Jacques Maritain's Aesthetic: An Expository Essay

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JACQUES MARITAIN'S AESTHETIC: AN
EXPOSITORY ESSAY

BY
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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This essay is intended to be an exploration, preliminary and introductory, of Maritain's writings on questions of art and poetry. Gathered together, these writings are now sufficient in quantity of principle and detail to exist as an independent aesthetic. The importance of Maritain as a philosopher is sufficient assurance that his aesthetic will be valuable, even if its value is not already assured us by the testimony of a multitude of voices.

Unfortunately, however, the voices praise but do not explain. In June of 1944 James Collins pointed out the fact that "Maritain occupies a lofty but lonely prominence in aesthetics. Catholic thinkers have done little to exploit his suggestions about art, beauty and poetic experience."\(^1\) Since then the writing about Maritain's aesthetic has continued to be limited to reviews and to short articles. The consequence is obvious: disorganized comments are made on elements selected from his writing according to the interests of the reviewer. The result is a certain confusion, each interpreter seeing Maritain's basic terms differently. Philip Wheelwright, for example, is impressed chiefly by the realist epistemology implicit in Maritain's aesthetic.\(^2\) For him therefore the crucial concept in Maritain is that of an interpenetration of subject and

\(^1\)Commonweal, LX (June 11, 1954), 249.

object, and he identifies four "key" terms according to this point of view: poetry, intentionality, interpenetration, and emotion. One can say only that the four words are important in Maritain's theory; to define them, however, in terms of a union between mind and reality is to obscure their more essential meanings. In like manner, E. A. Sillem, writing in The Dublin Review,\(^3\) obscures Maritain's central theses by making the hub of his theory what is only a spoke. For Sillem, Maritain's "key problem" is the question: "What has united all the different spiritual and bodily powers of the artist and brought them to act in such striking concord with each other?"\(^4\) The result of Sillem's search for the answer is a very inadequate account of Maritain's theory. A much better account is given by Victor Hamm\(^5\) because he sees that a basic question in Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry is that concerning the relationship between art and poetry. It is in answering this question that Maritain is led to define both and to analyze in detail the nature of poetic intuition. Nonetheless, the brevity of his essay precludes anything more than the barest sketch of a few of Maritain's problems. Because these are typical examples of the rather numerous but always brief treatments of Maritain's aesthetic, it is apparent that what is needed is a study which shall be at once more comprehensive in its survey of the theory and more thorough in exposing its root terms and consequent propositions. Hence this essay involves a search for the terms and the problems they are employed

\(^3\) Dublin Review, 229 (Summer, 1955), 176-187.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 177.

\(^5\) "Creative Intuition and Scholasticism," America, 90 (October 31, 1953), 127-129.
to solve. It is not an attempt to evaluate the terms, the propositions, or the validity of Maritain's conclusions. Such evaluations must be left to philosophers and aestheticians. What is intended is an exposure of his theories such that their implications for literary criticism will be seen. Hence this essay's point of view, which is its principle of construction. The essay is not organized historically—according to the way in which Maritain's interests and theories developed, although, to be sure, this development will be indicated. Nor is it organized simply around certain key terms, although its effort is to define those. Rather, to gain the desired perspective, it is organized around a tetrad of terms designating different major areas of critical concern: (1) poetry, or the nature of the activity which constructs the artifact; (2) poet, the nature of the being who performs the activity; (3) poem, the nature of the resultant artifact; (4) audience, the nature of the artifact as experienced and criticized by the reader. For Maritain, of course, all aspects of the work of art are understood in terms of events in the poet's mind. "Let us bring out attention to bear on the general structure of the activity of the mind."6 This is the interest informing his entire aesthetic. Nonetheless, the tetrad of terms is a valid principle of organization even for a cognitional aesthetic, and will effect an exposition of its implications.

The essay will, then, concern itself first with Maritain's concept of art, the "work-making activity" of the human mind. The distinction between speculative and productive virtues on which this concept is based is the first key concept in Maritain's aesthetic. The second is the concept of beauty, as a

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transcendental and as characterized by integrity, proportion, and clarity. It is the role of beauty in this activity which is art, and its impact on that activity, which leads Maritain to his next major term, poetry. The artist is one who imposes form on matter. In the case of the useful arts, the form is so regulated by exigencies of the object to be made (the requirement of a clock to tell time, for example) that the role of beauty must be subsidiary. But in those arts traditionally called "fine," the presence of the beauty of form may so enamour the artist that he neglects the need of form for matter in which or through which to shine. It is this neglect, in modern art, of the material conditions in which things exist in order to search out and possess the beautiful form by which they exist, which leads Maritain to an exploration of the nature of the artist's vision.

This third major concept—poetry, or poetic intuition—is made definable by an examination of the scholastic concept of God's creative idea, in relationship to which the artist's is both analogously similar and properly different. The chief characteristic of this poetic knowledge is its connaturality (that is, it is a knowledge in which the self and the thing known, though differing materially, have the same form and hence are revealed, as it were, through each other), because it is the self-thing content thus demanded which determines the emotive and experiential nature of that knowledge. The most crucial concept here, it seems, is Maritain's definition of emotion as intentional, or as that which causes to know. It is crucial because, if poetic knowledge is to be at once valid knowledge and yet distinctive knowledge, it must have a distinctive, non-conceptual medium for knowledge. That is, if the intellect (intellectus) is to operate validly in poetic knowing, and if the
concept is proper to the intellect as discursive reason (ratio), there must be
some cognate to the concept when the intellect is operating non-discursively.
And this is the intentional emotion, emotion as form.

Because this intentional emotion is awakened at the roots of subjectivity,
and because subjectivity as such is not knowable (the self is knowable only if
the not-self is simultaneously known), this hidden knowledge must, if it is to
become explicit knowledge, result in the making to exist of a thing. Unless
the thing comes to be, a knowledge of it and the self connatural with it will
remain hidden knowledge. Therefore Maritain's discussion of a completed work
is an examination of how poetry is interiorized in an artifact. Moreover, be-
cause the artifact is a result of art, and because beautiful art must be char-
acterized by the threefold characteristics of beauty, Maritain's discussions
of artifacts must also involve the relationship between poetry and art, and the
way beauty informs artifacts.

Finally, the essay will examine the possibilities of this theory as a
basis for a critical method, and the way in which this theory must deal with
the art-morality problem.
CHAPTER II

POETRY: THE ESSENTIALS OF "ART"

In 1943 Maritain wrote, "In my book *Art and Scholasticism* I intended to consider the essentials of art rather than the nature of poetry. Later on it was this mysterious nature that I became more and more eager to scrutinize."¹

In fact, the only noteworthy additions to the prospectus on art contained in *Art and Scholasticism* are an essay called "Sign and Symbol," published in *Ransoming the Time*, and a summary comprising chapter two of *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. His other works deal primarily with his concept of poetry.

We can begin by briefly sketching Maritain's version of the essentials of art.

The first four sections of his book-length essay, *Art and Scholasticism*, deal with the essentials of art considered generically, that is, art as an activity of the mind proper to both useful and fine arts. The fifth chapter, "Art and Beauty," limits the consideration of art's generic qualities by introducing what determines the "fine" (in *Creative Intuition*, the "self-sufficient") arts—beauty. After establishing the transcendental nature of beauty, Maritain must show how art, which deals with a transcendental value—hence one common to all artifacts (though proper only to the fine arts)—can nevertheless require rules which are determined by the needs of individual artifacts. He shows this in chapter six; this is actually the first statement of a problem—the rules of

art versus the transcendent demands of beauty—which recurs frequently in later work and is in fact a central theme of Creative Intuition. He next shows how those rules or any pattern imposed from without can prove a danger (chapter seven), unless they work through the virtue of art (Christian art a case in point, chapter eight). Finally, he shows how this necessity for making rules vitally appropriate to the unique needs of a work is a condition applicable even when the artist is concerned with patterns or rules of morality (chapter nine). There are two key concepts informing the entire essay: that of the division of mental activities into speculative and practical; that of the transcendental nature of beauty.

Generically speaking, the classification of art depends on the ancient distinction between the ways in which mind works: directed toward knowing in order to rest therein; directed toward knowing in order that the knowledge may be used for something else. To establish one of these directions in the mind so that the mind is empowered by it is to put oneself in possession of a condition perfecting that mind in its operations, a condition or power called a virtue. Art is the power of the mind by which the mind directs knowing for the sake of making. Art is the virtue of the intellect practicing. It fits into a scholastic scheme of the intellectual virtues as follows:

I. Speculative virtues (truth of knowing)  
   A. Understanding of first principles  
   B. Science (produces knowledge demonstratively by attributing causes)  
   C. Wisdom (in the natural order)

II. Practical virtues (truth of directing)  
   A. Prudence: directs acting as such (realm of will, morality)  
   B. Art: directs acting so as to produce

This sketch reveals the companionship of prudence and art, which Maritain exploits at length of three reasons: (1) to find theoretical bases for dis-
tinations without which the relations between art and morality become confused; (2) to determine the role played in art by the appetitive faculties; (3) to establish the need in art for rules. The art-morality problem we shall consider later; here it suffices to locate, in the way the mind operates, the distinction Maritain draws between the way of art and the way of morality. In the practical order artistic and moral activities tend to affect each other; none-theless, they are distinct. Moreover, their ends are such that art can warp the appetitive faculties considered as human without immediately warping the artistic faculties as such. Because man is both Maker and Man, this distinction in ends to be achieved creates a source of conflict with which Maritain is much concerned.

