

Romantic and Post-Romantic Notions of Artistic Expression: From Kant to Collingwood

David Collins

Postdoctoral Researcher, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Oxford

1. Introduction

The idea that art involves expression has been a central concept in modern philosophical aesthetics, where it is often taken to be a matter of artists expressing their feelings through creating art, of artworks being expressive in the sense of arousing an emotional state—or perhaps the cognitive awareness of an emotion—in audiences, or both. While theories that define art in terms of expression have largely fallen out of favour,¹ questions of how various art forms—especially music—can be expressive, and in just what their expressiveness consists, are still actively debated, with such discussions often presupposing a notion of expression that is carried forward from earlier expression-based theories of art.²

The most common understanding of expression operative in the philosophy of art over the last century or more, which can be found in arguments against expression theories of art (see, e.g., Hospers 1954-55) as well as in these theories themselves, is largely derived from the nineteenth century Romantic account of artistic expression proposed most famously by William Wordsworth. The predominance of this understanding of expression has largely overshadowed—and interfered with the accurate construal of—another understanding of artistic expression, one that is arguably more plausible and more philosophically interesting. This second way of conceiving of expression can be called ‘post-Romantic,’ as it arose in the early twentieth century

¹ Though see Robinson 2005 and Wiltshire 2018 for recent attempts to revive and defend such theories.

² See, e.g., the debate between Davies 2006 and Levinson 2006; see Collins 2021 for an analysis of this debate and an argument that the debate, and any view of the *expressiveness* of artworks, must be grounded in a theory of what it is for an artwork to be *an expression*.

and since it transforms elements of the Romantic notion of expression in ways that parallel broader developments in philosophy at the time, such as the turn away from Cartesian dualism and Lockean accounts of experience.

My aim here is to outline both notions of expression in a way that foregrounds their differences and clarifies how certain twentieth century thinkers' accounts of expression are distinct from the Romantic notion. Due to limited space, I will focus selectively on thinkers whose views and theories best exemplify these two notions of artistic expression, or who have been especially influential in the development and the intellectual and cultural prominence of these notions, or both. This will involve both glossing over certain figures who discuss expression or who are important to the history of aesthetics in the periods I cover—e.g., Bosanquet, Hazlitt, Ruskin, Schleiermacher, etc.—and only scratching the surface of the ideas of the figures I do discuss and their place in the history of aesthetics. I have chosen to focus on Wordsworth and Coleridge—and, to a lesser extent, Shelley—as the paradigm proponents of the Romantic notion, and to examine the influence of Kant's third critique on their ideas, as well looking at the expression theory found in Tolstoy's *What is Art?* (1897). After presenting their ideas and discussing Benedetto Croce's account of expression as a transitional theory, I turn to consider R.G. Collingwood's aesthetics as an instance of the Post-Romantic view of expression.

2. The Romantic Notion of Expression

Although details vary between thinkers, the Romantic notion of artistic expression takes it to be a process in which an inner state of an artist—e.g., a feeling or emotion—is brought forth or, etymologically, 'pressed out' and externalized in an outer form through which it is then

communicated to others.³ While this idea can be found in the work of several nineteenth century authors,⁴ its most prominent and influential proponent is William Wordsworth, who puts forward this view in his Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).

2.1 Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley

The Preface accompanying the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* was intended to be a “systematic defence of the theory upon which the Poems were written” (Wordsworth 1800, 445). This includes giving definitions of both poetry and of a poet, and generally defending the authors’ choice to go against established conventions of the time in their choice of subject matter, diction, and rhyme scheme in an attempt to write poetry in the language of, and dealing with the concerns and feelings of, the ‘common man’ (447). Another of their aims with the *Ballads*, according to Wordsworth, was to show “the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement” (*Ibid.*). Here we can see an implicit understanding of the poet’s task as one of expressing, insofar as this “showing” how ideas are associated is a matter of revealing and communicating the workings of an ‘inner’ process, where “excitement” suggests the influence of the emotions on our association of ideas.

