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For Owen Dodson
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MANY years ago Santayana, in his famous essay on "Penitential Art," suggested that the modern period in art is a "lenten" period, in which art is laboriously seeking to recover a purity and an innocence that were lost during the long years of the post-Renaissance experiment in the making of veristic, discursive, reproductive forms of poetry and painting. How vain, said Santayana, modern art is now telling itself

> was the attempt to depict or beautify external objects. . . . Nature has the urgency of life, which art cannot rival. . . . What is that to the spirit? Let it confess its own impotence in that field, and abandon all attempts to observe or preserve what are called *things*: let it devote itself instead . . . to purifying its sensibility, which is after all what nature plays upon when she seems to us beautiful. Perhaps in that way spirit may abstract the gold of beauty and cast the dross away—all that allow of preoccupation with material forms and external events and moral sentiments. . . . It was an evil obsession with alien things that dragged sensibility into a slavery to things which stifled and degraded it: *salvation lies in emancipating the medium.*

And it was, indeed, the desire to emancipate the medium that provided the generative impulse for all those revolutionary movements in the arts in the latter half of the last century that gave to the beginning of our period its exciting *modernity*. In poetry it gained expression in the *l'art pour l'art* aesthetic of the Parnassians, and ultimately in Mallarmé's *poésie pure*. In music it gained expression in the school of Debussy whose members created audible worlds as self-enclosed as a poem of Mallarmé; and later on it gained new realizations in the work of Schoenberg and Satie, Bartok and Stravinsky. And in painting it gained expression in the new abstractionist practice of the line of artists descending from Cézanne and Seurat through the Paris *fauves* to the Cubists and their heirs. In every area of the ferment that was taking place what gave unity to the period's style was the boldness and determination with which the artist sought to purify his medium:

so that, in a way, the destinies of all the arts converged in one, as the modern artist, seized by a fit of introspection, courageously undertook to reduce his art—whether poetry or painting or music —to its own pure, formal laws.

In his earlier essay in aesthetics—after lengthily disposing of a number of Aristotelian-Thomist distinctions between the speculative order and the practical order, between the "useful" arts and the "fine" arts, and so on—M. Maritain, in the most interesting passages of *Art and Scholasticism*, concerned himself with this astonishing "growth of self-consciousness" in the modern artist.[1] And what chiefly occupied him was the thought that, in submitting to the idea of making art out of the idea of art, the artist might become so fascinated with technique and so estranged from the existential world of nature and the universe of man that he should forget that, unlike God, he cannot create *ex nihilo*. He wanted, then, to confront him with the futility of claiming any kind of aseity for his art, for pure art, he said, "involves nothing, the subject being completely whittled away. I call that a sin of idealism in relation to the *matter* of art: pushed to the extreme, a perfect building, with nothing to build." The idea of making poetry out of the idea of poetry or painting out of the idea of painting can, in other words, never yield anything but sterility, since the kind of "metaphysical vastness" that characterizes greatness in the arts has always been a result of vital transactions between the creative Self and the universes of Being. And for the poet or the painter to seek to allay the kind of "eucharistic passion" that arises at the very center of the artistic process is for him to run the risk of suicide, since it is for him to isolate his art from everything that is not "its own peculiar rules of operation." There is one long and wonderful sentence in which the lesson is summed up, as M. Maritain says that he would remind modern art that

> being *of man*, it can no more fence itself off from things than he; that being *in man*, art always ends by confessing in some way the weaknesses of man; and that in devouring the substance of the artist and the passions, the desires, the speculative and moral virtues which make it truly human, it is also devouring its own subject of

[1] *Art and Scholasticism*, tr. by J. F. Scanlan (New York, 1943).

> inherence; that being in a way *for man*—if not in itself, at any rate so far as regards the use to which it is put—it will in the end decay if it rejects either the constraints and limitations required from without by the good of man or the service of our common culture, which requires it to make itself intelligible, accessible, open, to shoulder the burden of the inheritance of reason and wisdom by which we live. . . .

