful must at the same time be a "strengthening (*Stärkung*) of our concepts" (V-Anth/Busolt, AA 25: 1465-1466).

ty, poetic images illustrate thoughts.

In fact, Kant claims that "the *painter of ideas* alone is the master of beautiful art",[126] and in the *Anthropologie Busolt* (WS 1788/89) the poet is described as trying to find images "to approximate more and more the concepts of the understanding".[127] This approximation is presented as a perfection (*Vollkommenheit*) that greatly helps the understanding: examples or intuitions enliven concepts, giving them force and clarity, and can thereby make them interesting.[128] Kant admires Milton in part because the latter always strives to provide intuitions, and "the clarity of intuitions and the novelty of the images cultivate (*Cultivieren*) the understanding a lot".[129] We often find claims like these in the lectures, and the third *Critique* does not radically break with the view they express.

Like the confused representations of the rationalist aesthetics, Kant's aesthetic ideas can "enlarge" the meaning of abstract concepts, bringing to mind a plurality of thoughts, feelings, and moods linked together and connected to these concepts, thereby furthering our understanding of them. Consider again the concept of love. Our ordinary explication of 'love' leaves unelaborated much of its meaning, in particular the experience-related features of its content. While we may experience love, there are likely limits to our understanding of the idea of love itself, deriving from the way our experience makes it available to us. A concrete presentation of love offered by a poem may carry forward features that we have not grasped from our own experience or offer a different perspective on this concept, making it more cognitively accessible to us and contributing to a richer understanding of it.[130] It would not be misleading to use the word 'learning' in this regard, even if the kind of knowledge acquired cannot be fully articulated in propositions. On the one hand, this knowledge is not discursive because it refers to the affective and emotional aspects associated with our concepts – aspects with which we can only be perceptually acquainted; on the other hand – think once more about 'love' – it is not discursive because our language is not rich enough to grasp all the aspects of love in its particular instances. Our concepts, and our words, refer

[126] Anth § 71, AA 07: 248.

[127] V-Anth/Busolt, AA 25: 1446.

[128] Cf. V-Anth/Busolt, AA 25: 1444. To be sure, "aesthetic distinctness through examples" may improve "understandability", but it is "of a completely different kind than distinctness through concepts as marks"; "examples are simply not marks and do not belong to the concept as parts but, as intuitions, to the use of the concept" (Log, AA 9: 62).

[129] V-Anth/Busolt, AA 25: 1466.

[130] This point is made by Kuplen, *Cognitive Interpretation of Kant's Theory of Aesthetic Ideas*, cit., pp. 59-60. See also M. Kuplen, *Art and Knowledge: Kant's Perspective*, in "Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics", 7, 2015, pp. 317-331.

to properties that one case of love shares with others of its kind, but they cannot represent its individual features and therefore leave them undetermined. An artistic presentation of love – the expression of an aesthetic idea associated with the concept – can bring together different emotional and affective aspects of an experience of love and the thoughts and beliefs connected to it; in giving a perceptible form to these mental states, it may offer the opportunity to recognize features of love that cannot be directly represented. Although we already possess the concept, in the presentation of new and perhaps unfamiliar aspects (or contexts) of its application, our understanding of it is improved.

Something similar may be claimed with regard to the other kinds of concepts that aesthetic ideas can sensibly represent, namely ideas of reason such as those of God, freedom, and immortality. Both abstract concepts and ideas of reason have no appropriate sensible intuition. The aesthetic attributes that provide an aesthetic idea – recall Jupiter's eagle – can offer a symbolic or metaphorical representation of an idea of reason. They are not part of its logical content, but they can express certain associations connected to it, which, in combination, yield an intuition that represents the idea, giving it content or meaning, as required by Kant's claim that concepts without intuitions are empty.[131] In this way, an aesthetic idea helps us to better understand what such an indeterminate concept means.[132] Kant's admiration of Milton's striving to provide intuitions may be connected to this effect of aesthetic ideas. After all, when he claims that the poet "ventures to make sensible rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, eternity, creation, etc".,[133] it is natural to suppose that he is thinking of Milton, whom he considered a genius and associated with Shakespeare: "Milton, Shakespeare are geniuses".[134]

If this is correct, then one possibility when interpreting Kant's claim that aesthetic ideas as expressed in good poems are food for the understanding is to consider how, by imbuing abstract concepts and ideas of reason with intuitions, they can improve our understanding of them and give them more substantive meaning. This reading also helps to make sense of Kant's prudent statement

[131] A 52/B 75.

[132] The reference, in the *Menschenkunde*, to the dictum of the first *Critique* suggests that aesthetic ideas take on the role of intuition in ordinary cognition; in a sense, as presentations of particular concepts (of particular subjects or thematic concepts), they "are a means of occupying the emptiness" (Bruno, *Kant's Concept of Genius. Its Origin and Function in the Third Critique*, cit., p. 137) of thoughts without content (see KrV, A 51/B 75).

[133] KU § 49, AA 05: 314.