It is in Wordsworth’s definitions of poetry and of poets that the Romantic idea of expression is made explicit. “Poetry,” he writes, “is *the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*: it takes its origin from *emotion recollected in tranquility*: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of re-action, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produces, and does itself actually exist in the mind” (460, emphasis added). While this definition says more about what goes on inside a poet’s

³ For a comprehensive overview of the Romantic understanding of expression, its philosophical background, and its connection to art, see Abrams 1953, chapters 3 and 4.

⁴ Examples of well-known figures include Mill 1976 and Scott 1819.

mind before the actual writing down or reciting of a poem, this should be taken together with Wordsworth's answer to the question "What is a Poet?", viz., "a man speaking to men ... endowed with more lively sensibility, and more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common" (453). This definition of a poet relates to the definition of poetry, insofar as the capacities that are characteristically exercised by poets are held to include "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions ... [and] a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels" (*Ibid.*), e.g., of finding words that convey these thoughts and feelings to others. Both the feeling and its subsequent externalization are emphasized in Wordsworth's summary of his characterization of a poet as having "a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner" (457).

An elaboration on the communicative side of expression, and a suggestion for why poetry—and, by extension, art in general—is valuable, are found in Wordsworth's remarks that a poet's habit of reflecting on his or her "representations of ... past feelings" and their relations to one another, as well as to the poet's present feelings, when combined with the poet's capacity for greater "sensibility" and feeling will lead him or her to "describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified" (448). This is echoed in the supplementary essay written to accompany the new preface of the 1815 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, in which Wordsworth writes of the need for a "co-operating power in the mind of the Reader" without which "there can be no adequate sympathy with [the]

emotions,” e.g., of the pathetic and sublime, and in the absence from which “elevated or profound passions cannot exist” (Wordsworth 1815, 478). Remarks such as these suggest that, for Wordsworth, expression is not yet complete when the artist has externalized the emotion she has made herself feel through her reflective contemplation but only once the external form in which the artist has embodied this emotion is encountered and understood by a reader or audience member, passing on the emotion to the reader or audience.

While the process by which the “overflowing” of the artist’s emotion occurs is not described in any technical detail, on this view expression clearly involves somehow bringing forth this emotion and making it public. In the case of a poet, this would be done by putting the feeling into words, where those reading these words could thereby apprehend the emotion themselves and so come to share an awareness of what the poet felt, and perhaps feel that emotion for themselves. Moreover, the description of the “overflow” of emotion as “spontaneous” suggests that the words and phrases a poet uses and the order in which he or she arranges them—or the movements of a dancer’s body, the sounds a composer arranges, etc.—are not selected or put together in any premeditated way but somehow come to the artist in the moment of creation, as they are writing, moving, vocalizing, etc. We might read this as a matter of artists being in the grip of the emotions they feel and lacking control over how they are externalized, but this would overlook Wordsworth’s remarks on how poets’ habits of reflecting upon their feelings shape the ways in which they will express themselves (448). Rather, this un-premeditated spontaneity would seem to be more akin to that of an athlete who, habituated to respond in certain ways through training and the deliberate cultivation of certain reflexes, moves and reacts in a way that can be described as ‘automatic,’ yet which is controlled and voluntary.

This leads to a potential difference between Wordsworth's and Coleridge's understandings of artistic expression, since Coleridge writes of the poet's creative activities in ways that sound more deliberate and calculated: for instance, he says that poets select and "artificial[ly]" arrange the words of their poems for the sake of "exciting" the interests and feelings of their readers (Coleridge 1815, vol. 2, 44.15; see also Costelloe 2013, 194). Especially if "artificial" is read as 'artful' or the result of artifice, i.e., as involving the deliberate employment of a technical skill, this characterization of the poet's activities seems to be closer to what Collingwood calls 'craft,' insofar as Coleridge seems to be describing a process by which a poet conceives of an end prior to expression, i.e., the excitement or arousal of a certain kind of feeling, and then figures out and employs the means to realize that end, i.e., specific words arranged in a specific way.

Another point of difference between Coleridge and Wordsworth is that Coleridge takes the poet's capacities for feeling and expressing to be different in kind, and not merely in degree, from the capacities that the 'common person' possesses, with the poet's creative powers stemming from a unique faculty he calls "secondary imagination," i.e., a faculty for creating new images, as distinct from the common or 'primary' imagination and its capacities to picture or represent things when they are not present to perception (Coleridge 1815, vol. 1, 304-305; see also Costelloe 2013, 198). Wordsworth, however, sees the heightened capacities for feeling and expression that set poets apart as differing only in degree, and not in kind, from the common faculties and capacities that everyone possesses (Wordsworth 1800, 457).