This was his message to the artist of our period in *Art and Scholasticism*, and thus it is not surprising that the names that figured most prominently in it were the names of Rimbaud and Mallarmé, of Gide and Cocteau, of Valéry and Picasso and Breton.

Now it is this sensitive understanding of the predicament of the modern artist that forms the basis in his latest book for a more highly generalized theory of art.[2] One might well have supposed, of course, prior to the appearance of the present volume, that M. Maritain's major work—*Art and Scholasticism* (1920), *Degrees of Knowledge* (1932), *Preface to Metaphysics* (1934), *Science and Wisdom* (1935), *True Humanism* (1936), *Ransoming the Time* (1941), and *Education at the Crossroads* (1943)—was behind him. But in this monumental book on art and the nature of poetic knowledge which the Pantheon Press has recently published with such remarkable beauty and elegance, he reveals that, in preparing to deliver the initial series of the A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, he made one of the supreme intellectual efforts of his life, to state as rigorously and systematically as possible his full understanding of the artistic process. And the result is a magnificent volume that deserves to stand alongside the really great essays in theory of art of this century, alongside such books as Croce's *Estetica*, Roger Fry's *Vision and Design*, Worringer's *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, Malraux's *Les Voix du Silence*, and Susanne Langer's *Feeling and Form*.

What, in effect, M. Maritain does is to suggest the possibility of our understanding modern art more profoundly in terms of a

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[2] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953). References to this work will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses in the text.

revision of the aesthetic premises which the distinctively modern practice in the arts has fostered; and this revision and correction of the conventional rationale for modern art practice then becomes itself the basis for a general aesthetic.

The fundamental doctrine upon which the Mellon Lectures are based is that art has its real source not in *operation*, as modern aestheticians have so frequently supposed, but in a "knowledge of the very interiority of things" which proceeds from a deep "spiritual communion with being." For art does not come into existence until things have resounded in the poet so deeply that both they and he are enabled, at a single awakening, to "come forth together out of sleep." What is required is that the poet should permit himself to be invaded by the reality of the objective world and should himself seek to invade the deepest recesses of his own subjectivity— the two movements of the spirit being performed together, as though one, "in a moment of affective union." When the soul thus comes into profound spiritual contact with itself and when it also enters into the silent and mysterious depths of Being, it is brought back to "the single root" of its powers, "where the entire subjectivity is, as it were, gathered in a state of expectation and virtual creativity" (239). And the whole experience becomes "a state of obscure . . . and sapid knowing" (ibid.). Then "after the silent gathering a breath arises, coming not from the outside, but from the center of the soul—sometimes a breath which is almost imperceptible, but compelling and powerful, through which everything is given in easiness and happy expansion; sometimes a gale bursting all of a sudden, through which everything is given in violence and rapture; sometimes the gift of the beginning of a song; sometimes an outburst of unstoppable words" (243). And only when this point in the artistic process has been reached may *operation* begin. For the artist to initiate the processes of *operation* at any earlier point is for him "to put the instrumental and secondary before the principal and primary, and to search for an escape through the discovery of a new external approach and new technical revolutions, instead of passing first through the creative source . . ." (223). Then, what is produced is but "a corpse of a work of art—a product of academicism" (63). "If creative intuition is

lacking, a work can be perfectly made, and it is nothing; the artist has nothing to say. If creative intuition is present, and passes, to some extent, into the work, the work exists and speaks to us, even if it is imperfectly made and proceeds from a man who has the habit of art and a hand which shakes" (60).

M. Maritain, it should be immediately said, is not seeking to reinstate any sort of enervated, sentimentalist romanticism: he is not asking the modern poet to cultivate "transports" and rapture" and "delirium" and "frenzy," for these, he recognizes, may often "proceed . . . from spurious sources. The real blessing is poetic intuition, and not any kind of thrill" (244). And he would have us remember, the austerity of modern poetics notwithstanding, that "Nothing is more real, and more necessary to poetry, and to any great work, than inspiration" (243).

