People call themselves poets and painters, and seek help for their failures, as I might come to a psychiatrist to discover the causes of my vaulter's block or to find out why I can't get anywhere in nuclear physics. Indeed, regularly people push through the turnstiles of the critic's day who feel very strongly the need to pass as poets, to be called "creative," to fit themselves into a certain social niche, acquire an identity the way one acquires plants there's no time to tend or goldfish that can't be kept alive, and their problems are important and interesting and genuine enough; but they are not the problems of poets as poets, any more than the child who tiptoes to school on the tops of fences has the steelworker's nerves or nervousness or rightly deserves his wage.


During the most austere phase of Analytical Cubism, when he and Braque were working in closely related styles, Picasso one day went to look at his friend's latest work. Suddenly, he became aware that there was a squirrel in the picture, and pointed it out to Braque, who was rather abashed at this discovery. The next day Braque showed him the picture again, after reworking it to get rid of the squirrel, but Picasso insisted that he still saw it, and it took another reworking to banish the animal for good.


Be sat around tossing ideas back and forth, and we developed material of what we called the "What if?" category. Someone would say, "What if Christopher Columbus were an usher at Roxy Theater?" and we'd take it from there, with Columbus navigating people to their seats. Or, "What if Leonardo da Vinci worked as a short-order cook?" and we'd have Leonardo sort of painting sandwiches together like each one was a work of art.


The day Schwitters decided he wanted to meet George Grosz. George Grosz was decidedly surly; the hatred in his pictures often overflowed into his private life. But Schwitters was not one to be put off. He wanted to meet Grosz, so Mehring took him up to Grosz's flat. Schwitters rang the bell and Grosz opened the door. "Good morning, Herr Grosz. My name is Schwitters."

"I am not Grosz," answered the other and slammed the door. There was nothing to be done. Half way down the stairs, Schwitters stopped suddenly and said, "Just a moment."

Up the stairs he went, and once more rang Grosz's bell. Grosz, enraged by this continual jangling, opened the door, but before he could say a word, Schwitters said "I am not Schwitters, either." And went downstairs again. Finis. They never met again.


There was a man whose chatter in certain circumstances made it necessary for me to listen to. At every opportunity he was ready with a little philosophical lecture, a very tiresome harangue. Almost in despair, I suddenly discovered that he perspired copiously when talking. I saw the pearls of sweat gather on his brow, unite to form a stream, glide down his nose, and hang at the extreme point of his nose in a drop-shaped body. From the moment of making this discovery, all was changed.

I even took pleasure in inciting him to begin his philosophical instruction, merely to observe the perspiration on his brow and at the end of his nose.

This issue is dedicated to LIAM HUDSON

BALLAST is privately published. It is a journal devoted to wit, the contents of which are intended to be insightful, amusing, or thought provoking. Its purposes are educational, apolitical, and entirely noncommercial. It does not carry paid advertisements, nor is it supposed to be purchased or sold. It is issued quarterly in September, December, March, and June. There is no charge for subscriptions as such, and (to the extent that finances allow) the journal will gladly be mailed to people who send in their mailing address, accompanied by two first class stamps (22¢ U.S. postage stamps) for each of the issues requested. To subscribe for one full year (a series of four issues), send in a total of eight first class stamps (current value of $1.76). No other currency will be accepted. Do not send cash, checks, or money orders. Nor can the journal be ordered by phone. Subscription requests must be mailed to: BALLAST Quarterly Review, 2968 North Prospect Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211. Readers are also encouraged to send examples of verbal and visual wit of the sort that the journal might publish. Original material should be explicitly labeled as that. Unsolicited material will not be returned unless it is accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage affixed. Copyright © 1985 by Roy R. Behrens.

ballast (ball'ast), n. 1. something heavy carried in a ship to steady it. 2. weight carried in a balloon or dirigible to control it. 3. anything which steadies a person or thing. 4. gravel or crushed rock used in making the bed for a road or railroad track. —v. furnish with ballast. give steadiness to. 5. load or weigh down. (ap- par. < Scand. (OldN.) bælast < bær bare + last load) —ball'aster, n.
After dinner, Duchamp would take the bus to Nice to play at a chess circle and return late with Lydie (his first wife) lying awake waiting for him. Even so, he did not go to bed immediately, but set up the chess pieces to study the position of a game he had been playing. First thing in the morning when he arose, he went to the chessboard to make a move he had thought out during the night. But the piece could not be moved—during the night Lydie had arisen and glued down all the pieces... A few months later Duchamp and Lydie divorced, and he returned to the States.