Apart from their differences on points such as these, Coleridge's conception of artistic creation as a matter of expression, and the notion of expression that this involves, is ultimately similar to Wordsworth's and shares in the general Romantic notion of expression as the

externalization of a pre-existing inner state.⁵ Another figure who offers a Romantic view of expression, although differing on a number of points with Wordsworth and Coleridge, is Shelley. In *A Defence of Poetry*, written in 1821 but not published until 1839, Shelley defines poetry as “the expression of the imagination” and poems as “image[s] of life expressed in its eternal truth” (Shelley 1839, 26, 35). What is meant by expression here is something close to the ancient Greek idea of poets as channels for divine inspiration, with the images and lyrics they communicate being ‘breathed into’ them by the muses who, in a sense, sing through them, although in Shelley’s case this inspiration comes from nature as itself divine.

We can see this most clearly when Shelley writes of poets as “instrument[s] over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre” (26). Although he goes on to note that expression involves “an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them” (26-27)—e.g., moving, vocalizing, etc. in ways that correspond to the impressions ‘driven over’ us—there is no indication that this adjustment is something the poet does voluntarily (cf. Nahm 1955, 461). Rather, Shelley’s characterization of the poet as an instrument suggests that poets apprehend naturally occurring relations of harmony, rhythm, and order—i.e., beauty—that they cannot help but carry over into their actions, gestures, and creations (28-29).⁶ However, despite this difference from Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the Platonic trappings in which his theory is presented, the view of expression we find in Shelley is essentially the Romantic notion insofar as it involves an artist feeling something and then acting to externalize it in some outward form.

⁵ See Costelloe 2013, 191-192, on Coleridge’s “theoretical contribution to the aesthetic tradition” being “relatively slight” compared both to Wordsworth’s contribution and to Coleridge’s other philosophical writings, and on the general agreement of his stated views on art and poetry with Wordsworth’s.

⁶ This can be seen in Shelley’s remark that “A child at play will express its delight by its voice and motions; and every inflexion of tone and every gesture *will bear exact relation* to a corresponding antitype in the pleasurable impressions which awakened it; *it will be* reflected in the image of that impression” (27, emphasis added), where the necessity claimed for this correspondence shows that this is not something the expresser has control over.

2.2 Kant's Influence on the Romantic Notion of Expression

Although Kant does not say much about expression directly, his Third Critique stands at a turning point between an older understanding of expression as the imitation or depiction of emotive behaviour and the nineteenth century Romantic view (Beardsley 1966, 129-130). Along with German philosophers such as Schiller and Schelling, Kant had an important influence on Romantic aesthetics, especially with his ideas of aesthetic disinterestedness, genius, and the importance of the imagination (Beardsley 1966, 222; Nahm 1955, 459). In England this influence came by way of Coleridge, who introduced Wordsworth to Kant's ideas and for whom Kant was an inspiration for his own philosophical writings (Costelloe 2013, 181, 190-192).⁷

Kant's only mentions of expression occur in his discussion of artworks and natural beauty in relation to what he calls 'aesthetic ideas' (Kant 1790, 5:317, 320). A likely influence on the Romantic view is the passage in which he writes that genius—earlier defined as “a talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given,” such that “originality must be its primary characteristic” (Kant 1790, 5:307-308)—consists in “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 produce ... can be communicated to others*” (5:317, emphasis added). Here we can see the 'inner' and 'outer' elements of expression that are found in the Romantic view, where in the terms of the Third Critique, and in the context of Kant's notion of aesthetic ideas as 'intuitions' that occasion the associative 'free play' of the imagination without being determinable by, or reducible to, any single concept (5:314), the talk of genius “finding ideas for a ... concept” can be understood, albeit loosely, as analogous to what

⁷ As Costelloe notes, Coleridge's *Principles of Genial Criticism* “consist[s] ... almost entirely of an unacknowledged restatement of Kant's treatment of beauty and aesthetic judgment in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*” (Costelloe 2013, 191).