Inspiration requires, of course, "the rational toil of the virtue of art and all the logic and shrewdness, self-restraint and self-possession of working intelligence" (246). For art, as Maritain the good Thomist likes to say, is "a virtue of the practical intellect—that particular virtue of the practical intellect which deals with the creation of objects to be made" (49). And thus there is an essential relationship between art and reason, for reason discovers the rules by means of which the work—whether it be a poem or a still life or a sonata—may be successfully brought into existence. The rules are not, of course, "ready-made recipes, taught by professors in schools and museums, but vital ways of operating discovered by the creative eyes of the intellect in its very labor of invention" (53-54). And when art refuses to live in a climate of reflective intelligence—when it worships ignorance and rudeness—it is, Professor Maritain says, a sign of weakness. But the reason and the calculation that are in the poet, he declares, "are there only to handle fire" (218), and to grant them anything more than this purely instrumental function, simply for the sake of adherence to a puritanical formalism and a spurious austerity, is to be guilty of a gratuitous dogmatism.

At "the single root" of the poetic process, then, there is a profound act of creative intuition or an act of cognition through connaturality that tends to express itself in a work of art (the poem or painting playing "the part played in ordinary knowledge

by the concepts and judgments produced within the mind" [118]). And in this cognitive act the soul "suffers things more than it learns them," experiencing them "through resonance in subjectivity." The thing that is cognitively grasped is simply "some singular existent," "some complex of concrete and individual reality, seized in the violence of its sudden self-assertion and in the total unicity" (126) that is constituted by "all the other realities which echo in this existent, and which it conveys in the manner of a sign" (ibid.). Thus it is, says Professor Maritain, that poetry is, as Aristotle said, more philosophic than history—not, however, "with respect to its mode or manner of knowing, for this mode is altogether existential, and the thing grasped is grasped as non-conceptualizable. But with respect to the very thing grasped, which is not a contingent thing in the mere fact of its existence, but in its infinite openness to the riches of being, and as a sign of it" (ibid.). Yet—though what is most immediate in the dynamic process of poetic intuition is "the experience of the things of the world, because it is natural to the human soul to know things before knowing itself" (127-128)—"what is *most principal* is the experience of the Self—because it is in the awakening of subjectivity to itself that emotion received in the translucid night of the free life of the intellect is made intentional and intuitive, or the determining means of a knowledge through congeniality" (128).

But how is the creative intuition of the poet incarnated or *internalized* in a work of art? It is upon this question that many of Professor Maritain's finest pages are based, and this phase of his argument deserves careful recapitulation. He begins in the VIIIth chapter of the present volume by noting that the presence of poetic experience within the soul first manifests itself by "a kind of musical stir, of unformulated song, with no words, no sounds, absolutely inaudible to the ear, audible only to the heart . . ." (301). This stir is produced by waves stirred up in the preconscious life of the intellect by the experience of poetic intuition, and he calls these waves or dynamic imaginal and emotional charges *intuitive pulsions*. The "moving continuity" between these pulsions is "a kind of melody." These pulsions expand as the poetic intuition expands; and with this expansion

"explicit images awaken, more distinct emotions resound in the fundamental emotion"—till the enlarged musical stir produces a music that emerges into consciousness and the poet is brought to the point of being ready to begin operative exercise. At this point the process of expression begins, and the poet becomes attentive not only to the music of intuitive pulsions but also to all the words which begin to emerge from the unconscious, taking up for use those which are consonant with the original intuition and casting aside all those which are not. In this second stage—the stage in which poetic intuition begins to be objectivized—creative intelligence is "at play as working reason, accomplishing a properly so-called artistic task, applying the secondary rules of making, taking care of the arrangement of words, weighing and testing everything. Here all the patience and accuracy, all the virtues of craftsmanship are involved, and intelligence works and works again, takes up the task anew, uses all that it knows, displays the most active sagaciousness to be true to its own superior passivity, to the individual inspiring actuation received—poetic intuition and wordless meaning or melody—to which it does not cease listening" (305-306).

