CHAPTER 4

# *Collingwood and Wittgenstein on the Relation between Philosophy and Poetry*

*Vasso Kindi*

Philosophy and poetry have been discussed together since ancient times. Parmenides and Lucretius left us philosophical poems, Plato spoke of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry,[1] Aristotle thought that poetry is more philosophical than history,[2] and Michel de Montaigne wrote that "philosophy is nothing but sophisticated poetry."[3] Moreover, the fusion of philosophy and poetry is very prominent in the German Idealism and Romanticism of the nineteenth century. In this chapter, I will discuss two philosophers of the first half of the twentieth century, R. G. Collingwood and Ludwig Wittgenstein, who linked philosophy with poetry.[4]

Collingwood, in his books *An Essay on Philosophical Method* and *The Principles of Art*, presents philosophy as a branch of literature and connects it to poetry. He writes, for instance, in *The Principles of Art*:

> Good philosophy and good poetry are not two different kinds of writing, but one; each is simply good writing. In so far as each is good, each converges, as regards style and literary form, with the other; and in the limiting case where each was as good as it ought to be, the distinction would disappear. (PA 298)

[1] Plato, *Republic*, 607b. [2] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451b.

[3] Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, 98. M. A. Screech, in the 1987 Penguin edition, translates Montaigne's *poésie sophistiquée* as "poetry adulterated by Sophists." This rendering captures best, I think, Montaigne's desire, in the same passage, to belittle Plato in comparison to the ancient poets, implicitly targeting Plato's own depreciation of poetry. Accordingly, Montaigne calls Plato *poëte décousu*, a characterization that has been translated in English as "disjointed," "disconnected," or "incoherent" poet. However, I think that "fallen poet" or "poor poet," in the sense of not being as competent or as accomplished as the ancient authors who wrote in poetic form, would be closer to the spirit of the text. *Découdre* means "to unpick," so one is *décousu* if one is in a bad condition, has lost, or is stripped of one's regalia. Montaigne cites Timon, who calls Plato "a great contriver of miracles" [*grand forgeur des miracles*].

[4] Alfred North Whitehead, writing in the 1930s, also thought that philosophy is akin to poetry; see Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, vii, 50, 174.

Wittgenstein, for his part, writes in his notes of 1933–34, which have been included in *Culture and Value*: "I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said philosophy ought to be written only as a *poetic composition*."[5]

In what follows I will present what these two philosophers say about the relation between philosophy and poetry, and argue that both want philosophers to express their times, just like poets, and so to lead their audience to the future in a process of self-knowledge and reform. At the end, as an addendum, I will comment on similar remarks made on philosophy and poetry by Richard Rorty to examine their similarities and differences with Collingwood's and Wittgenstein's remarks.

## 4.1 Collingwood

In *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, Collingwood says that literature is divided into poetry and prose. By poetry he does not mean only verse, as there is prosaic verse and poetic prose (EPM 201). With prose, Collingwood distinguishes between matter and form. Matter concerns content, or what we say, and form concerns style, or how we deliver the content. The formal aspect of prose has aesthetic qualities and prose writers, says Collingwood, are artists when they live up to the task of literary excellence. Unlike the formal aspect, which aims at beauty, the material aspect aims at truth, and so prose writers need to be thinkers (EPM 199). These two dimensions are analytically distinct but one cannot exist without the other if the piece of writing is to qualify as literature. However, in poetry, according to Collingwood, matter and form are not distinguished. The poets do not try to say anything; they just speak, aiming at beauty,[6] at achieving literary merits.

Philosophy, says Collingwood, "as a kind of literature belongs to the realm of prose" (EPM 201), despite the fact that there exist philosophical works written as poems. In order to bring out philosophy's distinct characteristics, Collingwood compares philosophy to science and history. Science, he says, uses many technical terms, something that is not common

[5] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 24, original emphasis. In the 1998 edition of *Culture and Value* the same remark has been translated as follows: "I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: really one should write philosophy only as one *writes a poem*."

[6] Collingwood, in *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, contents that "[t]he sole business of a poem is to be beautiful" (EPM 200). I would like to thank David Collins for drawing my attention to the fact that by the time of *The Principles of Art*, Collingwood came to focus on successful expression rather than beauty as the criterion of artistic success.

in philosophy, where technical terms, at least in Collingwood's time, were dismissed as jargon and looked down upon. According to Collingwood, the greatest philosophers, who were also great stylists – for example, Plato, Berkeley, and Descartes – did not use technical terms at all (EPM 202). In his view, science uses technical terms because in science we come across new experiences and new concepts and we need new words to name them. In contrast, in philosophy we are trying to understand better what we are already familiar with, using relatively but not absolutely new terms to make distinctions, recognize new aspects, and highlight new connections (EPM 205–06). In philosophy, we "never need an absolutely new word for an absolutely new thing" (EPM 205). The language of philosophy avoids technical vocabulary and has "that expressiveness, that flexibility, that dependence upon context, which are the hall-marks of a literary use of words as opposed to a technical use of symbols" (EPM 207).

The literary nature of philosophical writing brings the philosopher close to the historian (EPM 208). Yet, their styles differ, according to Collingwood, since these are affected by their respective subject matter. Historians' style is instructive as they know more than their readers, and as they present just the end product of their work. They do not disclose to their readers their doubts and intellectual peregrinations. In contrast, philosophers are primarily addressing themselves. They do not put forward only the thoughts that they are certain of, but rather focus on the vexing difficulties and the conceptual obscurities that trouble them, "if not to solve or remove them, at least to understand them better" (EPM 209). To this end, says Collingwood,

> [t]he philosophers who have had the deepest instinct for style have repeatedly shrunk from adopting the form of a lecture or instructive address, and chosen instead that of a dialogue in which the work of self-criticism is parceled out among the dramatis personae, or a meditation in which the mind communes with itself, or a dialectical process where the initial position is modified again and again as difficulties in it come to light. (EPM 210)

For Collingwood, philosophical writing is "essentially a confession"; the philosopher "must always be confessing his difficulties, whereas the historian is always to some extent concealing them" (EPM 210). We consult historians, we are interested in their conclusions, but we follow in philosophers' footsteps, developing an intimate relation with them and trying to emulate their thoughts ourselves (EPM 211).

