

PREFACE

dreamed *Kubla Khan*: he did not dream *The Ancient Mariner*.

These four elements—sound, emotion, imagery, thought—are present in all good poetry. But they have no separate existence in our actual enjoyment of a poem, or in that original act of creation which our enjoyment faintly re-enacts. We analyse them out of the poem; but no alchemy of ours could recombine them into that living whole. What fuses them into one is the poet's emotion, the poetic mood. This mood may be induced in various ways—by a sense-impression, by a recollection, by meditation on a theme. Sometimes it is actually induced by a rhythmic sound. This happens most often in those poems which are most nearly akin to mere reverie or dream. If Coleridge dreamed *Kubla Khan*, he dreamed it to the rhythm of a sonorous sentence from Purchas. And, if not actually induced by a rhythm, the poetic mood must always find its appropriate rhythm before it can beat itself out into imagery and thought. Wordsworth's *Solitary Reaper* supplies an unambiguous instance. That poem was suggested—we may almost say it was inspired—by this sentence from Wilkinson's *Tour of Scotland*:

'Passed a female who was reaping alone: she sung in Erse as she bended over her sickle; the sweetest human voice I ever heard; her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious, long after they were heard no more.'

This lovely picture caught the poet's eye: the rhythm of the last phrase filled his ear: from the memory of his own recent tour in Scotland an appropriate setting floated up. He saw himself mounting the side of a glen, in a still and cloudless day of Autumn, all things favouring the poetic mood. Suddenly from a field below there rises the voice of song. He looks down: the singer and her strain define themselves; and his mood is precipitated into poetry. Swift to seek likeness in difference, imagination sweeps away to far other scenes where the same elements might meet—the music, the stillness, the cloudless blue—to Arabian oases vocal with the nightingale, to Western Isles where the cuckoo's first note is