Wordsworth calls the production of an emotion from the poet's contemplation of past feelings, which emotion then gets externalized.

Regarding the 'outer' element of expression and genius's talent for externalizing or embodying, and thereby communicating, aesthetic ideas, Kant writes that:

“to express what is unnameable in the mental state in the case of a certain representation and to make it universally communicable [...] requires a faculty for apprehending the rapidly passing play of the imagination and unifying it into a concept ... which ... is original and ... could not have been deduced from any antecedent principles.” (5:317)

Kant also writes that the arts of painting and sculpture “make shapes in space into expressions of ideas” where “the aesthetic idea ... is for both grounded in the imagination [while] the shape ... *which constitutes its expression* ... is given either in its corporeal extension ... or in accordance with the way in which the latter is depicted in the eye” (5:322, emphasis added). This notion of a shape that exists first within a subject's mind—e.g., in quasi-perceptual imagination, or as it would be “depicted in the eye”—and is then externalized in a corporeal 'outer' form is reinforced by Kant's remark that “the spirit⁸ of the artist *gives a corporeal expression ... to what and how he has thought*” (5:324, emphasis added), where what is thought or felt is taken to predate its externalization (cf. 5:303, 309-310).

While Kant's remarks do not amount to a full-blown account of artistic expression, the grounds for the basic Romantic view, and the likely influence on Wordsworth's development of it, are clear. Thus, while Kant cannot be said to be an expression theorist of art, we can see him as the source of the shift away from imitation to expression in philosophical aesthetics.

⁸ Note that “spirit” is Kant's term for the faculty of “apprehending the rapidly passing play of the imagination and unifying it into a concept” mentioned in the passage above. Cf. Makkreel 1990, 122, on genius being a faculty that lets us go beyond familiar concepts, and ‘spirit’ being what lets us communicate these unfamiliar ideas to others.

2.3 Tolstoy

Before turning to the Post-Romantic view of expression it is worth briefly considering Tolstoy as a later nineteenth century thinker whose theory of art extends, while sharing the essentials of, the Romantic notion. From some of his remarks he appears, at first glance, to oppose the Romantic theory of expression, rejecting the view that art is essentially “the external manifestation ... of emotions felt by man,” which he calls the “experimental definition” of art (Tolstoy 1897, 39). However, he is dissatisfied with this view not because he holds that art does not involve these things, but only because he thinks that this is insufficient, since it overlooks the effects of such external manifestations on audiences.

This leads to Tolstoy’s theory of art as essentially a kind of emotional transmission—or, as he calls it, an “infection” of audiences with an emotion communicated to them by the artist via the work—and not just the externalization of emotion (40). This emphasis on the communication of emotions is the basis for his view of art as a kind of community-building, with the artist as a spokesperson for, and who furthers the formation of, a community of shared sensibility. “Art,” he writes, “begins when one person with the object of joining another or others to himself in one and the same feeling, *expresses that feeling by certain external indications,*” with something counting as art if, and only if, “the spectators or auditors are infected by the feelings which the author has felt” (41, emphasis added). Here, Tolstoy retains the Romantic view of expression as the externalization of a prior feeling ‘in’ the artist, while expanding that view to give equal or more weight to the communicative element. The extent to which his understanding of expression is in line with Wordsworth’s, albeit with this shift in emphasis, can be seen from his characterization of the process of expression or artistic creation: viz., “To evoke in oneself a feeling one has experienced and having evoked it in oneself then by means of movements, lines,

colours, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling” (41-42). Here, the artist’s production within herself of a feeling that she felt on a prior occasion, and subsequent manifestation of this feeling in external form, is notably similar to what Wordsworth calls the recollection and contemplation of a feeling that is productive of a new emotion which gets externalized.