This relation of intimacy between philosophers and their readers is similar to that between poets and their audience. Poets, according to Collingwood, confess to their readers their emotions, whereas philosophers confess their thoughts.[7] These thoughts we, as readers, try to follow and think ourselves. But, we need to be attentive and receptive in order to share the experience of thinking the particular thoughts of philosophers, in order to be able to understand them and then come to criticize them. The end result of philosophical thinking, says Collingwood, "if it must be called a poem," is not an ordinary poem but a poem of the intellect (EPM 212). As mentioned above, Collingwood takes poetry in the wide sense of the term; it is not identified with verse and so may also comprise works of prose. It all depends on how language is used. Philosophers usually write in prose, as they are in pursuit of knowledge and truth, but their work may be considered poetic, since the language employed to craft it is imaginative, flexible, carefully wrought, and refined. "The principles on which the philosopher uses language are those of poetry," Collingwood argues, "but what he writes is not poetry but prose" (EPM 214).

The difference between philosophers and poets lies, according to Collingwood, in that philosophers do not think of language as valuable in itself so as to be interested, as poets are, in linguistic articulations for their own sake, but use it as a means to the end of expressing thought. Philosophers do not want word patterns to distract from what they want to say. They are not supposed to produce "a jewel that is looked at for its own beauty but a crystal in whose depths the thought can be seen without distortion or confusion; and the philosophical writer in especial follows the trade not of a jeweler but of a lens-grinder" (EPM 214). (Here, the allusion to Spinoza, who had been previously lauded by Collingwood as a great philosophical writer producing "lapidary phrases," is obvious.)

The parallel between philosophy and poetry is also made in Collingwood's *The Principles of Art*. In a section titled "Art and Intellect" (PA 292–99), Collingwood qualifies his view that art expresses only emotions and contains nothing that is due to the intellect, arguing that,

[7] Collingwood considers a similar thought in *The Principles of Art*, but he comes to reject it. Initially, he says that artists with a "true consciousness" try to confess to themselves their own feelings (PA 216, cf. 300–01), which means that, from this perspective, the audience is inessential to the artistic process. Later, however, Collingwood attributes this idea, to the "technical theory of art," i.e., the theory that turns art into craft and the work of art into an artifact designed to affect the feelings and actions of the audience. Collingwood is critical of this theory. His own view is that true artists invite the audience to participate and collaborate in the artistic process.

apart from psychical feelings,[8] poets can express intellectual emotions as well, that is, emotions that arise from intellectual activities: "The poet converts human experience into poetry not by first expurgating it, cutting out the intellectual elements and preserving the emotional, and then expressing this residue; but by fusing thought itself into emotion: thinking in a certain way and then expressing how it feels to think in that way" (PA 295).

In Collingwood's view, the difference between philosophers and poets does not lie in the fact that one writes in prose and the other in verse, nor that one expresses thoughts and the other emotions. All language expresses emotions according to Collingwood (PA 296). In his view, the difference lies in the fact that the philosopher tries to express the "dynamism of thought," the adventure of the mind seeking to achieve clarity and wisdom; the building of philosophical theories and systems is only incidental to the journey (PA 297). However, the poet's situation is more static. Poets try to successfully express emotions that they become aware of. Collingwood expresses the difference between poetry and philosophy thus: "Poetry, then, in so far as it is the poetry of a thinking man and addressed to a thinking audience, may be described as expressing the intellectual emotion attendant upon thinking in a certain way: philosophy, the intellectual emotion attendant upon trying to think better" (PA 297).

Yet, Collingwood contends that these distinctions hold only if we are dealing with bad philosophy and bad poetry:

> Good philosophy and good poetry are not two different kinds of writing, but one; each is simply good writing. In so far as each is good, each converges, as regards style and literary form, with the other; and in the limiting case where each was as good as it ought to be, the distinction would disappear. (PA 298)

Collingwood's concern in both texts is to highlight the significance of intellectual and emotional contact between the philosopher and the poet on the one hand and the audience on the other. It is a theme that dominates Collingwood's work in general as he puts great emphasis on the ability to re-enact the thoughts of others in order to understand them and criticize them.[9] To the extent that philosophy, unlike science, does not

[8] Collingwood distinguishes the psychical level, where we experience the flux of sensations and feelings, from the level of thought or intellectual level, where the intellect attends to relations between feelings converted into ideas by consciousness and, in its secondary function, to thoughts and intellectual emotions (PA 164, 166, 209, 216).