Man Ray (remembering Marcel Duchamp) in his autobiography, **Self-Portrait** (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), p. 237.

The three panels of the rounded triptych (shown below) indicate three domains of creativity which shade into each other without sharp boundaries: Humour, Discovery, and Art... Each horizontal line across the triptych stands for a pattern of creative activity which is represented on all three panels; for instance: comic—epigram—social analysis. The first is intended to make us laugh; the second to make us understand; the third to make us marvel. The logical pattern of the creative process is the same in all three cases: it consists in the discovery of hidden similarities.


**Before hearing this lecture I was confused about this subject. Having heard it, I am still confused, but on a higher plane.**


**School Days**

I was at this time a handsome boy of fourteen.

**What a Life!**

A lenient and generous teacher, the Doctor took us often to the Crystal Palace or to the Zoo.

**Recommended**


**Quackery**

If lawyers are disbarred and clerics defrocked, doesn’t it follow that electricians can be delighted; musicians denoted; cowboys deranged; models deposed; tree surgeons debarked and dry cleaners depressed?

Virginia Ostman.
Contrary to my hopes we spoke little, but we devoured each other with our eyes—suddenly I had the whim of trying to appear in his eyes as a kind of dandy of "universal intellectualism." I learned later that the effect I produced was exactly the opposite.

Before leaving I wanted to give him a magazine containing an article I had written on paranoia. I therefore opened the magazine at the place where the article began. He took it, and as I was about to leave I said without paying the slightest attention to my magazine. "Trying to interest him, I explained that it was not a Surrealist diversion, but... an ambitiously scientific article, and I repeated the title, pointing to it with my finger. Before his imperturbable indifference my voice became sharper and more insistent. Then, continuing to stare at me with a fixity in which his whole being seemed to converge, Freud exclaimed, addressing Stefan Zweig, "You have never seen a more complete example of a Spaniard. What a fanatic!"

Salvador Dali (describing his first and only meeting with Sigmund Freud, on 1 July 1936, when Freud was in his eighties), quoted in "Freud and Dali: Personal Moments" by Sharon Romm and Joseph William Slap in American Imago, vol 10, no 4, Winter 1983, pp. 344-345.

...He loved to shake hands. Nothing left him more puzzled and aggrieved than a white man who declined the offer. That he should feel baffled when a white man refused to shake hands is easy to understand because he had picked up the habit from them. Thomas Henry Tibbles... remarked that Indians, who never shake hands among themselves, consider this act to be one of the funniest things in the world. Nevertheless, having learned that whites express friendship by seizing each other, they happily do the same.


Alexander Woolcott (reviewing a play): The scenery was beautiful, but the actors got in front of it.

Custer and the Little Bighorn
of Sitting Bull, Son of the Morning Star

Son of the Morning Star
CUSTER AND THE LITTLE BIGHORN

British Military Officer (addressing an army recruit): How are your bowels working? Recruist: Haven't been issued any, sir.
Officer: I mean, are you constipated?
Recruit: No, sir. I volunteered.
Officer: Heavens man, don't you know the King's English?
Recruit: No, sir, is he?

When I was about five years old my father happened to be in a basement-chamber of our house, where they had been washing, and where a good fire of oak-logs was still burning; he had a viol in his hand, and was playing and singing alone beside the fire. The weather was very cold. Happening to look into the fire, he spied in the middle of those most burning flames a little creature like a lizard, which was sporting in the core of the intestest coals. Becoming instantly aware of what the thing was, he had my sister and me called, and pointing it out to us children, gave me a great box on the ears, which caused me to howl and weep with all my might. Then he pacified me good-humouredly, and spoke as follows: "My dear little boy, I am not striking you for any wrong that you have done, but only to make you remember that that lizard which you see in the fire is a salamander, a creature which has never been seen before by any one of whom we have credible information." So saying, he kissed me and gave me some pieces of money.


Kenneth Tynan: A critic is a man who knows the way but can't drive the car.