A third consideration arising from the distinction between art and prudence leads to a discussion of the rules of art. For prudence, concerned with acting as such—hence the exigencies of a unique situation in which action is determined only by the quality of the action, not by the needs of a fixed object—has no fixed rules. Art, concerned with the making of things, is pre-ordered by those definite rules by which things are made, by which, for example, a clock can be made to tell time. But a proper understanding of these rules of art requires two major considerations.

(1) Beauty, because it is a transcendental, will result in certain alterations in the rules of art. No generic rules can govern the making of the beautiful object because no genus can exhaust a transcendental. It is the impact of the beautiful on art which creates those distinctions by which we separate the arts into what are usually designated the Useful and the Fine. (This distinction was not made in the mediaeval period because the social hierarchy
imposed silence on that individualism which the unique demands of beauty suggest to the workman. Nonetheless, beauty was created, for art was sufficiently strong to achieve social ends without distorting the unique ends of the beautiful object.) "Recourse must be had to the metaphysics of the ancients to discover what they thought about Beauty, and a progress thence made to Art to see what happens when the two terms meet." 2 First, then, the metaphysics of beauty, and then "what happens."

Maritain's definition of the beautiful can be treated under the following headings: the nature of beauty; beauty in terms of its effects; beauty as known in the beautiful object; beauty as it affects the poet.

Under the first heading, the relevant distinction to be made is that between transcendental beauty and aesthetic beauty. As such, beauty is a transcendental, but as related to the human order, beauty is that which pleases not merely an intellect, but an intellect in sense. The senses do themselves contain a kind of proportion, or harmony, which must be satisfied; hence the ugly; though a thing can be said to be beautiful to the extent to which it has being, it may be ugly to the senses.

An examination of beauty's proper effects can be built around Aquinas's definition: beauty is that which, when seen, pleases. The phrase that which indicates that beauty belongs to the object; the observer delights not in the knowing but in the object known. Here we can distinguish between joy and delight. There is a joy which comes with the release which follows understanding.

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and a joy in the mere exercise of reason. But properly poetic experience is a delight, or an enjoyment in the possession of the good object. (Is not literature burdened with examples of acrostic works which demand an intensified mental activity, the successful completion of which results in joy, not not in the possession of a beautiful object?)

The phrase when seen means that the beautiful must be known intuitively. It cannot be designated by the concept, as a novel cannot be understood in terms of its theme alone. We actually turn away from the radiance of a work's beauty when we attempt to conceptually realize it. Conceptual discourse can, however, prepare us for the intuition and it can lead us to it; thus Maritain believes that the artist's friends who know his intentions can derive more enjoyment from his work than can others.

The beautiful is that which pleases. The senses, first of all, must be pleased, though not precisely as senses. The beautiful, that is, will not satisfy an itching sensation. Rather the senses will find something in the object which is proportioned to them, something which suits their nature to the degree to which the intellect is working in them. Because the experience (experience is knowledge in the presence of, and because of the presence of, the object) is of the beautiful, the intellectual function is its essence. Thus the role of the senses is formally only secondary and negative—that can be beautiful which does not disgust the senses. And those senses most capable of serving the intellect—sight and hearing—will be able to contribute most to the intuitive delight in beauty because they will not interfere with the focusing of the intellectual powers.

The intellect will be pleased in two ways: it will find pleasure in the
exercise of its powers of knowing; its natural appetite for being will be
allayed in the act of knowing the object. But, because aesthetic beauty, or
beauty in the material object, is not essentially different from transcendental
beauty, which is analogous, it will awaken in the observer a sense of longing
for transcendent beauty. (This is the basis for the doctrine of correspondence
enunciated in Poe and Bandelaire.) A yearning, over and above the sense of
delight in the immediate object, will be one of the indications of the presence
of the beautiful.

The emotions too will be aroused. But except for the happy fullness pro-
cured to the mind and satisfying (not completely) its natural desires, other
emotions—passions or feelings resulting from the intellectual delight and joy
—are posterior, extrinsic to what formally constitutes the beautiful.\(^3\)

We recognize beauty by its effects, primarily the delight it affords the
mind. But if it delights the mind, it is an excellence to be understood in re-
lationship to mind, and hence we work with Aquinas's definition of beauty's
essence: beauty is that which has integrity (the mind likes being), proportion
(the mind likes order and unity), and clarity (the mind likes light and intel-
ligibility). The variety of opinions as to the nature of the beautiful is some-
what explained when we remember that, because beauty is a transcendental, every
beautiful object will be beautiful in its own way. Furthermore, integrity and
proportion are relative to the end of the artist, not the ideal type of object
represented. One cannot judge a work of art by reference to such an ideal type.
The artist's worth lies in his ability to imitate, not create. The question

\(^3\) Cf. J. Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry (New York: Pantheon
of subject matter, in this view, is almost impertinent, because matter is only the material cause by which form can be revealed.

The poet himself must implicitly observe the demands of aesthetic beauty. The art which is concerned with beauty tends, because the first principle of beauty is purely intellectual, to move away from the requirements of the senses, tends to force itself to transmit transcendental beauty, to create an "angelic" art. The temptation here is to become so enamoured of being, of beauty itself, as to preclude all beings from one's art; hence the tendency of modern art toward the void: the artist originally sees beauty in things, but refuses to reexpress the things in an attempt to hold on to beauty itself. But he does not know beauty; he knows only beautiful things, and must remain subject to things in his work.

"What happens" when beauty meets art is that the rules of the genus art are modified, its intellectual nature is emphasized so as to make it resemble a speculative virtue. (This is an adumbration of modern art's gnostic tendencies, that is, its belief that by a sight of form it has come to possess a transcendent, secret wisdom.) Rules are modified because the end is never generic: every beautiful object is beautiful in its own way just as every object is in its own way. And because the arts which deal with beauty aim simply to produce intellectual delight, they are more obviously intellectual than the useful arts. Because they create an object the value of which is not as a means, but as an end (the sight of beauty perfects the intellectual nature; it does not provide it with a tool), this kind of art resembles a speculative virtue. However, the distinction between the arts created by a consideration of the demands of the beautiful is not an essential distinction, because both
belong to the genus art. In *Art and Scholasticism* Maritain gives more emphasis to the distinction on the basis of the difference in end pursued. This difference is less emphasized in *Creative Intuition*, where beauty becomes the end beyond the end of art (the making of the object), and where even those arts primarily concerned with utility tend to engender in beauty.\(^4\)

(2) Thus the second fact to be remembered in dealing with the rules of art is that "Art remains always essentially in the sphere of Making and it is by drudgery upon some matter that it aims at rejoicing the spirit."\(^5\) The fine arts remain among rules. Maritain's chapter on "The Rules of Art" is divided into two major sections: rules pertinent to art generically considered, and those rules considered as specific to the fine arts.

Generically, the important distinction is between customary and operative habits. The concept of virtue is again at the root of Maritain's discussion: customary habits become those "self-adjusting formulae"\(^6\) and methods based on a mechanistic treatment of life. But true habit, or virtue, is a quality of the artist's spirit. It follows that this quality will distinguish him from the mass of men. It follows, also, that habits can be said to *form* the artist. Hence from the artist's point of view, rules, or the structure of his habits, are imperative.

To make is to impose form on matter, to formulate. From the point of view of the work as well, therefore, rules (formulations) are imperative. Matter

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 175

\(^5\)Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, p. 28.

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 32.
must be treated in certain ways to be discovered by the artist whose practicing intellect has achieved the requisite power. Art therefore is essentially involved with rules, but living rules.

If man were an absolute creator, his formulations would be completely new, although still of the nature of rules. As it is, what he gives he has received, granting that an original genius will discover hitherto invisible rules for treating matter, nonetheless the bulk of creative work depends on a heritage of skills and principles and culture.7

With specific reference to the fine arts, Maritain indicates certain peculiarities in artistic rules. Again, the root of this discussion is the concept of beauty as a transcendental. For beauty's "infinite amplitude" must always be uncapturable, in any complete way, by the particular work. The original discovery of a way in which a piece of matter can be made to reveal form will result in certain rules, of course, but without the original vision a repetition of those rules will almost certainly result in their death. Elusive beauty, caught sight of by a trickery of mechanical adjustment too fine to be blueprinted, must ever be sought for in new ways. This readjustment of technique, perhaps of genre, Maritain calls a renewal. As for the useful arts—a clock capable of telling time need never change to fulfill its purpose.

A more important demand of the fine arts is that for a complete involvement of the artist. In making a clock, the reason alone suffices to adjust means to a willed end, which is separate from the work being done. But in making works for the sake of beauty, one is making ends, not means, and the

7Ibid., p. 35.
appetitive faculties must be intimately bound up with the process.

And because the end is original and proper to the person, it will be determined by what he is: "A good disposition of the appetitite is necessary, for everyone judges his particular ends by what he himself actually is: 'as a man is, so does the end appear to him.'"\(^8\) This is a brief statement of a principle, of the connaturality, or union of self and thing known, of poetic knowledge, which Maritain will develop at length in Creative Intuition.

Thirdly, the rules of the fine arts will be characterized by the same a posteriori kind of formulation that characterizes the rules governing a prudent action. For the way in which an artistic end is achieved can be as unique and new and dependent on unformulable circumstances as is a prudent action.