[9] On the idea of re-enactment in Collingwood, see D'Oro, "Collingwood on Re-Enactment and the Identity of Thought."

aim at accumulating knowledge that comes from without, but rather at the clearer and better understanding of beliefs and thoughts that we already have, it attempts an anatomy of our own self, a self-reflective investigation, a confession of dead ends and difficulties. And in that respect, philosophy resembles poetry.[10] Both philosophers and poets are wrestling with the complexities and entanglements of thought and emotions in order to meet their readers and move in tandem with them.[11] They do not aim at offering their audience the ready-made extract of their struggles but at thinking together and communicating.[12]

The prime example of a poet, for Collingwood, is T. S. Eliot, whose *The Waste Land* expressed a whole era – an era of decay, of destruction, of aridity, of fear, of resignation, of desertion – in a way that does not lend itself to amusement or political exploitation. Art, says Collingwood on the last page of *The Principles of Art*, needs to be prophetic. The artist, by which he means every writer, philosopher, poet, or novelist,

> must prophesy not in the sense that he foretells things to come, but in the sense that he tells his audience, at risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts. His business as an artist is to speak out, to make a clean breast. But what he has to utter is not, as the individualistic theory of art would have us think, his own secrets. As spokesman of his community, the secrets he must utter are theirs. The reason why they need him is that no community altogether knows its own heart; and by failing in this knowledge a community deceives itself on the one subject concerning which ignorance means death. For the evils which come from that ignorance the poet as prophet suggests no remedy, because he has already given one. The remedy is the poem itself. Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness. (PA 336)[13]

[10] Collingwood thought that philosophers "must go to school with the poets in order to learn the use of language"; then they will be able to use language to explore their own mind so as to "[bring] to light what is obscure and doubtful in it" (EPM 214). Also, in *An Essay on Metaphysics*, Collingwood, in a statement reminiscent of Plato, says that in his philosophy he is not trying to convince the reader of anything, "but only to remind him of what he already knows perfectly well" (EM 23).

[11] When Collingwood uses the term "poet," he does not refer solely to those who write in verse. He says: "Philosophers have written in verse, and have not on that account been poets; imaginative artists have written in prose and have been poets none the less" (PA 296).

[12] According to Collingwood, not only philosophers but also scientists and historians must go to school with the people of letters to learn how to write well. On the other hand, people of letters must, in their turn, go to school with the scientists to learn how to deal with a robust subject and not rest content with articulating a style. "Subject without style is barbarism; style without content is dilettantism. Art is the two together" (PA 299).

[13] By "corrupted consciousness" Collingwood means the disowning of one's own feelings and experiences (PA 216–21, 282–85).

## 4.2 Wittgenstein

As far as we know, Wittgenstein and Collingwood never met, although they were contemporary philosophers teaching at the two most prominent schools in Britain. Furthermore, we have no evidence that they read each other's work.[14] Still, scholars have noted similarities between their philosophies.[15] I will argue that this similarity extends to what they say about the relation between philosophy and poetry.

Collingwood, as we saw, addresses the relations between philosophy and poetry directly. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, connects philosophy to poetry in a brief comment written in 1933–34 and published in *Culture and Value*. The first part of that remark was cited above; the full remark is:

> I believe I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a *poetic composition* [*dichten*]. It must, as it seems to me, be possible to gather from this how far my thinking belongs to the present, future, or past. For I was thereby revealing myself as someone who cannot quite do what he would like to be able to do.[16]

Similar comments are found in Wittgenstein's manuscripts. Some of the more relevant ones are the following, selected and translated by Joachim Schulte. The first is written on April 23, 1938.

> If what I want to teach is, not a more correct way of thinking, but a new movement of thought [*Gedankenbewegung*], then I am aiming for a 'revaluation of values,' and come to resemble Nietzsche also because in my view, philosophers should be poets [*Dichter*].[17]

Then, in the period between February to April 1940: "I am a second-rate poet [*Dichter*]. As a one-eyed man, though, I am a king among the blind. And for a second-rate poet it would be better to give up writing poetry, even if in this respect he stands out among his fellow human beings."[18] Third, in October 1946, Wittgenstein writes: "O, why is it that I feel as if I were writing a poem when I am writing philosophy? It is as if here there

[14] There is only one reference in M. O'C. Drury's reminiscences of Wittgenstein (Drury, "Conversations with Wittgenstein," 141). In conversation, Wittgenstein expressed doubt whether Collingwood would vote for him to succeed G. E. Moore to the Chair of Philosophy at Cambridge. Collingwood was an elector but did not show up, probably because of health problems; see McGuinness, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 293.

[15] See, for instance, Martin, "Collingwood and Wittgenstein on the Task of Philosophy"; Blackburn, "Re-Enactment as Critique of Logical Analysis"; Kindi, "Collingwood, Wittgenstein, Strawson."

[16] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 24.

[17] Cited in Schulte, "Wittgenstein on Philosophy as Poetry," 349.

[18] Schulte, "Wittgenstein on Philosophy as Poetry," 349.

was a small thing of wonderful significance. Something like a leaf or a flower."[19]

How should these remarks be interpreted? The reference to poetry is usually interpreted in the Wittgensteinian literature as an allusion to aesthetics and art in general. More particularly, it is understood as a reference to the creative and literary use of language in contrast to its descriptive use or its use for the reporting of information. It is also taken as an allusion to style, since style is thought to be intimately related to poetry. So, given that Wittgenstein has said that he wanted to be able to write philosophy as poetry, the question that has been considered is whether, by speaking of poetry, Wittgenstein wanted to draw attention to his style and to the way it fits his philosophy. David Rozema, for instance, thinks that the *Tractatus* is a kind of poem given that, in his view, its form fits its content: "Just as a poem shows what it says in its form, thereby distinguishing itself as art, the *Tractatus* shows itself in its form to be saying something other than what it 'says.'"[20]

According to Rozema, Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* confronted the part of himself that was like Russell, a part that was proven barren, and as this book, according to this interpretation, elucidates a person's soul, "it can legitimately be called a kind of poetry, for it bears the essential feature of all poetics: it serves to shape, through catharsis, the passions."[21] In Rozema's view, the *Tractatus* articulates a logical picture of language based on Russellian principles, the implications of which lead to the final sentence of the book, the injunction of silence, that has practical bearings. The Logical Atomist's life in the first part of the book is proven fraudulent and unhappy, so logic needs to be fused with ethics.[22] Rozema makes use of Wittgenstein's claim to Ludwig von Ficker, the publisher of the literary journal *Der Brenner*, that his *Tractatus* is "strictly philosophical and at the same time literary," and so it can be published next to the poems and other artistic works in the journal. Rozema also makes use of Frege's comment,