Now, as creative intuition is disengaged from the obscure night of the poet's subjectivity and gains its proper incarnation in poetic theme and in "the fertile mathematic" of poetic form, how is the resultant poem to be perceived by the one who reads it? What is the mode of its action upon those of us who receive it? What is conveyed to the reader? Here, in his careful handling of this issue, M. Maritain's thinking proceeds along lines which many of our ablest critics and aestheticians have taken in recent years, and thus, since he comes out of a tradition of thought in many ways very much different from theirs, this convergence of doctrine takes on an especial interest. Professor Cleanth Brooks, for example, in his book *The Well Wrought Urn*, has raised the question, "What Does Poetry Communicate"? And in the essay in which he takes this question up through a close inspection of Herrick's poem "Corinna's going a-Maying," he argues with great force that the question as to what poetry communicates is itself wrongly put, since it suggests that the poet is precisely what he is not—namely, an expositor who conveys a hard core of rational

discourse "poetically," embellishing an idea or set of ideas with certain appropriate decorations. When we closely examine our experience of the successful poem, Professor Brooks insists, we discover that the poet is not a communicator or an expositor but a maker who "explores, consolidates, and 'forms' the total experience that is the poem"—and an experience into which the poem itself carries us further and further in a process of exploration. What the poet gives us is not a set of easily manageable abstractions that are separable from their poetic form by way of paraphrase but, rather, an experience that is *incarnated* in the radical unicity of a poetic structure which is itself "the *only* medium that communicates the particular 'what' that is communicated." And by *structure* Professor Brooks does not mean *form* "in the conventional sense in which we think of form as a kind of envelope which 'contains' the 'content.'" By *structure* he means the "structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations," "the pattern of resolved stresses," the "pattern of resolutions and balances and harmonizations" in which the actual life of the poem so completely consists that, in answer to the question as to what poetry communicates, we are brought round to "this graceless bit of tautology: the poem says what the poem says." The poet, that is to say, explores and consolidates a given experience in his poem, and what we are given is not a set of paraphrasable abstractions but the unity of the experience itself— in which we can share, if we are willing to engage in the kind of strenuous imaginative prehension demanded by the special sort of object that a poem is.

Now, in his handling of this question as to what is transmitted by the poem to the reader, M. Maritain shows himself to be in fundamental agreement with Professor Brooks and, indeed, with many of the most serious literary theorists of our period. He begins by observing that "the poem is essentially an end, not a means. An end as a new creature engendered in beauty; not a means as a vehicle of communication" (306). And whatever *communication* is achieved is "an effect of superabundance, terribly important for the poet, for he is a man, but additional with respect to the prime essential requirement of poetry" (301). For the prime essential requirement of poetry is to convey not "a piece

of information" but "the same poetic intuition which was in the soul of the poet: not precisely as creative, but as cognitive, both of the subjectivity of the poet and of a flash of reality echoing the world" (ibid.). M. Maritain does not, of course, mean here that it is the task of the reader and the critic to enter into the subjectivity of the poet: what he wants to insist upon (and it is very close to Professor Brooks' contention) is that a genuine experience of poetry involves "a participation in the poetic knowledge and poetic intuition through which the poet has perceived a certain unique mystery in the mystery of the world" (309). The poem exposes us to the "flash of reality" originally grasped by the intuitive emotion of the poet: what is communicated, if *communication* is to be spoken of at all, is (to use Professor Brooks' words) this "experience," formed and consolidated in poetic structure. Or, to use M. Maritain's words, the reader is brought back to the music of the poet's intuitive pulsions by the music of his language, and thus he is enabled not to enter into the poet's subjectivity but to *see*, to *know* something of what the poet saw and knows. What we receive, in other words, finally, is an intellectual gift. "We receive a transient and incomparable knowing, a vision, a fleeting revelation." But though the poet bestows an intellectual gift upon us, the royal law of poetic expression is not "the law of rational and logical connections, it is the law of the inner connections between intuitive pulsions, and of the unconceptualized intelligibility of which the images quickened by poetic intuition are the vehicles" (315).