Finally, in Creative Intuition, a fourth diversity between the rules of fine and useful arts is discussed. This is in addition to the three diversities mentioned above as analyzed in Art and Scholasticism, and reveals Maritain's new interest in the nature of the creative spirit itself. For the primary rule in the useful arts is the satisfaction of the need which originated the artistic process; but for the fine arts the basic rule is "the vital actuation or determination through which this free creativity of the spirit expresses itself first and foremost—and to which, therefore, the mind and the hand of the artist must first of all be loyal."\(^9\) That actuation is the task of the creative intuition, which gives form to the fluid spirit of man and which contains, virtually, all of the finished work.

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\(^8\) Ibid., p. 38.

\(^9\) Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 59.
Although these divergent tendencies can be noticed, it would not be true to say that there is an essential difference between fine and useful arts. "But with all that the threshold of art has not yet been crossed." The term properly complementary to art is what Maritain will call "poetry." We see in this term, because poetry is the result of the creative intuition which originates the artistic activity, that which leads Maritain to distinctions between poetry and poem, and between the poetic nature and the man who writes poetry. These distinctions for Maritain are valid: they are based on a point between the creative intuition virtually experienced and that intuition actualized by art.

Noting the area in which is engendered Maritain's definition of poetry (because there must be something responsible for the differences between useful and fine arts as traditionally conceived), we can return to his discussion of art generically considered.

Though art is essentially involved with rules, those rules cannot be imposed from without. In chapter seven of *Art and Scholasticism*, Maritain takes up various types of impurities in art which result from attempts to impose patterns on it from without rather than allowing its own patterns to engender from within. These impurities are mechanical logic; manual dexterity; servile imitation; brute emotion; and thesis.

One of Maritain's fundamental contributions to philosophy is his insistence on treating reason as a faculty so broad and deep as to take on, in some of its workings, an elusiveness, a mystery, contrary to the commonly held mean-

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10 Ibid.
Art is logical because it is essentially of the mind, but the logic which characterizes it is organic, evolving, immanent. "It must be steeped in logic; not in the pseudo-logic of clear ideas, not in the logic of knowledge and demonstration, but in the working logic of every day, eternally mysterious and disturbing, the logic of the structure of the living thing, and the intimate geometry of nature." 11 "Even chance is logical in the heart of the poets." 12 Maritain's approach to art is guided by this feeling for its mysterious self-originating and self-revealing nature; hence it becomes empirical and a posteriori.

Because art is of the mind, it is not only logical, but intrinsically free of manual dexterity, which is at best an instrumental cause of the realized piece of work, extrinsic to, though a requisite condition of, art.

A third impurity in art is caused by servile imitation. Maritain distinguishes between servile imitation and imitation properly understood, that is, between imitation as a material and as a formal element of the work of art. He rejects, as the subject matter for art, the Platonic Ideal; he rejects realistic reproductions of life; he rejects things as they ought to be—and any form of artistic exemplarism, based as it must be on some mode of idealism. To imitate therefore is not to copy reality nor to create any ideal form. If the intention is to create the ideal—what ought to be—then the artist is as limited as he who copies naturalistically. And to attribute a "what ought to be" concept to Aristotle's term "ideal" is to make his term Platonic. No, imitation must be

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11 Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, p. 41
12 Ibid., note 1.
understood as a working like nature, a disposing or imitation of material elements in such a way as to "make the brilliance of a form, the light of being, shine." Before there can be form, there must be a structure, or symbol, which can reveal it. This structure is known immediately by the mind and the senses—it must be knowable; and because the mind knows what is in nature, the way the work of art is made will be in some way an imitation of what the mind has learned from nature. But the mind and senses know the object—words, color, volume, line, sound, image, etc.—only that they may know that which is beyond, that which is meant by these objects: the brilliant form which gives them, more than conceptual, meaning. Here again is a point crucial in Maritain's interpretation of much of modern art: for the mind to get through the material of the work to the form radiant in it, it is necessary as a precondition that the material be intelligible. That which itself cannot be known cannot be a symbol of something else. (Unless we recognize, for example, a flag, we could not discover its symbolic content.) Thus:

if the obscurity be too great, if the symbols cease to be symbols, and become puzzles, the nature of our faculties will begin to expostulate. The artist is always to a certain extent doing violence to nature, and yet if he did not take account of this necessity, he would be offending, in a sort of idealist vertigo, the material or subjective conditions which art is humanly constrained to satisfy. 

The radiant forms the artist discovered in reality cannot be actualized into art unless he is willing to reproduce, to imitate, a sufficient amount of reality to allow a revelation of those forms.

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13 Ibid., pp. 45-46.

14 Ibid., p. 48.
To grasp Maritain's use of the term imitation it is necessary to remember that for him God is the supreme artist whose beauty, the source of the human artist's, is inherent in the way things are; that appearances, however, as frequently hide the secrets of things as flesh can hide the soul, and that the artist in thrusting appearances aside may create what seems a distortion of reality; that, finally, the artist will nonetheless be essentially imitating reality's secret ways of being, as well as the artist's own.

Two other impurities in art are brute emotion and thesis. It is essential to the beautiful that it delight, but this is delight created by and dominated by intellectual perception, not merely nervous and muscular stimulation. Art's effect is to produce emotion, but if it aims at emotion, at affecting or rousing the passions, it becomes adulterate, and another element of deceit thereby enters into it. One can argue that this precludes a concern for emotional response, but it seems, rather, merely a distinction between superficial emotion and emotion proper to an intellectual experience.

"The term thesis will be applied to any intention extrinsic to the work itself, when the thought inspired by such an intention does not act upon the work by means of the artistic habit moved instrumentally, but puts itself in juxtaposition to the habit so as itself to act directly upon the work." Didactic art can exist only when the ideas emerge from the fabric of the intuition. The criterion for this is the unity of the faculties; thesis "betrays calculation, a dualism between the intelligence of the artist and his sensi-

15Ibid., p. 50.

16Ibid., p. 51.
bility, which the object of art is to have united." ¹⁷

The term opposed to art is poetry.

By Poetry I mean, not the particular art which consists in writing verses, but a process both more general and more primary; that intercommunication between the inner being of things and the inner being of the human Self which is a kind of divination . . . . Poetry, in this sense, is the secret life of each and all of the arts; another name for what Plato called mousike. ¹⁸

One of the two main problems explored in Creative Intuition is the problem of the distinction, yet the "indissoluble relationship" of art and poetry. It is, in a way, the problem of content and form, inspiration and expression, poetry and poem, poet and poetry. The solution lies in what has been outlined above. Poetry is the divination of the spiritual in sense because poetry is the "pulse" or "melody" created by form's penetration into matter and its glimmering therein. Art is the process, the intellect at work making something, which brings that music, intuition, vision, into concrete existence. For poetry is contacted in a dark night; it is beauty only virtually present, only vaguely glimpsed. One does not "know" it until its form has been completed; the form does not shine until the matter has been designed. Hence, although the terms are distinct, they are indissolubly bound because the very existence in act of poetry depends on art. Nonetheless, we can speak, because the terms are distinct, of a man as a poet although he has not written poetry (if we believe his personal testimony regarding his intuitions); we can also speak of poetry which is distinct from any individuating elements of a work.

¹⁷ Ibid.
¹⁸ Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 3.
It is because, in examining modern art, he was struck with its desire to liberate itself from the work-making activity of intellect and hence from reason (logical reason) that Maritain was led to his interest in poetry, the cause of that activity. He noted that artists were shedding art for the sake of that which inspires it: they were eliminating the material conditions of art for the sake of holding on to the spiritual, the formal, transcendent beauty—poetry, itself. And Maritain is led, then, to explain this phenomenon. His explanation involves the deepest exploration of the nature of poetic knowledge in the act called "creative intuition."
CHAPTER III

POET: THE NATURE OF "POETRY"

Maritain's major philosophical work is the Degrees of Knowledge. His theory of art and poetry is also epistemological (and epistemology, for him, is a branch of metaphysics) in nature, and we can place his treatment of poetry with those of a continuum of thinkers—all approaching it through the faculties of the artist—from the German romantics and Coleridge to Freud and Jung, Croce and Bremond. In The Degrees of Knowledge Maritain writes of:

... one of the fundamental themes of this book: that there are in the very world of the mind itself structural differentiations and a diversity of dimensions which it is above all necessary to recognize, and, if we are to escape the gravest errors of interpretation, the greatest care must be taken to assign to each type of thought its exact situation in this form of transcendental topography.1

Maritain's exploration of the dimension or "situation" of poetic knowledge began early when, discovering Aquinas, but under the impact of Bergson and a rejection of a scientistic concept of the intellect, he wrote on intuition.2 In other essays, as well as in the 1920 edition of Art et scolastique, the seminal ideas are planted. But it is in 1927, with the essay "Frontieres de la Poesie" (added to the 1927 edition of Art et scolastique) that Maritain makes his first

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2See, for example, "L'intuition. Au sens de connaissance instinctive ou d'inclination," Revue de Philosophie, 23 (1913), 5-13.
explicit statement of the principles responsible for Creative Intuition. In the interim between "Frontiers" and Creative Intuition came not only The Degrees of Knowledge (1932), which briefly locates poetic knowledge with relation to other types of knowledge, but, more important, Art and Poetry (1935), the key essay of which is "The Freedom of Song." Finally, there are the two essays of The Situation of Poetry, the French edition of which was published in 1938. All of these works are now translated.