[19] Schulte, "Wittgenstein on Philosophy as Poetry," 351. Cf. what Russell writes to Lady Ottoline Morell in a letter of May 27, 1912 about Wittgenstein and his style of writing: "I told him he ought not simply to *state* what he thinks true, but to give arguments for it, but he said arguments spoil its beauty, and that he would feel as if he was dirtying a flower with muddy hands. He does appeal to me – the artist in intellect is so very rare. I told him I hadn't the heart to say anything against that, and that he had better acquire a slave to state the arguments. I am seriously afraid that no one will see the point of anything he writes, because he won't recommend it by arguments addressed to a different point of view" (cited in Monk, *Bertrand Russell*, 264).

[20] Rozema, "*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: A 'Poem'," 347.

[21] Rozema, "*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: A 'Poem'," 346.

[22] Rozema, "*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: A 'Poem'," 347, 361.

when he first read the *Tractatus*, that it is "an artistic rather than a scientific achievement; what is said in it takes second place to the way in which it is said."[23]

Marjorie Perloff has a similar view. In discussing the remark from *Culture and Value*, she contrasts the use of language in philosophy and poetry on the one hand with the use of language in the sciences and the reporting of information on the other.[24] She emphasizes Wittgenstein's use of figures of speech in his writings and his aphoristic style of expression in order to highlight the literary dimension of his work. In her view, because the German *Dichtung* is related etymologically to *dicht*, which means thick,[25] aphorisms (and poetry) pack things together in dense bits that cohere with each other by crisscrossing threads as in a woven tapestry.[26] Perloff thinks that Wittgenstein's philosophy is poetic by being inventive, and calls Wittgenstein's philosophy conceptual poetry, a kind of conceptual art.[27] She adopts David Antin's statement that Wittgenstein "is not a poet of the German language or the English language; he is a poet of thinking through language."[28] In the same vein, Ben Wade interprets Wittgenstein's comments about philosophy and poetry as an allusion to "a specific art of writing,"[29] while Kathrin Stengel, discussing how style can elucidate what Wittgenstein means when he says that "ethics and aesthetics are one," paraphrases Wittgenstein's remark from *Culture and Value* as follows: "we should deliver philosophy in verse."[30]

Edward Kanterian, in his own interpretation of the remark under consideration, lays emphasis again on style. First of all, he rejects the interpretation that presents philosophy in this remark as a form of poetry, arguing that Wittgenstein is alluding to the activity of writing: "Wittgenstein's attitude comes close to Nietzsche's requirement that in order to write good German prose one would need to work on a page like the sculptor on his statue, or like the poet on his poem."[31] Second, Kanterian thinks that in the same remark Wittgenstein is describing the

[23] Rozema, "*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: A 'Poem'," 357.
[24] Perloff, "But Isn't the Same at Least the Same?," 40–42. Cf. Wittgenstein's remark in *Zettel*: "Do not forget that a poem, even though it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language-game of giving information" (Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, section 160).
[25] Alan Janik, however, says that *Dichtung* "is ultimately derived not from *dicht* (thick) but from the Latin *dictare* meaning 'to dictate, to set up or to draft' (as one drafts, say, a letter)"; Janik, "The Dichtung of Analytic Philosophy," 145.
[26] Perloff, "Writing Philosophy as Poetry," 292–93.
[27] Perloff, "But Isn't the Same at Least the Same?," 43; see also Perloff, "The Conceptualist Turn."
[28] Perloff, "But Isn't the Same at Least the Same?," 45. [29] Wade, *Dialectic of the Ladder*, 61–66.
[30] Stengel, "Ethics as Style," 624. [31] Kanterian, "Philosophy as Poetry?," 99.

ideal style, which is supposed to incorporate a poetic dimension in the sense of finding the right word, the "redeeming word." Third, according to Kanterian, the remark expresses Wittgenstein's dissatisfaction with his own style of writing.

Most recently, James Klagge, in his 2021 book *Wittgenstein's Artillery: Philosophy as Poetry*, defends the view that the comparison Wittgenstein makes between philosophy and poetry is meant to show that he is interested in bringing about a change of attitude in his readers rather than merely a change in their beliefs. This is not supposed to be an intellectual affair but a matter that involves influencing the will, feelings, and temperament. *Dichtung* or poetry would serve, in Klagge's view, as Wittgenstein's artillery in that direction, since poetry engages and affects emotions.[32] Klagge focuses on the meaning of *Dichtung* as fiction and points to Wittgenstein's use of allegories, similes, and imaginary examples that can function as parables.[33] In his view, Wittgenstein turned from the esotericism of the *Tractatus* (i.e., Wittgenstein's indifference to whether he would be understood) to the evangelism of his later period (i.e., the period during which he was interested in communicating his thoughts and influencing his audience).

My own interpretation of the remark in *Culture and Value* differs significantly from the accounts that have been given above. It, too, concentrates on the meaning of the word *Dichtung*, but it does not connect it to fiction and Wittgenstein's use of imaginary examples and similes. Instead, I focus on two issues in the remark: the use of the word *Dichtung* that is usually translated as poetry and its role in German culture, and the reference to the past, present, and future in relation to Wittgenstein's thought. Relevant to this last point is the reference to Nietzsche in the remark from Wittgenstein's manuscripts. I will first discuss *Dichtung*.