The argument of this latest and perhaps most important book of M. Maritain is very long and is enormously complicated by all sorts of fascinating subtleties which cannot be suggested by any such bald summary as this. But here, at any rate, are the broad contours of his account of the poetic process, as it originates in those pulsions of the spirit by which the moment of creative intuition first makes itself felt in the poet's psyche and as it terminates in the internalization of the music of those pulsions in the poem through the agency of the poem's inner melody or *poetic sense*, its *theme*, and its *harmonic structure* (which are "the three epiphanies of poetic intuition" or the three modes of its passage into the work of art).

One phase of his analysis remains, however, to be touched upon, and this is that which grows out of his inquiry into the question concerning the relevance of the concept of beauty to the completed product of the poetic process. He is, of course, aware how generally today discussions of *beauty* in aesthetics are regarded as unforgivably anachronistic, but he is himself unwilling to submit to this current prejudice, for he believes that the idea of beauty must always be a salient notion in the philosophy of art. Indeed, M. Maritain desires to enlarge the traditional catalogue of *transcendentalia* in Scholastic philosophy (*ens*, *res*, *unum*, *aliquid*, *verum*, *bonum*) by the addition of a seventh, *pulchrum*—a procedure which he feels in no way to be really a *modification* of the tradition, since his reading of St. Thomas confirms him in his conviction that this was really the view of Aquinas also, who, for some reason or other which remains obscure, failed to make it clear. But M. Maritain himself wants unequivocally to insist upon beauty's being accorded this high status, for he believes that it—like Unity, like Truth, like Goodness—is as infinite as Being-itself. And he means, I think, that in so far as all things that exist participate in the power of Being-itself and resist the threat of Non-being, *to that extent* they show forth fullness of Being which is *integrity*, order-and-unity which is *consonance*, and the kind of light that causes the intelligence to see which is *radiance*: that is to say, they show forth beauty. "Thus, just as everything *is* in its own way, and is *good* in its own way, so everything is beautiful in its own way. And just as being is present everywhere, and everywhere diversified, so beauty spills over or spreads everywhere, and is everywhere diversified" (163). Thus it is, in Professor Maritain's view, that beauty, in transcending every genus and category and in permeating or imbuing everything, shows itself really to belong in the realm of transcendentals.

But transcendental beauty is not the beauty that our senses perceive, and since this is the beauty upon which the issues of aesthetics focus, M. Maritain feels obliged to introduce, by way of contrast, the idea of aesthetic beauty which is, he argues, "a particular determination of transcendental beauty: it is transcendental beauty as confronting not simply the intellect, but the intellect

and the sense acting together in one single act; say, it is transcendental beauty confronting the sense as imbued with intelligence, or intellection as engaged in sense perception" (164). His question is, then: what is the significance of the concept of aesthetic beauty for the philosophy of art?