Although, in consistency of thought, the works can be treated together, we might review Maritain's theories prior to Creative Intuition, noting how they build the foundation for that work, and noting as well aspects of development and change of emphasis. We have already mentioned that Maritain's interest was generated by the contemporary attempt by artists to rid themselves of any adherence to the material conditions of reality. His explanation of the attempt to impose self on nature is given chiefly by an exploration of the concept of the creative idea of God as defined by the schoolmen. God's creative idea becomes the analogue by which he attempts to comprehend the "frontiers" or limits of the artist's creativity.

A comparison of Divine ideas and the artist's ideas is valid because both types are formative of things, rather than, like human concepts, formed by things. The artistic idea is an idea of making or doing, a spiritual and immanent object contemplated in the mind, born of and nourished by the mind, living by the life of the mind, the immaterial matrix out of which the work is produced in being, an idea formative of things and not formed by them.  

This is the heart of Maritain's theory. But a comparison of God's ideas with

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those of the artist reveals, as well, certain limitations in the artist. His creative idea is appropriate to a soul-body being. Hence his idea is not, like God's, purely intellectual form; it is always filtered through the senses. Moreover, it is an idea dependent upon the way in which a human learns—through the senses. "God sees in His ideas every way in which His essence can be manifested and to their pattern He makes creatures . . . " But man must make according as he was made, and will reveal in his work the ways of things which he was taught by reality. These two limitations determine the failures of both abstract art and "realistic" art.

The failure of abstract art is its attempt to achieve divinity. "To order contemporary art to exist as abstract art, discarding every condition determining its existence in the human subject, is to have it arrogate to itself the asery of God." The three subjective conditions of art become its limits: it is of man, and therefore involved with things; it is in man, and therefore dependent upon his powers (this is the heart of the art-morality interdependence); it is for man, and cannot live if it cuts itself off from the social sources and final causes which nourish man. The conflict between art's attempt to achieve pure creation and the necessities originating from its subjective conditions in man, as a quality of man, is the conflict of modern art. Maritain illuminates this conflict by seeing it simultaneously from a diversity of viewpoints based on art's multiple causes.

As for realism, it errs in the opposite direction, attempting to ignore

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4Ibid., p. 70.
5Ibid.
the fact that "art's most fundamental demand is that the work make apparent not something else already made, but the spirit from which it proceeds." Thus Maritain's concept of making, which is synonymous with imitation formally conceived, is of an art halfway between pure creation and a pure copying of reality. The artist's idea "transforms, removes, brings closer together, transfigures; it does not create." The difference between reality as it originally feeds the artist's hunger for beauty and the way it appears in the work is the result of the artist's own idea, which, if it is not transforming reality, is not being artistic. But the creativity of the self is a concept not here developed at any length; it, and the seeing of art as a history of the growth of human self-consciousness, are merely sketched. Maritain is primarily concerned with discussing the dangers of the extremes: making poetry an absolute; making poetry a slave to reality or to social needs. Indeed, the latter half of the essay (sections ten through fifteen) proposes that the quest for artistic absolutism has led and will continue to lead man to a choice between faith or destruction. Hence we may be on a verge of "a revival of art as important as the advent of Cimabue and Giotto." Again Maritain gives us a clue to modern art, this time in its obvious religious strivings.

The same theological approach to art characterizes "An Essay on Art," which in 1930 was added to Art and Scholasticism. But a deepening knowledge of contemporary art leads him further along this parallel between God's and the

6Ibid., p. 74.
7Ibid.
8Ibid., p. 83.
artist's creative idea. If the artist's creative idea forms things, it is because of the creativity of his self. This, too, is an attempt to explain modern art's egoism. "The Freedom of Song," beginning with a thorough restatement of the parallel and the dangers to art of absolutism, progresses to an exploration of the content of the artistic intuition of self. Artists are not more self-conscious of their art because a growth of art demands, in virtue of the self-reflexive nature of artistic knowledge, self-consciousness, self-creativity. What they seek in this exhausting and dangerous exploration of self is poetry. And here begin the definitions which ultimately account for Creative Intuition. Poetry, first of all, becomes analogous to music. "Nowhere better than in music does there appear to the philosopher the very mysterious nature of the creative idea, or factive idea, that plays a central role in the theory of art." More important, Maritain defines the emotional nature of the artistic idea, the emotive idea, or tendential emotion, a key term in his epistemology of art.

As for the creative idea, it appears to consciousness especially, in truth, as a decisive emotion, but an emotion transverberated by intelligence, a little cloud at first, but full of eyes, full of imperious visioning, charged with will, and avid to give existence; and if the affective tone imposes itself before all on our knowledge of ourselves, in reality what is of chief import in this intelligenced emotion is the invisible and intentional dart of intuition.

This cognate of the speculative concept is then explored by means of its analogue—the divine idea. The limits are again shown: man's "freedom of song" is limited because the music he discovers is not himself alone but things on

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10Ibid., p. 81.
which he depends, and he cannot sing therefore without things and obedience to the demands they make. Nonetheless, his greatness will be his creativity, his subjection of the material order to the formative powers of his own spirit. "In proportion as the artist approaches his pure type and realizes his most fundamental law, it is indeed himself and his own essence and his own intelligence of himself that he expresses in his work; here is the hidden substance of his creative intuition." But his own essence, as contained in the central intuition of himself, is not the stuff of art, it is the form of art. The emotion-idea, as the concept-idea, is intentional, that is, tends to, forces contact with, the object—to be made, in art; to be known, in speculation. And because man's way of knowing is not, as with God, by means of his own essence, but by contact with the not-self, the content of his intuition will always contain elements of reality as well as elements of self. In knowing reality we are awakened to ourselves. (Hence the fullness of being experienced by the artist and by the critic.) But this knowledge is not abstraction from things, it is the impact of things on the spirit; in knowing we become another; but if the other is still there, if its individuating notes have not, as in abstraction, been shed, then we endure the thing as part of ourself: we become con-natural with it. Poetic knowledge becomes knowledge of two things simultaneously: self and thing.

Maritain adumbrates other concerns of Creative Intuition in stating:

11Ibid., pp. 87-88.
12Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 120.
In order that there should grow unceasingly, conforming to its law, the life of the creative spirit, it is necessary that the center of subjectivity should continuously deepen to a point where, in suffering the things of the world and those of the soul, it awakens to itself.  

He will, in Creative Intuition, begin with the creative nature of the spirit (intellect) of man, and explore the recesses of the depth of the formation point of the creative design.

The self-reflexive nature of poetic knowledge becomes the chief theme of Maritain's next major statements, the two essays he contributed to The Situation of Poetry, the title of which indicates the attempt to locate the "situation" of poetry in the hierarchy of man's faculties. Maritain writes:

"This law of progressively becoming conscious of itself is one of the great laws of the historical development of the human being, and it is related to a property of activities of a spiritual order. The distinctive property of spirit is to be able, the ancients said, to return upon itself, to accomplish a perfect reflexion, the essential thing here being not the turning back, but the grasp, the penetration of the self by the self, which is integral to it. Reflexivity is essential to the spirit, which thus grasps itself by means of itself and penetrates itself. Thence the general importance, for everything, concerning culture, of the phenomenon of becoming self-conscious."

Here he provides, as he did briefly in "The Frontiers of Poetry," a history of literature in terms of the growth of artistic self-consciousness. And he tells us there are three aspect of "poetry's taking consciousness of itself as poetry" which can be distinguished: poetry in the work as it tends to obscure the intelligible design of art in favor of its obscure meaning; poetry as a state demanding asceticism and tending to a destruction of the human limits which keep the

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poet on the same side of poetry's mysteries; poetry as knowledge, which leads to problems to be investigated in the rest of the essay.

Those "problems" can be stated as follows. (1) The superabundant nature of the intellect—it seeks to know, and in the case of poetic knowledge it comes to know by making a thing, not a concept—determines that poetic knowledge is essentially creative—knowledge for the sake of making a work, not for the sake of knowing or communicating to others; (2) the object of the intellect, because it is being and therefore transcends all genera, will be not only the object to be made, but a meaning or signification which will transcend that individual object: works of art become signs (radiating being and therefore intelligibility) as well as objects;¹⁵ (3) but knowledge which is not formed by the object known but forms it must express the being of the creator, and poetic knowledge must be self-knowledge; (4) yet the self is not awakened to itself except by the presence of the not-self, and poetic knowledge must be simultaneously a mixture of the self and a thing, a mixture possible because self and thing have become connatural. The remainder of the essay is another attempt to explain modern poetry's attempt to make poetic knowledge knowledge for its own sake rather than for the sake of making a work—the attempt to turn back on the transcendental discovered in the intuition and to grasp it without submitting to the modes of human knowledge. The complete definition of poetic knowledge which concludes the essay is a definitive statement, not gone beyond even in Creative Intuition. The new emphases which we should note in this essay are, first, on the "preconscious" area in which poetic knowledge begins and lives;

¹⁵Ibid., p. 50.
second, on the experiential nature of poetic knowledge, "more experience than knowledge"; 16 third, on the essential demands of poetic knowledge for a work in which to find itself—this establishes the relationship between poetry and art on a new basis: the need of poetry for art if poetry is to emerge from virtual to actual existence.