Wolfgang Wickler

Mimicry in plants and animals

Undoubtedly one of the best books on mimetic resemblance in natural forms is Mimicry in Plants and Animals by Wolfgang Wickler (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1968). The author's text is amplified by fifty illustrations by Hermann Kacher. The cover (reproduced at left) presents a composite of two unrelated varieties of butterflies, set up to aid in comparing their wings. The left wing is that of Atrophanura coon, a distasteful "model" which is avoided by predators, while the right is the wing of the "mimic," Papilio memnon, a palatable source of food for birds, and yet it too is avoided because it looks like the poisonous form.

While writing this letter I was trying to catch a mouse in the studio. It kept rustling more and more inconsiderately in the wastepaper basket. So I placed a bucket of water next to the wastebasket, built a bridge out of cardboard and scattered sugar on the end that was suspended over the bucket. One strip of cardboard fell into the water, and the mouse leaped back into the basket. The next time the gimmick worked, that is, the mouse fell into the water and swam desperately about; I wanted to hasten its end by pushing it under. The pail, elevated on a little box, tipped over, the water spilled all over me, and the mouse escaped. All that remains is the stench, probably from the cold sweat—I trust the mouse won't catch cold!

inner of the 1982 Drue Heinz Literature Prize was Dancing for Men, eleven short stories by Roley Wilson, Jr. (NY: Ecco Press, 1985). His previous volumes of stories include The Pleasures of Manhood (1977) and Living Alone (1978). Wilson’s works have been described as “highly realistic, utterly convincing dreams.” That is especially apparent in “Iris,” a story which has just appeared in the Indiana Review (Spring 1985, pp. 7-13), a story which starts in the following way:

When Iris woke up one Sunday morning and recognized that Robert was dead, she passed the rest of the day in silence, absorbed in the problem of how to explain to him what she knew he would refuse to believe.


The simplest prejudice of all, the basic currency of judgment in the academy at large, is the distinction with which I began: that between the "hard" and the "soft." Either, this distinction says, we are trying to do science or we are engaged in something quite different: politics, therapy, journalism, self-expression. The arts in particular are seen as peripheral, or—even worse—as "fun," that is to say, as a simple emotional release that receives little professionally academic attention because it deserves none. Yet the briefest glance shows that poems, novels, paintings, photographs, plays, films of any quality are rarely fun, either for artist or for spectator; what is more, that they are at least as carefully poised, as subtly calculated in their effects, as any other genre of intellectual activity. Many take months, years, to put together, and at least as long to assimilate in any but a superficial way.

The arts in particular are seen as "hard" and the "soft." Either, this distinction says, we are trying to do science or we are engaged in something quite different: politics, therapy, journalism, self-expression. The arts in particular are seen as peripheral, or—even worse—as "fun," that is to say, as a simple emotional release that receives little professionally academic attention because it deserves none. Yet the briefest glance shows that poems, novels, paintings, photographs, plays, films of any quality are rarely fun, either for artist or for spectator; what is more, that they are at least as carefully poised, as subtly calculated in their effects, as any other genre of intellectual activity. Many take months, years, to put together, and at least as long to assimilate in any but a superficial way.

Because of my work with colour, I began to notice butterflies. There is nothing so brilliant or as changing and shifting as the iridescence and the pigmented colour of the butterfly's wing. I began to keep a visual record. The diary itself, on which most of this book is based, developed over the years from the time when I first made notes about these colours. I started in 1966, producing really a loose notation—flashes of colour mostly, flowers, grasses and butterflies. As an adult watching as the result of a visual training, the more I drew, the more I wanted to know, so a written account of what I saw began to take place very naturally at the sides of the drawings.

Sign above urinal in New York restaurant restroom: We aim to please. You aim too, please.

Before leaving Basle for England in 1526 and wishing to leave proof of his skill, the artist Hans Holbein the Younger painted a fly on a portrait he had just completed. The purchaser of the portrait, trying to remove the insect with a brush, discovered the jest. The story spread, and arrangements were set in motion to retain this virtue in the country. The painter therefore had to leave town in great secrecy.


There then we have the beginnings of an answer to what relations lie at the heart of beauty. "All beauty may be a metaphor be called rhyme." What is rhyme like? Well, let us have an example:

- cat rhymes with mat;
- cat does not rhyme with table;
- cat does not rhyme with cat.