### 4.2.1 Dichtung

The verb *dichten* and the noun *Dichtung* have been part of the German language for centuries, but in the nineteenth century they came to be associated with high literature irrespective of whether this is verse or literary or philosophical prose. Literary figures such as Goethe, Schiller,

[32] Klagge, *Wittgenstein's Artillery*, 68.

[33] Janik also lays emphasis on *Dichtung* as fiction, the work of imagination, and says that Wittgenstein's language games are fictions; see Janik, "The Dichtung of Analytic Philosophy," 145, 149.

Heine, Hölderlin, Hofmannsthal, Grillparzer, Musil, Rilke, and Mann were called *Dichter*. They held an elevated status and people looked up to their poets as to their leaders, and Germany was thought to be the land of "*Dichter und Denken*."[34] According to Philip Kitcher, Thomas Mann longed for and aspired to "*Dichter* status," a status that signifies "an elite 'man of letters'." Kitcher says that Mann, who had very little interest in poetry, "wants to make a claim for the credentials of prose to achieve the highest literary levels – so that he and Nietzsche could qualify as *Dichter*."[35] Mann himself has commented rather extensively on the distinction between *Dichter* and *Schriftsteller* [writer]. In his writings, he tried to overcome this division by combining and reconciling, in one person, the natural and instinctive creativity that characterized *Dichter* with the intellectual critical analysis that characterized the *Schriftsteller*.[36] According to Wolf Lepenies, who writes about the opposition between poetry and literature in German culture, *Dichter* in that context is seen to be close to nature, spiritual, forward-looking, and capable of prophetic revelation, in contrast to the writer who is alienated from nature, sociable, and cosmopolitan.[37]

Already since the nineteenth century, the word *Dichtung* was associated with the concepts of authenticity and originality; it pointed to grand and groundbreaking ideas and the revelation of higher truths. In contrast, the word *Literatur* "evoked artifice and complexity."[38] *Poesie*, on the other hand, although castigated by Nietzsche as useless [*unnütze*] and merely for amusement, in German Idealism and Romanticism encompasses not only literature in verse but also prose, the arts in general, and even science.[39] It constitutes an aesthetic ideal and refers to any creative act.[40] Schlegel, in particular, said that "poetry [*Poesie*] and philosophy should be one," and that "time has come to unite the two."[41]

[34] See Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science*, 204, 212, 215.

[35] Kitcher, *Deaths in Venice*, 2, 194.

[36] See Siefken, "Mann as Essayist."

[37] Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science*, 220–33. According to T. J. Reed, the *Dichter* was more *volkisch* and had "his roots in the Volk," while the *Schriftsteller* is described as "rootless and international"; see Reed, *Thomas Mann*, 330.

[38] Cassin, *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, 216, 218.

[39] Nietzsche, "The Philosopher," 21. Cf. Dilthey (quoted in Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science*, 212): "Poetry too expresses a general truth as does science; but not in the form of an abstraction encompassing many individual cases but as the perception of a *single* life. It expresses it intuitively and thus with a wonderful power over the heart" (original emphasis). This passage is from Dilthey's inaugural address at Basel in 1867, titled: "Die dichterische und philosophische Bewegung in Deutschland 1700–1800." The word he uses for poetry is *Poesie*, but in the text itself Dilthey does not seem to differentiate between *Poesie* and *Dichtung*.

[40] See Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 8–9, 15.

[41] Schlegel, "Critical Fragments," sections 115, 108. A similar thought is expressed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound

### *4.2.2 Nietzsche*

Wittgenstein's reference to Nietzsche and the revaluation of values in his manuscript, and his reference to thought that may belong to the future, the present, or past in his remark from *Culture and Value*, lead to the hypothesis that Wittgenstein was not talking about style as an aesthetic category here but was referring to an idea that we find in Nietzsche about the role of the poets (*Dichter*) in a culture or in some historical state of affairs. These thinkers, philosophers, and poets are expected to express their epoch and at the same time to look beyond it into the future. Wittgenstein writes the following in a rather long comment of 1931, which is worth quoting in full.

> These are problems I never get anywhere near, which do not lie in my path or are not part of my world. Problems of the intellectual world of the West that Beethoven (and perhaps Goethe to a certain extent) tackled and wrestled with, but which no philosopher has ever confronted (perhaps Nietzsche passed by them). And perhaps they are lost as far as western philosophy is concerned, i.e., no one will be there capable of experiencing, and hence describing the development of this culture as an epic. Or more precisely, it just no longer is an epic, or is so only for someone looking at it from outside, which is perhaps what Beethoven did with prevision (as Spengler hints somewhere). It might be said that civilization can only have its epic poet in advance. Just as a man cannot report his own death when it happens, but only foresee it and describe it as something lying in the future. So it might be said: If you want to see an epic description of a whole culture, you will have to look at the works of its greatest figures, hence at works composed when the end of this culture could only be *foreseen*, because later on there will be nobody left to describe it. So it's not to be wondered at that it should only be written in the obscure language of prophecy, comprehensible to very few indeed.[42]

Nietzsche, who was both a philosopher and a poet and who considered philosophy a kind of art,[43] in his book *Beyond Good and Evil* – which, notably, bears the subtitle "Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future" – talks about those who will carry us to the future, the new philosophers, who will open new channels and will initiate "a revaluation and reversal of 'eternal values'."[44]

philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language." Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria," 324–25.

[42] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 9.

[43] Nietzsche, "The Philosopher," 19. The word Nietzsche uses is "*Dichtkunst*." Cf. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, section 53, where the art of poetry [*Dichtkunst*] is connected to genius. Robertson calls the poetry as understood by Nietzsche "an ethical art"; Robertson, "Nietzsche's Poet-Philosopher," 188.

[44] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 203.