Having mentioned the experiential (that is, existential) nature of poetic knowledge, Maritain goes on to examine it in "The Experience of the Poet." The use of the term experience is important because it signifies Maritain's attempt to explain the ontology of poetic knowledge—experience. We have mentioned that experience is definable as an intense knowledge of an object in and because of its presence; hence the use of this term in an explanation of what is actually there in poetic knowledge. We might add here that the ontology of Maritain's aesthetic is somewhat obscure; except in the three questions outlined below, poetic experience in its content is not precisely defined, and these questions do not take us far. What the poet sees is beauty, the splendor of being, of all the transcendentals together, shining on or through proportioned matter. One must fill in such a theory with data taken from scholastic metaphysics. Even so, it is ultimately necessary to be satisfied with the statement made in Creative Intuition: "We must . . . admit, if we get rid of our 'scienticist' modern prejudices, the existence of a poetic science which differs toto coelo from theoretical sciences, and which is however a real knowledge, attained through creative intuition. Its object is neither the essential structure of the object known nor the laws of phenomena; it is real nevertheless—the exist-

16 Ibid., p. 65.
ential aspects and relations of things grasped through emotion and connatural-
ity. 17 "The Experience of the Poet" is the most complete explanation of poetic
knowledge Maritain offers from this existential point of view. Hitherto he has pointed out its characteristics; now he tries to explain them. He asks: (1)
Why is poetry radically creative; (2) Why is the individual thing necessary to
an act which is a glimpse of a transcendentalexistence itself—and in what
ways can the object of poetic knowledge be existential? (3) In what precise
way is the emotion, in which poetic knowledge begins, made intentional—that is,
precisely when does it become pregnant with reality? The answers are defini-
tive in the sense that Maritain nowhere goes beyond them.

The answer to the first question: poetry is radically creative because
that self-reflexive act which originates poetic knowledge is a grasp of self
precisely in its creative, formative nature. (As we mentioned above, the intellecf because spiritual is itself radically creative.) But the content of
reality which has awakened self to this grasp of itself remains buried in that
self: there is then no thing to conceive except a formation of thing by self;
hence a work ad extra. 18 The existent object of art is parallel to the con-
cept which emerges from the work of the speculative intellect.

The answer to the second question: "All existence is the existence of
something, for existence is in no way separable from nature or quality, from
the intelligible stuff which exists . . . " 19 Nonetheless, although an indi-

17Maritain, Creative Intuition, pp. 49-50, note 4.
19Ibid., p. 75.
vidual is known, it is not known (and here Maritain steers between idealism and superficial realism) as an essence—there is no formation of species; it is known in the secret of its operation. The thing, caught in the subjectivity of the poet, reveals a way in which it can be, and therefore also suggests a way being itself is. Because the thing is known as being, "it is the mode of this experience that is completely existential."20 Moreover, the knowledge is not aimed at grasping the reality of that thing known but at causing it, in a work of art, to be. Hence the object of poetic knowledge "is a practical existential object."21

In answering the third question we move (because the answer is provided by a description of the preconscious life of the spirit) immediately into Creative Intuition. For the six lectures which comprise that work are at once a summary of what Maritain has written before and a more detailed exploration of the recesses of creative intuition. Actually, although each chapter contains clearer descriptions and broader evidences of earlier positions, the new chapters begin only in the final pages of chapter seven. That is, we can step from "The Experience of the Poet" to chapter seven of Creative Intuition without skipping any basic principles. Looked at this way, the latter work is essentially new because it examines the fruition of intuition, and its thesis begins with the definition of the "poetic sense" (that in the poem which is comparable to the poetic experience in the poet) in chapter seven. What such a point of view overlooks in the earlier chapters are not the principles, outlined above,

20 Ibid., p. 77.
21 Ibid.
but more specific applications of them. (Especially helpful are elaborately detailed descriptions of the preconscious life of the intellect in chapter three and the division of the faculties, a sketch of which begins chapter four. These descriptions are designed to provide premises for examinations of the fruition and expression of intuition in the last chapters.) Chapter one is an inductive statement of the self-thing nature of poetic knowledge. Chapter two is a definition of art, the first term to be used in solving the problem stated in one. Chapter three, again constructed inductively by an examination of modern poetry, describes the location where poetry begins. Chapter four examines the nature of poetic knowledge (and, we note, solves the problem stated by chapter one). Chapter five shows, by summarizing the metaphysics of beauty, why an art aware of poetry tends to stop short of its own proper end—the work to be made—and why it may not do so. Chapter six applies the theory of failure to modern painting. Chapter seven prepares the ground for an analysis of the way the intuition is put into the work. Chapters eight and nine reach a discussion of how poetry is "interned" in the work and various aspects of a work as determined by the way that internalization was made.

To bring us to that point in Creative Intuition (chapter seven) where, we say, its proper thesis begins, we need answer the third question asked in "The Experience of the Poet." The soul of man, its powers and faculties integrated, must be pictured as ruminating upon itself—aware, not consciously, of its own natural creativity and being. At some moment in this preconscious life there enters the real in a condition of connaturality with that soul, making it simultaneously aware of the way it is and the way reality is. The contact with reality is made through the emotional impact reality makes on the musing soul,
not through abstraction. This grasp of the real through the effect it has on
the self is therefore through affective connaturality. And the "affection" or
emotion which awakens the experiential knowledge becomes intention (that is,
contacts and grasps the real) at that precise moment when it startles into a
certain tendential movement the creative spirit in its musing on itself. The
tendential movement of the real has been grasped by a connatural tendential
movement in a spirit whose nature it is to project, as it were, the final cause
of such movement. Hence the tendential movement contained in the intentional
emotion is the form of a work to be made, the way a form—simultaneously proper
to the artist's self and to reality—can be made to shine on matter. The
spirit is passively ruminating until this intuition (a startling moment when an
emotional experience of the real is simultaneously an experience of the crea-
tive self) actuates it to create a definite object. This actuation of the in-
tellect at the preconscious root of its immanent life (where no separation of
the faculties, of intellectual and sensory powers, exists) is an actuation of
all the faculties in unity. The poetic experience is therefore characterized
by an integration of the faculties involved. A preservation of these faculties
and the peculiar shape given to the original intuition by priority in one of
them—these are the keys to the completion of the work of art. But before we
move to a sketch of the principles of Maritain's concern with the poem itself,
we should summarize the principles of the theory of poetry he has outlined from
"Frontiers of Poetry" to chapter seven of Creative Intuition. The following
sketch is intended to show the root principle and how it generates some (only
a few—the other basic dichotomy is art vs. poetry) basic aspects of Maritain's
aesthetic.
The Artistic, Creative Idea

Like God's, Free:

A. A formative, not formed, mode of knowledge, non-conceptual.

B. Self is creative, a formal principle of art and poetry.

I. The spirit (synonymous with intellect in broad sense) produces within (the word) and without (the work).

II. Poetic knowledge is therefore not communication or knowledge for its own sake. It is radically operative because it is inseparable from self seen (in the reflexive act of spirit) as creative.

C. A knowledge of the source of art, and a formal treatment of art, are consequent upon artistic self-consciousness.

Proper to Man, Limited:

a. A mode of knowledge which is formed, because the human is not pure intellect, and because he learns through things.

b. Self is dependent—knows itself only in simultaneously knowing the not-self.

1. The spirit intuits, but by an intentional emotion (one which conveys the factive idea—the idea of how to produce—created by the impact of thing on self). A knowledge connatural and affective grasped at depth of spirit without concept but with intentional promptings of knowledge to be brought into light only by means of the artistic process.

2. Poetic knowledge is rather experience (another thing present) than knowledge.

c. All good art must reveal thing as well as artist.

This dichotomy can be seen to inform many aspects of Maritain's discussions: (1) His explanation of modern art is given in terms of its formalism and its failure, or "vertigo," when it tries to make form all. (2) His history of art is given in terms of that which reveals self and that which tries to discover reality. (3) His critical interests include both a search for the "wound"—the way reality is shaped when it merges with a peculiar self, and an
appeal to nature for verification of artistic truth. (4) In the problem of art and morality, his concept of "elevation" depends on the fact that what constitutes art is form, although sin may be the matter treated.
CHAPTER IV

POEM: POETRY IN THE WORK OF ART

How does one deliver the poetic sense? This is the problem in creating works of art. The poetic sense, we said, is that in the poem which is equivalent to the poetic experience in the poet, and the problem of delivering it into the work is the problem of attaining perfect artistic obedience to the content of the poetic intuition. The poet must be aware of the integrity of faculties which characterizes the poetic experience and that the germ of the poem, if properly nurtured, will grow "with inner necessity"\(^1\) into a poem; but he must also be aware that this is an intellectual act. In other words, there are two aspects which determine the process of creation once the original emotion is made intentional: inspiration (considered by Maritain to be the second or two moments comprising poetic experience—the moment at which the intuition breaks into consciousness with melody-like pulsations) and the intellectual work which alone can give it form. This is a warning that intellectual strength is needed, that inspiration cannot account for the poem because, although it is a breaking into daylight of consciousness of the intuited germ, it is not in itself formed. Bad romanticism made this state—the music-like impulses generated by the sudden expansion of intuition—the end of the poetic

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\(^1\)Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 239.
process and as a result produced formless works. But "the most perfect poets are madmen using unfailing reason." This can be put in another way for the sake of clarity. The original intuition first mesmerizes (this is its "systolic" phase), and then catalyzes (its "diastolic" phase), the spirit of the poet. The first phase is that of the intuition proper, the second is that of an all-pervading motion resulting from the harmony of the faculties involved. The faculties tire, and inspiration, the second phase, ceases. But the intuition is still present, and the work of making something from it can continue if the intellect is sufficiently strong to return to its original condition.