In order to understand the circle of definition that M. Maritain draws around this problem, we must recall that, in his view, art (and here I mean what he means by the "fine" arts as opposed to the "useful" arts) originates in Poetry—that is, in "that intercommunication between the inner being of things and the inner being of the human Self which is a kind of divination" (3). And the distinctive thing about Poetry, in contrast to Science and Art (i.e. in the sense of productive action, *factibile*), he argues, is that in it the creativity of the spirit is entirely free, since there is nothing towards which it must tend in order to be *specified* and *formed;* whereas, in Science "the creative function of the intellect is entirely subordinate to its cognitive function," the object being to "conquer" Being by concepts and judgments and reasonings; and in Art the creativity of the spirit is entirely subordinate to the work which is to be made. But in Poetry it is wholly free: yet, even so, it cannot help tending "toward that in which the intellect has its ultimate exultation," toward "that which causes the pleasure or delight of the intellect" (170). And thus it is that beauty, though not the *object* of Poetry, as conceptualization and "cognitivity" are the objects of Science, is yet its necessary correlative and what M. Maritain calls the "*end beyond any end*" of Poetry.

Now Poetry is the motive power of art, since poetic intuition yearns for expression of itself, and this expression must necessarily be something *made*: so "Poetry is committed to the productive activity of art . . ." (171). And though the artist does not set out to produce a *beautiful* work but only a *good* work, he, nevertheless, does in fact engender in beauty in so far as his art is moved and quickened by the grace of Poetry. Beauty, then, is not something to be *produced* by the artist but is rather something "to be loved, and mirrored in the work." M. Maritain, with his customary penetration, sees, of course, the danger here, for once the artist became—as he did become with the advent of Roman-

ticism—"a priest performing the rites of beauty, it was difficult for him not to adore beauty. And once beauty was made into a goddess, it was difficult for the artist, when later on he continued advancing in self-awareness and in the discovery of his own spiritual powers, not to quarrel with the goddess, and sometimes to be fed up with her, and sometimes to break with beauty, or keep house with beauty only grudgingly and spitefully, because he had fallen in love with some foreign seducer, closer to man than to art" (176). And herein M. Maritain locates the spiritual predicament of the modern artist, to the discussion of which many of his most brilliant pages in the Vth and VIth chapters are devoted.

This, then, is the doctrinal scheme of *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, which is marvellously buttressed by an enormous body of cogent reference to the history of literature and painting and music. One puts the book down, indeed, with a sense of bafflement at how a philosopher who for over thirty years has kept so busy with the subject matter of his field could have found the time to achieve such immense erudition in the arts. And one is also struck by the thoroughness with which M. Maritain, in the years since he has been in residence in this country, has studied the literature of contemporary American criticism: the names of men like R. P. Blackmur, Kenneth Burke, John Crowe Ransom, Francis Fergusson, and Allen Tate frequently figure in his discussions. There are, to be sure, occasions when one questions the validity of particular judgments—as when, for example, together with the canvases of Cézanne and Rouault and Braque, he mentions those of Henri Rousseau and Chagall as belonging to that body of work which gives us the "feeling that we are in the presence of an exceptionally great epoch"—and then ranks, below Rousseau and Chagall, Paul Klee as being among the "less resounding names." And one may also find it a little curious that Arthur Lourié should be regarded as providing us with "the greatest example in contemporary music" of profundity, of "creative inspiration." Yet, despite these occasional eccentricities, the book displays, on the whole, an elegance and sureness of taste that mark M. Maritain's as what is unquestionably the finest aesthetic sensibility among the major figures of modern philosophy.

There are, it is true, occasional unclarities—which may themselves, though, be less a consequence of fundamental obscurities of thought than they are of the labyrinthic involutions of the rhetoric which at times tends to run away with itself. But, finally, the book shows itself to be the kind of triumph with which the critic can never be altogether at ease; for he is most at home with failure or at least with what is only partially successful. And in the presence of complete success—which is what I think this book, taken in the frame of its own premises and presuppositions, represents— he can only admire the patience with which the project was conceived: he can only notice the various details and admire the skill with which they have been joined together and remind himself that no list of them will ever be equivalent to the whole of which they are parts. Then if, as is true in this instance, the architectonic splendor of the book is matched by its power to organize and illumine that which is outside itself—in this case, the life of art—we have, indeed, received a benediction for which we may well be grateful.

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