True philosophers, Nietzsche says, "reach for the future with a creative hand"; they are at odds with their today and the ideals of today, and are "necessarily person[s] of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow."[45] In his book *Daybreak*, Nietzsche calls poets (*Dichter*) "*seers* [*Seher*] who tell us something of the possible," and wishes that they "would let us feel in advance something of the *virtues of the future*!"[46] And, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes:

> I see here a poet . . . His work never wholly expresses what he really would like to express, what he would like to have seen: it seems as if he has had the foretaste of a vision, but never the vision itself – yet a tremendous lust for this vision remains in his soul, and it is from this that he derives his equally tremendous eloquence of desire and craving. With it he lifts his listener above his work and all "works" and lends him wings to rise to heights which listeners otherwise never reach; and so, having themselves become poets and seers, they give the creator of their happiness their due admiration, as if he had led them immediately to the vision of what was for him holiest and most ultimate; as if he had really attained his goal and really seen and communicated his vision.[47]

Wittgenstein, as we saw, does not think that he is capable of carrying out this task. He says that the intellectual problems of his time do not come his way, so as to engage his attention and give an epic description of his declining culture. As much as he wants to contribute to changing the then-current style of thinking,[48] he cannot express his times and lead the way toward the future speaking the language of prevision.[49] Yet, the language

[45] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sections 211, 212.

[46] Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, section 551, original emphasis. Cf. what Nietzsche says about Zarathustra, the poet: "The now and the past on earth – alas, my friends – that is what is most unbearable to *me*. And I would not know how to live if I were not also a seer of that which must come. A seer, a willer, a creator, a future himself and a bridge to the future"; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 110.

[47] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 79. This passage from Nietzsche is very much reminiscent of how Collingwood ends his *Principles of Art*: "The artist must prophesy not in the sense that he tells his audience, at risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts. His business as an artist is to speak out, to make a clean breast. But what he has to utter is not, as the individualistic theory of art would have us think, his own secrets. As spokesman of his community, the secrets he must utter are theirs. The reason why they need him is that no community altogether knows its own heart; and by failing this knowledge a community deceives itself on the one subject concerning which ignorance means death. For the evils which come from that ignorance the poet as prophet suggests no remedy, because he has already given one. The remedy is the poem itself. Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness" (PA 336).

[48] See Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, 28: "Much of what we are doing is a question of changing the style of thinking." In the same lecture, Wittgenstein says that he is "in a sense making propaganda for one style of thinking as opposed to another."

[49] Wittgenstein cannot express his times most probably because he does not feel any sympathy with the European civilization of the early twentieth century, given its adulation of progress. See Drury, "Conversations with Wittgenstein," 160: "My type of thinking is not wanted in this present age.

he uses, mostly in the *Tractatus* with its aphoristic style, resembles somewhat the obscure language of prophecy that few can understand. The editors of Oets Bouwsma's *Wittgenstein: Conversations 1949–1951* report in their introduction that Bouwsma, in a note for a class discussing the nature of a prophet, writes:

> What is a prophet like? Wittgenstein is the nearest to a prophet I have ever known. . . . the acquaintance with Wittgenstein has given me some inkling as to what the power of the prophet was among his people. "Thus said the Lord" is the token of that being high above all fear and all blandishment, fearless and feared, judge and conscience.[50]

## 4.3 Similarities and Differences

Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Collingwood meet in their description of the poet. As the spokesperson of their age and culture, the poet sees ahead, paves the road, and leads the way toward tomorrow. Wittgenstein measures up to this ideal, but thinks that he is not up to it. He cannot do what this task demands. Still, we can presume that he considers this task worthwhile since he approvingly refers to Nietzsche and aspires to be writing philosophy as poetry.

Apart from the affinity they see between philosophy and poetry, all three have another thing in common that is connected to their understanding of philosophy: their view that philosophical discourse, and poetical discourse in general, is some sort of confession. For Collingwood, as we saw above, philosophical writing is essentially a confession. For Nietzsche, "every great philosophy so far has been: a confession of faith on the part of its author."[51] Finally, according to Ray Monk, Wittgenstein thought that "all philosophy, in so far as it is pursued honestly and decently, begins with a confession."[52] Wittgenstein himself said: "If you are *unwilling* to know what you are, your writing is a form of deceit. If anyone is unwilling to descend into himself, because this is too painful, he will remain superficial

I have to swim so strongly against the tide." Cf. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 59: "Just as I cannot write verse, so too my ability to write prose extends only *so far* and no farther. There is a quite definite limit to the prose I can write and I can no more overstep *that* than I can write a poem. *This* is the nature of my equipment; and it is the only equipment I have. It's as though someone were to say: In this game I can only attain such and such a degree of perfection. I can't go beyond it" (original emphasis).

[50] Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein*, xv–xvi.

[51] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 6, original emphasis.

[52] Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 366.

in his writing."[53] He also maintained that his writings are private conversations with himself: "Things that I say to myself tête à tête."[54] In Wittgenstein's view, "[w]orking in philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more a working on oneself."[55] All these remarks show that Wittgenstein demanded from philosophers the painful effort to know themselves, to sincerely delve into themselves and be truthful to who they are. This process involves acknowledging who one is and making a clean breast; it amounts to a confession. A confession marks a turning point, a clean break with a certain type of conduct. Accordingly, Wittgenstein remarked that "[a] confession has to be a part of the new life."[56] The new movement of thinking that he mentioned in relation to poetry, the one that he wanted to inaugurate and teach, may be thought to belong to this new life.