While Tolstoy’s emphasis on the communication and not merely the externalization of emotions is new, this communicative dimension of expression and its connection to the social value of art have precedents in the thinkers discussed above. A similar view can be found in Kant, with his claim that artworks must “arouse similar ideas” to those their makers entertained in those who perceive them, and that artworks are “the only means for transmitting these to posterity” (Kant 1970, 5:309-310). Moreover, a precursor to Tolstoy’s view of art as community-building, and his insistence that the emotions that genuine works of art transmit be those of simple Christian and folk virtues, can be seen in Wordsworth’s choice of feelings and situations drawn from “[h]umble and rustic life” as material for the poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, thinking this the best source for “the essential passions of the heart,” which are simpler and so “may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated” (Wordsworth 1800, 447). If Wordsworth gives us the paradigmatic statement of the Romantic notion of expression, Tolstoy is arguably the thinker who most fully expands upon the basic Romantic idea of expression, with an eye to explaining not only the artist’s process of creation but the place of art in human life.

3. The Post-Romantic Notion of Expression

While this section focuses largely on Collingwood, the Post-Romantic view of expression can also be found in the writings of other twentieth century thinkers, including John Dewey (1934)

and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945a; 1945b; 1961). The essential difference between this view and the Romantic notion is that, on the Post-Romantic understanding, an artist does not *first* have a feeling or emotion and *then* externalize it in some outward form that corresponds to or represents the prior, ‘inner’ state. Rather, on this understanding, the feeling or thought that an artwork expresses emerges from, and in a sense is created by, the artist’s workings in and with her medium, with what is expressed coming into being along with the finished work that is its expression. Thus, what is expressed is not taken to be ‘pressed out’ of, or to ‘overflow’ from, the artist’s psyche, but is pressed out of the interaction between artist and medium.

Recognizing this view of expression as the one held by Collingwood in *The Principles of Art* (1938) helps to differentiate his account from the view found in Croce’s *Aesthetic* (1902), with which it is often conflated, with many of the objections raised against Collingwood’s account arising from this conflation. While Croce’s expression theory is not yet the Post-Romantic view, it is transitional between the Romantic and Post-Romantic notions and so is worth briefly discussing before turning to Collingwood.

3.1 Croce as a Transitional Figure

For Croce, expression is not specifically related to art but is a cognitive process at the core of our mental lives, as the production of what he calls ‘intuitions.’ These are mental images or representations that include perceptions along with memories and fictional imaginings, which are necessarily of particulars in contrast to concepts which are of universals (Croce 1902, 1-3). An intuition can be understood as an objectification of a sensation or impression, where sensations are registered passively and mechanically and where intuitions result from the “spiritual [read: mental or cognitive] activity” of the mind “taking possession” of, and giving form to, “the flux or

wave of sensation, or ... psychic matter” (6-7, 11). “Every true intuition or representation,” Croce writes, as opposed to a mere sensation or impression, “is also expression” (8), with intuition and expression being practically synonymous: “[i]t is impossible to distinguish intuition from expression in this cognitive process,” he insists, since “one appears with the other at the same instant, because they are not two but one” (9).

For Croce, expression is an entirely internal process which, although conscious, is pre-reflective and so does not allow for techniques or methods that the expresser deliberately employs.⁹ “We cannot will or not will our aesthetic [i.e., intuitive] vision,” he writes, but “we can however will or not will to externalize it, or rather, to preserve and communicate to others, or not, the externalization produced” (111). Thus, Croce views expression, or the forming of ‘intuitions’ in imagination, as wholly separate from any externalization or physical embodiment of what the artist feels or imagines: expression, here, is complete before any words are spoken or written, sounds are made by instruments, paint is applied to canvases, etc., with such activities standing in a secondary and contingent relation to expression proper (cf. 116).

Croce’s theory is compatible with certain elements of Wordsworth’s account, where the mental activity that forms intuitions, or determinate images of things for imagination, out of sensations and impressions is analogous to the reflection and contemplation of prior, and as yet vague or scattered, feelings that Wordsworth takes to produce a new emotion which is then expressed. However, Croce’s view is unlike the Romantic notion insofar as the latter takes expression to be a two-step process involving ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ activities and products, whereas for Croce there is only one ‘inner’ step. In effect, Croce not only goes in the opposite direction from Tolstoy by emphasizing the internal element of the Romantic notion of expression over the

⁹ In Croce’s terms, “expression ... is a *primary theoretic activity* [that] *precludes practice*” (112, emphasis added), i.e., is not the result of will or deliberation.

outward, communicative element, but goes further by cutting expression off from this latter element entirely. Here Croce anticipates the Post-Romantic theory by making what is expressed coincide with its expression; however, his view is not quite the Post-Romantic one, insofar as it divorces expression from any interaction between artist and medium.