There is one other fact the poet must be aware of if he is to do his work well: poetry will tend to transcend art. That is, as we have already indicated, the very nature of poetic knowledge demands a work if it is to be made known; but a work, at the same time, is a material and generic thing which cannot completely capture the spiritual and transcendent reality of poetry. The surplus of poetry in the achieved work will result in its possessing a quality of suggestion or elusiveness which Maritain chooses to designate "magic." (This magic is distinguished from that of a failure to separate the identity of sign from thing signified—a failure characterizing primitive man and some modern artists.)

With these cautions in mind, it is possible to discuss the poem, which

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2Ibid., p. 243.
3Ibid., p. 249.
4Ibid., pp. 241 ff.
5Ibid., pp. 229 ff.
will be characterized by the peculiarities of its poetic sense. "Let us bring our attention to bear on the general structure of the activity of the mind."6 This, the starting point for all of Maritain's theorizing, is also the determining factor in the nature of the poem. Because the poetic sense is the poetic knowledge—experience of the poet transferred into the poem, it will be informed by the characteristics of that experience.

A poem therefore will not be an exercise in discursive reason; it will not be logically. The logical sense is only one aspect of a poem's meaning: there are also "the intelligible meanings of the words (carried either by concepts or by images)—and the imaginal meanings of the words—and the more mysterious meanings of the musical relations between the words, and between the meaningful contents with which the words are laden."7 (We must always keep in mind both Maritain's anti-"scientistic" treatment of man's rational nature, and the ultimately musical nature of the poem's being and meaning.) Because of the nature of poetic meaning, no poem can be either completely clear or completely obscure: to be the first, it would have to be merely logical; to be the second, it would have to be meaningless. Maritain makes a distinction between poems obscure in essence and those obscure in appearance. The latter type of poem (Mallarme, Valery, Hopkins, Pound, Eliot, Tate) is difficult because its words are heavily laden with a complex intellectuality. The former type of poem (Dylan Thomas, Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens) is obscure, not because the sign is heavily strained with bearing signification, but because the sign is broken

6Ibid., p. 310.
7Ibid., p. 259.
and its parts rearranged for the sake of making it a better instrument of signification. There is an interesting corollary to this discussion: poetry cannot become abstract, as can painting, because it uses words, which are by nature signs as well as objects, and always involve the presence of a thing. Painting, which can lose the thing and become abstract because lines and colors are not essentially signs, cannot on the other hand become imagistic—that is, lose the object in the impression it makes—because to the extent to which it uses sensation it uses appearances and these present, to some extent, natural objects.

The second determination of the poem by poetic knowledge is the result of the change poetry undergoes when it is captured in the poem. There it loses its creative nature and becomes cognitive. "Since the work is the final objec-tivization of poetic intuition, what the work tends finally to convey to the soul of others is 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. The reader is primarily interested in the reality conveyed; the subjectivity of the poet is valuable because it is the means (it has generated the particular intentional emotion) by which we discover reality.

The dominance of certain faculties involved in the process of internalizing poetry in the poem accounts for the distinction between classical and

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8 Ibid., pp. 261-268.
9 Ibid., pp. 269-270.
10 Ibid., p. 307.
and modern poems. The classical poet forces the intentional emotion to emerge from the depths of the imagination (imagination as charged with rationality, however) into the daylight of conceptual and logical reason. The narrow province of this realm of reason is essences, and classical poems are characterized by their presentation of concrete, specific things. But poetry is not things, it is creative intuition, experiential divination of the splendor of the being of things. No concept or specification can convey it. Hence classical poetry is in danger of smothering poetry; it saves itself by retaining the music of "words," "by being brought back toward the original intuition. And this can be accomplished bony through a magnetic, supraconceptual power, which is the music of the words (including that of the proffered notions and images) strong enough to overcome the obstacle created by the intermediary signification, the definite set of things . . . The modern poet remains safely closer to the original preconceptual area by not leaving the realm of imagination for that of logical reason. The organizing principle in the arrangement of words (including, again, images etc ideas) is not any socially designated or conventionally received pattern, but the musical pattern established by the way the original intuition stirs (causes "pulsions" in) the content of the poet's spirit. What follows is that, in spite of its dangers and its higher demands on the intellectual powers of the poet, classical poems are potentially greater because they can convey more clearly and fully an intelligible content. To the natural, individual signs used by modern poets to convey their intuitions, the classical poet adds social signs. The difficulty of classical poetry accounts for its frequent failures.

Ibid., p. 312.
In a parenthesis concerning the critic,\textsuperscript{12} Maritain remarks that any too high development of the reflective faculties will prevent a man with poetic gifts from exercising them; he will habitually transform poetic knowledge into exclusively conceptual knowledge. This individual can be a critic; he cannot be a poet.

A fourth aspect of the poem designatable by the nature of poetic intuition is imagery, or, more precisely, the way imagery is used in metaphor. Maritain distinguishes between the "purposive comparison" of images and the image which is "immediately illuminating." In the first usage, two images are brought together in order that one, because it is seen by the logical reason to share a quality of the first (as the fragility of glass shares the quality of fragility which life possesses), may help to illumine the other. The logical reason purposely compares; this use of imagery is a function of conceptual, not poetic, knowledge. It is rhetoric. The "immediately illuminating" image is, however, not a servant but a master of logical reason, which puts it down without understanding it: it is not joined by conceptual similarity to another. There is, in fact, no comparison involved: one thing is made known through another; one knows, but does not \underline{conceive}, the relationship between them. Maritain quotes Yeats to illustrate:

\begin{quote}
'The winds that awakened the stars
Are blowing through my blood.'\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

One cannot conceive, that is, relate by essences, the wind awakening the stars

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12}Ibid., pp. 324-25.
\item \textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 328.
\end{itemize}
or blowing through blood, because, for example, in the essence of the stars is no capacity for being awakened. Yet the metaphors signify by the dictates of a poetic intuition a truth about the poet's experience.

A corollary: the use of the immediately illuminating image may be by means of a diction which is simple or complex. If simple, the diction conveys without any commentary, as it were, the metaphor. If complex, the diction contributes an essential part in the expression of the image by means of sound or rhythm or figurations. Maritain uses a sonorous line from Hopkins—"Or a jaunting vaunting vaulting assaulting trumpet telling"—to illustrate his meaning.14

We have finally to consider Maritain's analysis of the three types of literature, the three "epiphanies" of creative intuition: poem, drama, novel. The origins of these lie, again, in the proper character of the poetic sense as it comes to existence in the work. That poetic sense, we have said, is meaning, the poetic knowledge-experience: the emotion it conveys is intentional, that is, it makes us know. But the ways by which it conveys knowledge to us may differ. The poetic sense can be spoken of as the substance of the work of art; as substances in things of nature can be complemented and objectively reflected by quality and quantity (a tree, for example, can be strong and four feet high), so the poetic sense, analogically speaking, can be complemented and reflected. When the poetic sense is complemented by quality, we have a poem the chief manifestation of which is action, and the term of action, theme. When it is complemented by quantity, we have a poem manifested by "harmonic expansion."

14 Ibid., p. 331.
These three states of the meaning of the original intuition—the primary and pure state of the poetic sense itself, a qualification in terms of what it means in action, and a quantification in terms of what it means when its manifestations are arranged harmonically—are different intentional values of the original intuited knowledge because each possesses its own way of manifesting knowledge. This is what Maritain means in speaking of the three intentional values of a poem. On these three different states or epiphanies of the original creative intuition depend the distinctions among the three types of literature.

Within the realm of these three intentional values which the poet can permit his intuition there lie the four essential elements of the poem: the poetic sense, action, theme, and number or harmonic expansion. All these elements are present virtually in the original intuition, but are not manifested as primary unless that original intuition passes through certain stages—in the direction of clearer intellectual awareness—in the poet's spirit which determine which one of them shall become primary. If the intuition remains in the depths of the poet's preconscious spirit, its expression in the poem will be simply the poetic sense. But if that original intuition is partially disengaged by the increasing demands of the intellect for clarity from the original night in which it was conceived, if it is now seen not for what it is but for what it does, its manifestation in action becomes the chief interest. That is, "every work of art not only is, but does. It moves, it acts. And this action is part of its very substance."15 But if the being is subordinate to the

15 Ibid., p. 359.
acting, we have drama; if it is not, we have song. Because a thing is before it does, and because one must remove the intuition from the recesses of self (where it merely is) if one is to see the way it does, a dramatic poem is less subjective than a song.

Within the area of the second intentional value or manifestation of poetic meaning lies the third essential element of a poem: theme. "The 'immanent action' I am pointing out, the action of the poem, is what the poem does—an elan or motion which develops in it, and through which within itself it asserts itself beyond itself. And through its action it proffers something which is an ultimate fruit of intelligibility: the significance of the action, in other words, the theme."\(^{16}\)

The poetic intuition can progress from the early stage of intellectual clarity (the stage of action and theme) to the sphere of the third intentional value. If it does, it "penetrates into the sphere of the daylight vision of the intellect, or of the formed logos, I mean to say, of the virtue of art."\(^{17}\) Here is the realm of proportion and arrangement, that is, of number or harmonic expansion, which is defined as the "vital concurrence of the multiple, or vital order bringing to complex orchestral unity parts struggling to assert their own individual claims."\(^{18}\) Hence the novelist becomes one who arranges and disperses and disposes. (It is because he arranges and disposes human acts that Maritain demands of him great moral wisdom.)