It seems, then, that what Wittgenstein writes about the relation between philosophy and poetry is not an artistic or aesthetic matter alone and does not narrowly concern style in writing. Instead, it concerns Wittgenstein's whole philosophy and the spirit in which it was written.[57] In fact, Wittgenstein distinguishes his way of thinking in philosophy from his style of writing. As Edward Kantarian notes, in his manuscripts Wittgenstein writes: "I am somewhat in love with my kind of movement of thought when I philosophise. (And I should probably drop 'somewhat.') Incidentally, this does not mean that I am in love with my style. For I am not."[58]

Still, despite their similarities, there are certainly differences between Collingwood and Wittgenstein as philosophers. For instance, Collingwood was explicitly and substantially drawing on the idealist tradition (while seeking to go beyond it), he wanted to turn metaphysics into an historical discipline, and he developed a theory about art. Wittgenstein's philosophy broke a different path. He did not develop philosophical theories of any kind

[53] Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, 174, original emphasis. In *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein writes: "The *edifice of your pride* has to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work" (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 26, original emphasis). Cf. Ezra Pound's exhortation, "Pull down thy vanity," in the second part of Canto 81 of the *Pisan Cantos*. There is controversy, however, over whether Pound was addressing this to himself; see D'Epiro, "Whose Vanity Must Be Pulled Down?"

[54] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 77.

[55] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 16.

[56] Rhees, *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, 173; Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 18.

[57] Cf. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 78: "Le style c'est l'homme même." Oskari Kuusela, in a forthcoming article, also argues that Wittgenstein's remark about philosophy and poetry concerns Wittgenstein's whole philosophy and not just matters of style and aesthetics. However, Kuusela's article focuses on different issues, most notably the issue of truth in philosophy ("Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, and Future Philosophers").

[58] Kantarian, "Philosophy as Poetry?," 102, n. 19.

and he aimed at being able to stop doing philosophy.[59] Yet, Collingwood's and Wittgenstein's concurrence in suggesting to write philosophy as poetry brings to light an affinity that focuses on the wider role that philosophy can have in life. In order to perform this role, philosophers need to assume the responsibilities of the poets [*Dichter*]: of the literary figures and artists who are in synch with their epoch, who express and embody their culture, who lead their audience to the future in a process of self-knowledge and revaluation.[60] They do not do it pedagogically or doctrinally; they do not preach; they do not issue commands or precepts. As we attend to them and follow them, as we take inspiration from them, we ourselves become poets and artists,[61] that is, authors of a new future. We too become makers, as poets are, at least etymologically speaking.[62]

The relation between philosophy and poetry might seem, at first glance, a peripheral topic relative to the main concerns of Collingwood's and Wittgenstein's work, and of contemporary philosophy. Yet, the parallel discussion of Collingwood's and Wittgenstein's remarks on this issue, together with the connection to Nietzsche, shows that their work is held together by an existential or ethical quest for self-understanding and meaning – where this is an element of Collingwood's thought that is not often brought out or discussed. As I hope to have shown, both want to fuse philosophy and poetry in order to achieve the kind of expression that will lift us above mundane concerns and get us closer to a clear understanding of ourselves and the world. The discussion of this "peripheral" issue thus brings out links to other strands in their thought and allows us to see that Collingwood's and Wittgenstein's philosophies are not confined within the narrow professional boundaries of the discipline – especially when these are retrospectively drawn.

By way of conclusion, a comparison with Richard Rorty's thoughts on the same issue will bring this orientation of Collingwood's and Wittgenstein's thought into sharper relief by considering their similarities and differences.

[59] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, section 133. For a comparison of Collingwood's historical metaphysics, Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations, and Strawson's descriptive metaphysics, see Kindi, "Collingwood, Wittgenstein, Strawson."

[60] An issue that falls outside the purview of the present chapter is how the conception of philosophy expressed by the call to write philosophy as poetry relates to what Wittgenstein says about philosophy in his later work, especially in the *Philosophical Investigations* and, in particular, about philosophy not interfering and leaving everything as it is.

[61] Cf. Collingwood: "As Coleridge put it, we know a man for a poet by the fact that he makes us poets" (PA 118).

[62] The word "poet" derives from the Greek *poiein*, which means "to make," "to produce."

## 4.4 Addendum: Rorty

In 2004, Rorty gave the Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia. Their title was "The Priority of Imagination Over Reason," and in 2016 the three lectures were published together in a book under the title *Philosophy as Poetry*.[63] The moral of the lectures, Rorty writes, is "that philosophy and poetry can coexist peaceably if both sides are willing to give up on the attempt to transcend human finitude."[64] Philosophy, in Rorty's view, has aimed to overcome human finitude and touch something non-human, such as Platonic ideas or a mind-independent reality. Poetry, on the other hand, is thought to be more attuned to human situatedness and finitude, and it is urged to resist the Platonic temptation to access reality and track truth. Accordingly, philosophy and poetry are seen as two distinct genres of writing that go in different and divergent directions. Rorty's point in these lectures as well as in his philosophy overall, early and late, is to give priority to poetry, which deifies imagination, over philosophy, which deifies reason.[65] By poetry, Rorty does not mean only verse but includes in it all imaginative and groundbreaking writing, be it literary, scientific, or philosophical.[66]

Rorty thought that imagination breaks new ground, creating new language games that reason then proceeds to play.[67] It is both temporally and logically prior to reason, as it is "the source of language, and thought is impossible without language."[68] In a short essay that Rorty wrote for the journal *Poetry* just before he died, and which was published posthumously, he summarized what he was trying to do:

> In an essay called "Pragmatism and Romanticism" I tried to restate the argument of Shelley's "Defense of Poetry." At the heart of Romanticism, I said, was the claim that reason can only follow paths that the imagination has first broken. No words, no reasoning. No imagination, no new words. No such words, no moral or intellectual progress.[69]