3.2 Collingwood

The differences between Collingwood's expression theory and those of both the Romantics and Croce have been obscured by persistent mischaracterization of Collingwood as an 'ideal theorist' of art for whom artworks are mental objects existing solely in the imaginations of artists and audiences.¹⁰ This mischaracterization is due to reading passages in which Collingwood writes of artworks as being 'in the head' out of the full context of *The Principles of Art* and of Collingwood's broader philosophy, from which it is clear that for Collingwood, something being 'in the head' does not entail that it is not also 'in the world.'¹¹ While he does not hold artworks to be mind-independent entities, he also does not take them to be immaterial or solely imagined.

Collingwood understands expression to be the articulation and clarification of qualitative experiences, raising these from the 'psychical,' pre-conscious level of feeling to consciousness, where psychical feelings include both sensations and affects, encompassing what we might also call the immediately felt qualities of experience. This is "the activity of getting clear about one's own experience" (Ridley 1999, 26), or of coming to understand one's feelings, perceptions, etc. in their particularity rather than as 'things of a certain kind,' which in turn makes it possible for others to understand them as well: e.g., not just knowing *that* one feels happy, but grasping the

¹⁰ For this misreading of Collingwood, see Hospers 1956 and Wollheim 1972; for a critique of this interpretation, see Ridley 1999.

¹¹ See, e.g., Collingwood 1942, 2.42, where he writes that "man's body and man's mind are not two different things [but] one and the same thing ... known in two different ways."

phenomenal and affective character of *what* this particular happiness is like to feel. Importantly, Collingwood distinguishes expression from what he calls the “betrayal” of emotion (122-123), or the exhibiting of signs and symptoms that indicate one is feeling some kind of emotion: e.g., a raised voice, flushed face, and clenched fists as a betrayal of someone’s anger, or a slumped posture and tears as a betrayal that one feels sad. While betraying an emotion can show to others *that* one feels something, these kinds of automatic or physiological symptoms do not articulate or clarify, either to oneself or to others, just *what* this particular feeling is. For instance, artistically expressive acting will not just pantomime signs of, e.g., sadness, but will allow us to grasp and understand the *particular* sadness that the character being portrayed is (fictionally) feeling (122).

Collingwood writes that the process of expression begins with an initial vague awareness of a feeling at the fringes of consciousness, without yet knowing what one feels but only that one feels something (Collingwood 1938, 109). This feeling is clarified, or expressed, by attending to it so as to bring it to conscious awareness. This is not done through introspection alone—i.e., Wordsworth’s reflection and contemplation—but by articulating it in a medium in which it is embodied so that one can intend it as a determinate object of awareness and so apprehend it as a particular or ‘certain thing’ (109-111). Collingwood does not say exactly what is involved in articulating a pre-conscious feeling: this is because expression “is an activity of which there can be no technique” or steps to follow, since the end—the expression, i.e., both the emotion and the finished artwork—is not known in advance, being pre-conscious, so no means to this end can be determined or specified prior to its expression (111). It is also because every expression will be at least partly unique, since each felt experience is itself a partly unique particular—i.e., “a certain thing,” and not just “a thing of a certain kind” (114)—and so no generalized method for what to do in order to express oneself can, in principle, be given.

Although he does not say what exactly will be involved in expressing a feeling once an artist has become aware of and begun actively attending to it, from statements and examples it is clear that Collingwood takes expressing a feeling to involve the artist acting on, in, or with a medium, in which that feeling or qualitative experience gets worked out and articulated. For instance, he writes that genuine expression “must be formally or linguistically expressed, not only materially or psychically expressed” (234), where “materially or psychically expressed” means here what he calls ‘betrayal’ elsewhere. When read in the context of the theory of language developed in Book II of *Principles of Art*, it is clear that the phrase “*linguistically* expressed” does not refer only to verbal expressions, e.g., written or spoken words, but to deliberate gestures on the part of the artist;¹² hence, artistic expression must be mediated by some kind of ‘language’ in this broad sense. Likewise, “*formally* ... expressed” suggests that expression is a matter of giving form to the initially indeterminate feeling, where this entails a medium in which it is given this form (cf. Ridley 1999, 27).