\(^{16}\) Ibid., pp. 359-360.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 367.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 364.
We see, then, that here too the progressive movements of the original intuition through the three basic levels (preconscious, imaginative, conceptual) of poetic cognition accounts for the divergencies in the made object. The intellect thinks more and more about the intuition, thus translating its own mysterious music into more objectively seen tendencies in action and even more objectively seen demands for arrangements (demands determined by the emerging proportions between the poetic sense and the actions to which it can give rise). In short, considered as it is, the poetic sense remains a song. Considered as it does, as it tends, it is action, or drama. Considered as it does in space, it is arrangement or harmonic expansion.

The danger in thus allowing different intellectual translations to be generated by the original intuition lies in forgetting the intuition altogether. If, for example, one translates action into a mere tool of logical mind, he loses theme and adopts thesis, that is, mere argument. The relevance of the Dante essay in chapter nine of Creative Intuition is that it illustrates a work in which all three epiphanies are equally presented, so that there is no distinguishing it as one of the three types of poetry. The essay is also an example of Maritain's aesthetic principles applied in practical criticism, and we can now briefly examine his theories from the point of view of their adaptability to critical method and comprehension.
Maritain's Aesthetic as Criticism

Mr. H. Abrams has identified\(^1\) four major approaches to the work of art in critical tradition, and the possibilities of Maritain's theory for critical criteria will be more clearly seen if we place him within such a framework. Aristotle, representing the mimetic orientation, specifies a type of art initially in terms of imitation: he asks what object is imitated, in what manner, by what means; hence we focus on the reality which is the object imitated. Aristotle also considers, but only after having established the elements of the type (in the case of tragedy—action, character, thought, etc.) by reference to the stuff imitated, how to use those elements to greatest advantage. And he measures this advantage in terms of the proper end of the type.

This concern for the end to be achieved takes in later critical writing not only the primary, but often the exclusive, place. Abrams calls this the "pragmatic" approach to art, and believes it has been dominant from the time of Horace through the eighteenth century.\(^2\) That is, the concern for the formation of response guides the poet in his evaluation of material; it determines, and is not determined by, the manner, means, or object of imitation. Plots become


\(^{2}\)Ibid., p. 21.
not simple or complex, but pleasing or displeasing. The modern orientation, to
the extent that one can be distinguished, is toward the work itself as object
rather than the reality it treats or the ends it attains. Here the integration
of the pieces of the work is important because of the servantic relationships
thus created.

The romantic orientation, with which we can associate Maritain's theory,
considers the work as an expression of the artist.

I labored at a solid foundation, on which permanently to ground my opin­
ions, in the component faculties of the human mind itself, and their com­
parative dignity and importance. According to the faculty or source, from
which the pleasure given by any poem or passage was derived, I estimated
the merit of such poem or passage.\(^3\)

Coleridge's famous statement implies that the way in which the expression
occurs must become, because it is the source of creation and because the work
of art is an unspecified and subjective creation, the essential consideration.
So in Maritain's theory: all arts which engender in beauty begin in the same
event: the creative intuition is the generative power; differentiations in the
work produced are made not by the intentions of the poet but on the basis of
the virtual demands of the content of that intuition. The attention of artist
and critic is back to the seed, not forward to the flower, of the work. Only
by keeping his eye on the seed can he help the flower bloom in its nocturnal,
shadowy process. Furthermore, when it blooms it is a creation (in the natural
sense of the word): something of reality has been transfigured by the powers
of the artist. His sign is on the work, which, without his sign, would be mere
external reality, the data of quotidian sensibility. We must know, not only

\(^3\) Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1907),
I, 14.
what he saw, but what he is, because what he is in some degree determined what he saw.

The divergent nature of these approaches makes its own demand for a critical pluralism. The approaches are not mutually exclusive; they operate in different areas. For example, Aristotle's generic analysis of tragedy has little to do with Maritain's concept of drama as the second epiphany of the poetic sense. Aristotle simply considers the existent object and tells us what it is; Maritain tries to explain its psychological origins. Hence Aristotle's discussion is based on a comparatively superficial distinction of type, not on any essential, or formal, distinctions: the poet's mode of knowing or working; he deals with what Maritain would call conditions "imposed by art or techne," not poetry. The difference in point of view is as great as that between poetry and art. Yet Maritain is as rigid in his demand for rules of art as he is for freedom of poetry. As for what a specific work must do to the audience, Maritain has little to say.

The pragmatic theory is, however, somewhat less companionable with Maritain's principles than is the mimetic theory. To the extent that the pragmatists remain within the realm of art, its material processes and techniques, the making of a work which will perform a certain function (to instruct pleasingly, for example) is explicable in their terms. Yet the purposes of pragmatic art demand a concern for rhetoric. Now ultimately rhetoric is a science dealing with the selection and arrangement of vocabulary to the end of transmitting content convincingly. Thus it involves two terms: content and vehicle, or form.

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4Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 383.
But in Maritain's theory the content cannot conceptually be imposed on form (although for discussion it can be abstracted from it) or the reverse, because in the intuited germ is contained the two substantially united. The poet's work-making activity, his art, draws out of the germ and according to its own needs, not according to the needs of the poet or audience, that germ's own design. Ultimately, therefore, rhetoric in the sense of a creator of poetry is, because of the nature of poetic knowledge, an obviated science: the design of the poetic expression is determined at the initial moment of creative intuition. The process of creation is not performed with the content of the creative intuition in mind, and a consequent effort made to more or less successively adapt one to the other—that process is the realization, or actualization, of the intuition. If, then, the pragmatists speak of creative origins, or use their vocabulary to explain the way the thing of beauty—imperative, unique, transcendent—came into existence, they are mistaken. The serious crime for the artist as artist is to allow any consideration to cause his attention to deviate from the good of the work being made. In no way can the final cause be separated from or influence the formal cause.

Disparities between Maritain's theory and that of the modern "objective" theorists exist because Maritain believes that the work's essence contains the poet's: what is for the new critics the biographical or intentional or subjective fallacy is for Maritain a fact rooted in the nature of poetic knowledge as a subjective-objective entity. His criticism, as we shall see, is therefore dominated by a concern for the particular way in which reality has impressed, or "wounded," the poet.

The briefest suggestion of this orientation suffices to adumbrate Maritain's
criticism. He goes beyond Eliot's warning: "I prefer not to define, or to
test, poetry by means of speculations about its origins; you cannot find a sure
test for poetry, a test by which you may distinguish between poetry and mere
good verse, by reference to its putative antecedents in the mind of the poet." Eliot may or may not refute his own dictum (in the next paragraph he evaluates
Yeats's earlier poetry by referring to the poet's frame of mind), but he does
give emphasis to the difficulties besetting any criticism limited by Maritain's
aesthetic frame of reference. We can begin, in fact, by questioning the very
possibility of a valid criticism, one of the fundamental premises of which is
the mysterious, unique and incommunicable, nature of poetry. Here of course we
must distinguish between poetry and art, between the critic's two tasks: (1)
discovering and illuminating the creative intentions; (2) judging the work as to
its ways of execution. Art has certain rules and is subject to predictable
analyses, one of the most fruitful examples of which is Aristotle's Poetics.
But this design revealed by the work is only, as it were, the body; its soul is
the poetic sense, and though the two exist substantially united in the work,
they are for the purposes of criticism distinct. With only the poetic sense is
Maritain's criticism concerned, and it is this aspect of art which is secretive.
(One remembers that his Creative Intuition is concluded with a section on magic.)
This poetic sense, constituting the artifact's principle of life, is a much
broader principle than the logical sense, which is the artifact's purely demonstrable meaning; hence to know a poem (work of art) it is necessary to penetrate
to the supralogical area where the creative experience originates. We do not

say an illogical area. We must remember that for Maritain to say that something exists is to say that it "means." The convertibility of being and the intelligible is one of the theoretic pillars of his philosophy. He can therefore speak of the poetic sense as the "meaning" of the poet, although it is the soul, not the mind (the logical sense) of the poem.

In understanding the poem, therefore, it is impossible to exhaust the poetic sense by a mere statement of the logical sense. "As to the logical or intelligible sense, it is only one of the elements or components of the poetic sense." No dependence upon concepts will be rewarding here because poetic knowledge-experience is not conveyed by means of the concept but by the intentional, significant emotion, the unique means of expressing or forming which is the work itself. Because no poem exists except by means of its poetic sense, and because that is essentially intelligible (even if above discursive reason), no poem can be completely obscure to the reader. His inability to translate that meaning is another matter. The existence of this unexhausted, indefinable meaning of things is a premise ubiquitous in Maritain's theory. Hence his frequent use of synonyms for mysterious: magical, nocturnal, inexpressible, ineffable, uncapturable, mystic, and so on.