Taking rhyme as the paradigm of beauty, let us turn at once to the fundamental question: Why do we like the relation that rhyme epitomises? What is the biological advantage of seeking out rhyming elements in the environment?

The answer I propose is this: Considered as a biological phenomenon, aesthetic preferences stem from a predisposition among animals and men to seek out experiences through which they may learn to classify the objects in the world around them. Beautiful 'structures' in nature or in art are those which facilitate the task of classification by presenting evidence of the 'taxonomic' relations between things in a way which is informative and easy to grasp.


Percy Hammond (reviewing a musical): I have knocked everything but the knees of the chorus-girls, and Nature has anticipated me there.

Those who are appreciative of scientific illustrations will no doubt find pleasure in viewing the exquisite pen and ink drawings by Sabine Bauer in Animal Forms and Patterns: A Study of the Appearance of Animals by Adolf Portmann (NY: Schocken Books, 1967). The drawing below is of guenons (a variety of African monkey), rendered and arranged "to show the many variations produced by some few elements of design and colouration."

When I wanted to know what time it was I looked at the Ehret Brewery clock and held the watch to my ear. It ran like a charm, and its ticking was a constant reminder that I had, for once, outsmarted Chico. When I left Basle for England I was I looked at the Ehret Brewery clock and held the watch to my ear. It ran like a charm, and its ticking was a constant reminder that I had, for once, outsmarted Chico.


A basketball game is more enjoyable when appreciated as an aesthetic whole, with its changing rhythms, its sudden grace, and its dramatic tensions, finally decisively, resolved. And classroom life is more rewarding when students experience their learnings as the climax of spirited but directed give and take. To the extent that these daily activities are charged with aesthetic qualities and relations, we experience them as fulfilling and are fulfilled.


Absolutely Mad Inventions by A.E. Brown and H.A. Jeffcott, Jr. (NY: Dover Publications, 1970) is a sidesplitting collection of the drawings and descriptions for 60 strange inventions for which there are actual patents. Reproduced here (left) is a diagram of an "improvement in foot-warmers," a gadget worn inside the shoes on the coldest winter days, with tubes and a strap which extend to the neck. To warm the feet, the wearer breathes into the cup at the top.

When I hear anyone talk of culture I reach for my revolver.

I.J. Good: When I hear the word 'gun' I reach for my revolver.
Lyton Strachey was unfit, but instead of allowing himself to be rejected by the doctors he preferred to appear before a military tribunal as a conscientious objector. He told us of the extraordinary impression that was caused by an air-cushion which he inflated during the proceedings as a protest against the hardness of the benches. Asked by the chairman the usual question: "I understand, Mr. Strachey, that you have a conscientious objection to war?" he replied (in his curious falsetto voice), "Oh no, not at all, only to this war." Better than this was his reply to the chairman's other stock question, which had previously never failed to embarrass the claimant: "Tell me, Mr. Strachey, what would you do if you saw a German soldier trying to violate your sister?" With an air of noble virtue: "I would try to get between them."

Robert Graves, Goodbye to All That (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957)

He (Groucho Marx) probably was not aware of everything he was saying when in a "You Bet Your Life" contestant stated she had thirteen children and could explain it only by proclaiming, "I love my husband!" "I like my cigar too," said Groucho, "but I take it out once in a while."


It is our parents, normally, who not only teach us our family history but who set us straight on our own childhood recollections, telling us that this cannot have happened the way we think it did and that, on the other hand, did occur, just as we remember it, in such and such a summer when So-and-So was our nurse.


"The styles I find most useful to study are those of Hugh Kenner, Osip Mandelstam, Samuel Beckett, Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, Charles Doughty. All of these are writers who do not waste a word, who condense, pare down, and proceed with daring synapses. From Victor Shklovski I saw how narrative can be suggested rather than rendered, and how anything can be made startling by taking it out of "its series." Shklovski (and other Formalists) felt that art served a purpose by "making the familiar strange," a process of regeneration (of attention, of curiosity, of intelligence) the opposite of narcosis."


John Lahr (describing how vaudeville skits were made by burlesque comedian Billy K. Wells, an associate of Bert Lahr, the author's father) in Notes on a Cowardly Lion (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 41.