Certain of Collingwood’s examples confirm that this is his view: when discussing painting, for instance, he writes that one “paints with [one’s] hands, not with [one’s] eyes,”¹³ and that, as such, painters do “their work with fingers and wrists and arms, and even (as they [walk] about the studio) with their legs and toes. What one paints is what can be painted ... *and what can be painted must stand in some relation to the muscular activity of painting it.*” Moreover, he advises draughtsmen learning to draw to think of the paper “as if it were the surface of a slab of clay in which you were going to cut a relief, and of your pencil as a knife” (144-145, emphasis added). The example that most clearly shows the necessary place of the medium in expression, on his

¹² It is beyond the scope of this article to explicate Collingwood’s theory of language; it will suffice here to note that he defines language broadly to include anything that is done intentionally to communicate meaning, and not to refer only to verbal speech and writing.

¹³ Cf. Croce 1902, 10, and the endorsement of Michelangelo’s statement: “One paints, not with the hands, but with the brain,” where Croce reads ‘brain’ as ‘mind.’

view, also involves painting. Here he compares the experience of someone who merely looks at something with that of someone who also paints it, arguing that “there is far less in [the former] experience than in the experience of [one] who has painted the subject; for the sensuous elements involved in merely looking, even when looking is accompanied by a smile of pleasure [i.e., a ‘betrayal’ of feeling] ... *are necessarily much scantier and poorer, and also much less organized in their totality, than the sensuous elements involved in painting*” (307-308, emphasis added).

These examples show that, for Collingwood, the finished *expression*—i.e., both the feeling that is expressed and the artwork that expresses it—emerges from the artist’s engagement with a medium, where this engagement is the artist’s *expressing*. It is only when the medium is able to be imagined by the artist veridically and in enough detail that Collingwood allows that a work of art can be created entirely ‘in the head:’ e.g., a poet imagining words and phrases and ordering them into lines to compose a poem without speaking or writing it down, a musician imagining and arranging sounds into a simple tune without playing or vocalizing them, etc.

If what is expressed emerges from the activity of expressing, it follows that it does not exist prior to this expressing. This is the essential difference between the understanding of expression developed by Collingwood and the one held by the nineteenth century Romantics discussed above, including Tolstoy: what is expressed is not first ‘in’ the artist to be then brought forth in a medium, but is a product of the interaction of the artist and the medium. In this respect, Collingwood swings the pendulum away from the Romantics’ over-emphasis on the artist’s interiority or subjectivity, positioning it instead at the point where subjectivity and objectivity overlap. His understanding of expression also differs from Croce’s, since it does not take what is expressed to exist prior to its externalization in a medium: rather, the external form and the feeling or quality it expresses come into being together, with ‘intuitive’ knowledge, or the

knowledge of particular qualitative wholes, being gained not through a purely mental process such as introspection but through the interaction of ‘mind’ and ‘world’.

4. Conclusion

In this article I have explicated and differentiated two views of expression found in nineteenth century Romanticism and in the thought of R.G. Collingwood, respectively. While there is much more to say about each thinker’s own account, and about the historical development of the idea of expression, including the influence between these thinkers, I have aimed here to give a basic sense of the development of the idea of artistic expression, including its grounds in Kant’s Third Critique.

As noted above, the Post-Romantic notion of expression held by Collingwood can also be found in other twentieth century thinkers: for instance, in Dewey’s aesthetics and in Merleau-Ponty’s essays on art and painting, as well as in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Part I, Chapter VI. Because, as also noted above, discussions of expression in the philosophy of art tend to assume something like the Romantic notion by taking expression to be a matter of outwardly manifest an already-existing ‘inner’ state, emphasizing the difference between these two notions can help to avoid the statements of post-Romantic thinkers on expression being misconstrued, as well as showing that another way of understanding how art can be expressive is not only possible but is already available. Since this alternate understanding can avoid the traditional objections that have been raised against the Romantic notion of expression as definitive of art, the further development of the Post-Romantic view promises to be philosophically rewarding.

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