[134] V-Anth/Busolt, AA 25: 1497.

that aesthetic ideas are indirectly applied to cognition.[135] With regard to poetry, I would like to rephrase this statement by saying that their expression in good poems can have cognitive benefits.[136] As I have just suggested, these benefits consist mainly in the fact that such poems often initiate in readers/listeners a reflective process that makes them explicitly aware of aspects or implications of concepts (or experiences) that they formerly knew (or had) in an unarticulated way; this may also inspire them to re-evaluate their understanding of those concepts (or experiences).[137]

As a way of concluding these reflections, I would like to return to an aspect hinted at in section 1, namely the figurative, imagistic way in which poetry often communicates meaning. The crucial role of this feature of poetry now becomes clear, as it seems that, given the conceptually indeterminate character of aesthetic ideas, the only way to communicate them is through a non-discursive mode of expression, that is, by giving them a perceptible form of some kind. It may seem unlikely that this can be accomplished by an "art of speech". However, poetry can make thoughts and feelings perceivable in virtue of the figurative element that is characteristic of the art form. Kant is well aware of this feature of poetry, given his description of the poet as a "painter of ideas". In the third *Critique*, he hints at this indirectly. Explaining the pictorial arts as involving "the expression of ideas in sensible intuition", he adds in brackets: "not through representations of the mere imagination, which are evoked through words".[138] I take this remark to refer to the arts of speech dealt with in the preceding paragraphs. If this is correct, then Kant is assuming that in poetry, words function as a sort of trigger of inner representations of the imagination, conjuring meaning-rich images that evoke thoughts and feelings and promote a search for meaning which, to use Kant's words, "sets the faculty of intellectual ideas (reason) into motion".[139] Incidentally, this suggests that the bearers of poetic meaning are the images evoked by the words of a poem.

In addition to its pictorial aspects, poetry also has musical features. If only in a footnote, I have recalled Kant's claim that rhyme and rhythm make poetry (at least insofar as it is read aloud) similar

[135] Cf. KU § 49, AA 05: 317.

[136] I owe this expression (and the idea connected to it) to D. Davies, *Aesthetics and Literature*, Continuum, London 2007, pp. 162-163.

[137] On this see also Vidmar Jovanović, *Kant on Poetry and Cognition*, in "Journal of Aesthetic Education", 54, 1, 2020, pp. 1-17.

[138] KU § 51, AA 05: 321-322.

[139] KU § 49, AA 05: 315.

to music.[140] Thus, the art to which he attributes "the highest rank of all" and whose value does not lie in its perceptual properties alone may also offer the "enjoyment" of the art that, more than any other, "moves the mind in more manifold and, though only temporarily, in deeper ways".[141] On the one hand, this suggests that in the case of poetry, both the transitive use and the intransitive use of the term 'expression' play a role. Kant could therefore subscribe to Angela Leighton's claim that "a poem expresses something […] and at the same time […] is expressive, as if with musical dynamic".[142] On the other hand, it impinges on the nature of the thought process that poetry can prompt: rather than being one of logical connection, it may, to use Leighton's words, be "one of sound and syntax, rhythm and accent, of sense sparked by the collocation and connotation of words".[143]

Assuming that I have justified attributing the epistemic claim implied by aesthetic cognitivism to Kant, the vindication of the aesthetic claim follows immediately. In truth, Kant does not claim that the cognitive value of a work of art contributes to its artistic value, but his conception implies that the source of the cognitive value of a work, namely the aesthetic ideas it expresses, is also the source of its aesthetic value. As we have seen, Kant describes the mental disposition effected by aesthetic ideas in terms akin to those used to describe the state of mind on which taking pleasure in the beautiful rests, and he equates beauty with the expression of aesthetic ideas. The result is that a work strikes us as beautiful when it makes possible the wealth of thoughts and the animation of the cognitive faculties on which its potential cognitive benefits depend. In poetry, more than any other art, it becomes clear that what Kant considers the source of the pleasure offered by a work is a disposition of the mind that, while it perhaps does not push in the direction of what can be known, surely invites a kind of imaginative thought[144] that is not devoid of cognitive value, for it often engages in reflection on aspects of our experience and the use of our concepts.

[140] See n. 20. He also suggests that the "art of tone (*Tonkunst*)" may "very naturally be united with" poetry (KU § 53, AA 05: 328).

[141] KU § 53, AA 05: 328. That musicality contributes to the aesthetic value of poetry is claimed in Anth § 71, AA 07: 247.

[142] A. Leighton, 'Poetry's Knowing: So What Do We Know?', in J. Gibson (ed.), *The Philosophy of Poetry*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, pp. 162-182, p. 174.

[143] Ivi, p. 178.

[144] I have borrowed the expression 'imaginative thought' from E. John, 'Poetry and cognition', in J. Gibson, W. Huemer and L. Pocci (eds.), *A Sense of the World. Essays on fiction, narrative, and knowledge*, Routledge, New York and London 2007, pp. 219-232, p. 229.

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