In Rorty's view, philosophy is seeking an unmediated, non-linguistic access to reality because it fears, and because it is not ready to accept, that imagination goes all the way down.[70] All we have, according to Rorty,

[63] The third lecture was published independently in 2007 under the title "Pragmatism and Romanticism."
[64] Rorty, *Philosophy as Poetry*, 22. [65] Cf. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Romanticism," 109.
[66] Rorty says that he is using the term "poet" to apply "beyond those who write verse, . . . in the large, generic sense . . . so that Proust and Nabokov, Newton and Darwin, Hegel and Heidegger, also fall under the term"; Rorty, "The Contingency of Selfhood," 24, n. 1.
[67] Rorty, *Philosophy as Poetry*, 15. [68] Rorty, "Pragmatism and Romanticism," 106–07.
[69] Rorty, "The Fire of Life," 129. [70] Rorty, *Philosophy as Poetry*, 3.

are descriptions and redescriptions, new linguistic practices, new circles that expand our "linguistic repertoire" and set new patterns of language, thought, and action.[71] "There is nothing outside language to which language attempts to become adequate," he writes, citing Emerson, who says that "[t]here is no outside, no inclosing wall, no circumference to us."[72] Human progress, according to Rorty, is achieved not by ascending to the indubitable, not by hitting on "The One Right Description," but by breaking new ground, by being iconoclastic, and by having the new practices and patterns that are created by imagination catch on.[73] One does not only need to be innovative; one also needs luck so that one's ideas get accepted because they bear fruit and are useful and appropriate.[74] The vehicle of progress is imagination, which is expressed through poetry, and the goal is not to get things right but to enlarge and renew our vocabularies, to enrich our concepts and conversations, making us happier and freer.[75] The world does not decide between alternatives; we only compare languages with one another, not with facts.[76]

Does Rorty's understanding of poetry and its relation to philosophy bear any resemblance to how Collingwood and Wittgenstein dealt with this issue? All three philosophers wanted philosophy to be written as poetry, and all three understood poetry broadly, as encompassing different kinds of linguistic expression including philosophical writing. Yet, there seems to be a difference between Rorty on the one hand and Collingwood and Wittgenstein on the other. Collingwood and Wittgenstein see affinities between good philosophy and poetry, and they want the two genres of writing merged. Rorty seems to think that philosophy suffers from a constitutive, deeply rooted, defect that keeps it apart from poetry: philosophy aims to transcend humanity while poetry dwells in it and should not leave it. In Rorty's view, as we saw, philosophy and poetry can coexist but they have different goals, even though some philosophers may prove to be "strong poets."[77] It is true that both Collingwood's and Wittgenstein's philosophies are attentive to finite humanity and, in that sense, may qualify as poetry from Rorty's perspective. However, poetry on Rorty's view seems not to have anything distinctly philosophical about it – it is simply required to break new linguistic ground – whereas for

[71] Rorty, "The Contingency of Language," 20; cf. Rorty, *Philosophy as Poetry*, 3–7.
[72] Rorty, *Philosophy as Poetry*, 6–7. [73] Rorty, "The Contingency of Selfhood," 40.
[74] Rorty, *Philosophy as Poetry*, 4. [75] Rorty, "Analytic and Conversational Philosophy," 124.
[76] Rorty, "The Contingency of Language," 20.
[77] This is an expression used by Harold Bloom and adopted by Rorty. Strong poets are those that acknowledge and appropriate contingency; see Rorty, "The Contingency of Selfhood," 28.

Collingwood and Wittgenstein it does. Both Collingwood and Wittgenstein speak from within philosophy and see poetry as its best expression. Rorty gives the impression that he would not mind if poetry were to replace philosophy altogether.

Still, despite this serious difference between them, Rorty's discussion of poetry bears some further resemblance to Wittgenstein's and Collingwood's discussions of the same topic, most notably in relation to how these philosophers understand the philosopher-poet. Both Collingwood and Wittgenstein compare, as we said, the philosopher-poet to a prophet, who is not understood as predicting upcoming events but as inspiring and leading an audience, or a movement, into the future. Collingwood said that the artist "must prophesy," not in the sense of foretelling, while Wittgenstein remarked that the great figures of an epoch speak "in the obscure language of prophecy," trying to break a new path away from degeneration and decline. The idea is already found in Nietzsche and in German culture in general where *Dichter*, as mentioned above, is thought to be forward-looking and capable of prophetic revelation. Rorty, for his part, declared explicitly his aim to vindicate Shelley's *A Defense of Poetry*. In that essay Shelley calls poets prophets, and notes that he does not mean the word in the "gross sense," that is, in the sense of having them foretell the future; that gross sense, he said, "would make poetry an attribute of prophecy, rather than prophecy an attribute of poetry."[78] Rorty also quotes Nietzsche, who, in section 299 of *The Gay Science*, in a passage where he discusses what one should learn from artists, says that unlike artists who stop where art ends and life begins, we are wiser and want to be "the poets of our own lives [*die Dichter unseres Lebens*]," that is, makers of our own lives.[79] Rorty too, then, sees poets as makers who create new words, and as humanity's heroes.[80] So, even though Rorty's discussion of philosophy as poetry differs significantly from the respective discussions in Collingwood's and Wittgenstein's work, as it is meant to serve Rorty's goal to get rid of unimaginative philosophy, it still shares aspects of the philosopher-poet with them.[81]

[78] Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry*, 19–20, 61. [79] Rorty, *Philosophy as Poetry*, 8.
[80] Rorty, "The Contingency of Language," 20; Rorty, "The Contingency of Selfhood," 26.
[81] I am grateful to David Collins for his editorial suggestions and substantive comments, which helped me to spot problems and significantly improve the chapter.