In reading Maritain one realizes, with a certain sense of shock, how essential to the logic of his theories is this demand for a non-logical or supra-logical concept of intellect. One is continually prompted to recall Wilde's unfair but provocative comment on Newman: "The mode of thought that Cardinal

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6 Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 258.
7 Ibid., p. 259.
Newman represented—if that can be called a mode of thought which seeks to solve intellectual problems by a denial of the supremacy of the intellect—may not, cannot, I think, survive. 8 Empirically certain as it may be, the fact that assent is often a personal matter, usually an affirmation sung by the concerted faculties, exposes any philosopher to the danger of such criticism. But Maritain is explicit; one of the most important passages in his writings occurs in a note to his essay, "Art and Beauty."

By brilliance of form must be understood an ontological splendour which happens to be revealed to our minds, not a conceptual clarity. There must be no misunderstanding here; the words clarity, intelligibility and light, used to characterize the part played by form in the heart of things, do not necessarily indicate something clear and intelligible to us, but rather something which, although clear and luminous in itself, intelligible in itself, often remains obscure to our eyes either because of the matter in which the form in question is buried or because of the transcendence of the form itself in the things of the spirit. The more substantial and profound this secret significance, the more concealed from us it is; so much so in truth, that to say with the Schoolmen that form in things is the peculiar principle of intelligibility is to say at the same time that it is the peculiar principle of mystery. (There can in fact be no mystery where there is nothing to know; mystery exists where there is more to be known than is offered to our apprehension.) To define beauty by brilliance of form is at the same time to define it by brilliance of mystery.

It is a Cartesian error to reduce absolute brilliance to brilliance for us. 9 Hence we need not be able conceptually to grasp what is said before we can enjoy the pleasure of knowing. In praising Dante, Maritain remarks: "As to allegory, he invests it with such visual melody that we already receive some intuitive pleasure from it—even from it!—before understanding anything of it." 10 As with

10Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 377.
allegory, so with disparate images: after quoting a passage from Hart Crane's The Bridge, Maritain remarks: "Only images. Is it, however, a mere visual description of the flowering spring? No, all this carries an implicit intelligible sense . . . "11 Even the presence of explicit conceptual discourse in a poem does not regulate its meaning, because the concepts or statements are themselves subordinate to the more essential meaning organized by the imagination at the core of the creative intuition, a meaning which is logical as a melody, not as a syllogism.

The first limitation of Maritain's criticism must therefore be that of expression, not necessarily of knowing. Intelligible is not equatable with translatable, and there are limits to the critic's ability to evoke in us a vicarious experience of the work. There is a second factor: the words of the work are themselves untranslatable. Maritain has barely sketched his notions on the nature of the sign,12 but he does repeatedly emphasize the fact that words are objects as well as signs. As sign, one would suppose that a particular work of art could be explained in another mode (the mode of criticism, for example), but in verbal works the word is object as well as sign; hence a synonym would not only alter, but actually transfer, the identity of the work. And to translate signification, if this is the task criticism undertakes, is not to transfer the work itself; the words in their objectivity remain. The critic, again, has transferred the conceptual clarity of the work, but not its onto-

11Ibid., p. 265.

logical splendor, because, and here Maritain quotes his wife: "The poetic sense cannot be separated from the verbal form it animates from within."¹³

Both of these limitations suggest a particular kind of criticism; they do not preclude criticism. What they preclude is the possibility of an autonomous criticism, one operating while divorced from the work or one dependent on conceptual analyses alone; what they demand is a criticism directed toward opening the mind of the reader in his act of attending to the work. Criticism must not incorporate the work of art within itself or translate it, Wildean fashion, into the critic's own language; in short, criticism must not exist for its own sake. Rather it must direct the reader's mind (that is, his whole rational nature) so as to remove from it any obstacle to the entry of the artifiat's meaning, or by suggestion to open it to that meaning. This process of opening the reader's mind can, however, take place anytime—that is, criticism of a certain kind can prepare for (not reproduce) the experience of art, chiefly by revealing the end the author had in mind and by developing the taste of the reader. One important implication of this necessity for dealing with the particular work at hand, in its creative origins and in its work-making operations demanded by those origins, explains Maritain's insistence on the unphilosophical nature of criticism: "Criticism ... though it can always derive its inspiration from philosophical principles—always a good thing, but risky—remains on the same plane as the work and the particular, without being itself operative or making any creative judgement, rather judging from without and after the event."¹⁴

¹³Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 258.
¹⁴Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, note 160.
evaluation and illustration of principles (which seems to comprise a great part of criticism today), though the critic, as the philosopher, may undertake such a task, are in no way sufficient to judge the work itself. When a critic judges the value of an artistic school, for example, he does not thereby judge any work of any member of that school. "If his system is false, a philosopher is of no account, for in that case he cannot tell the truth, unless by accident: if his system is false, an artist can be of some account, of very great account, because he can create beauty in spite of his system and in spite of the inferiority of the form of art which is his."15

What precisely, then, is the nature of that critical knowledge by which the form and matter of the work will be revealed to us? Unless this knowledge is similar to that of the poet's, how can the critic possibly reveal anything important? Maritain himself tells us that "reflective afterthought has nothing to do with the direct perception of the poem."16 How, then, since reflection is the proper act of the critic, can the critical work be said to awaken the original intuition? And to what extent does analysis, by determining, limiting, its signification, destroy the value of the poem?

The answers to these questions are contained where all of his aesthetic answers are contained, in the nature of poetic knowledge. This knowledge, essentially creative, demands objectivization in a work; in the work it exists no longer as creative, but as cognitive. As knowledge it is comprised of the subjectivity of the poet and a flash of reality, both conveyed through an inten-

15 Ibid., note 90.
16 Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 266.
tional emotion causing the reader to know, to see. To get to that emotion—that is the critic's task.

He can perform it particularly well because he has the gifts of the poet, virtually; and this gift separates him in kind, not only in degree, from ordinary people. Critics have an intellect capable of poetic depths and are distinct from those whose reading simply stimulates an outburst of directionless and autonomous creativity. "Before judging of the work as to its ways of execution he must discover the creative intentions from which it proceeds and the more secret things which stirred the soul of its author."\(^{17}\) He who best knows the author is best able to explore the work. "The artist's friends therefore, who know what the artist wanted to do—as the Angels know the Ideals of the Creator—derive far greater enjoyment from his works than the public, and the beauty of some works is a hidden beauty, accessible only to the few."\(^{18}\)

To attain the poetic sense of the poem the critical reader (by "reader" is meant one examining any work of art) will rely on concentrated intellectual effort (if the poem is complex, that is, obscure in appearance) or on a simple opening of the mind and feelings to the influx of the significant emotion.\(^{19}\)

These general principles relevant to the work of the critical mind are complemented by many specifications which we can briefly make explicit. First, Maritain points out that certain attitudes toward art will be required, because our pre-conceptions will determine our judgements. Hence, for example, we must

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\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 324.

\(^{18}\)Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, note 55.

\(^{19}\)Cf. Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 258.
not desire an imitation-copy, nor a work designed for pleasure or instruction as such, nor an expression of the author's personality, but a work containing the double mystery of thing and self. Again, we shall not attempt to exhaust the meaning of the work by transferring it into the conceptual mode of the critical essay, condemning the work if such transference cannot be effected. Furthermore, the artistic judgment will itself make certain requirements. Our qualities, both innate and acquired, will need development. Maritain points out that there are three sensibilities—lyrical, histrionic, and introspective—corresponding to the three specific types of poetic epiphanies. Like taste, these depend on a natural gift which can be informed. This artistic education is twofold. To judge truly the critic must have had an intellectual training "based upon a deep-rooted study of the past and upon a wakeful interest in the searchings of the present." He must also know "the structure and principles" of the creative process and the "laws and the internal reality of the thing judged." Before he applies this knowledge, however, he is required, as an essential prerequisite, to consent to the artist's intention. As Maritain puts it, to judge a work is to understand another intellect, and this requires an understanding of the way his intellect is working. (Maritain's reply to questions about the affective or intentional fallacy becomes clear.) Furthermore, the unique nature of any beautiful object demands that we conform to it before we judge it. Pertinent here is a footnote to a discussion, in Degrees of Knowledge, of mystical

20Ibid., p. 399.


22Ibid.
Before the beautiful object, we perceive the beauty before being connaturalised with its object, and it is this perception indeed which makes us enter into sympathy with it, a sympathy which on its own side will determine a form of knowledge. (Cp. J. Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, note 55). While in mystical experience it is the connaturalility which causes the perception. 23

Involved in this consent to follow the path of the artist's mind is a feeling for the spiritual mystery of the beauty with which he is grappling and a respect for his struggles. Finally, the ultimate judgement can and will be, if the critic, as man, is fully developed, a judgement, without confusing the two, of distinct values: those properly poetic and those properly human. "To form a good judgement on the work both virtues are necessary." 24

In his essays on art, Maritain repeatedly reminds us that he is writing as a philosopher, not as a critic, and implies that the distance between general principle and specific application can be crossed only by himself, because only he can build the required bridge of qualifications. Nonetheless, there are essays of his which are certainly critical, if the intention of criticism be to illuminate particular works. A brief consideration of these will perhaps suggest the possibilities of Maritain's principles for the critic and the way Maritain himself applies them.

Significantly enough, the first quality of Maritain's writing which attracts our attention is its impressionism: its language is colorful, suggestive, imagistic. That Maritain can, and frequently does, call upon an other than abstract language is one of his fine qualities, if not properly as a phi-


philosopher, then as a teacher. By his own explanation, there are areas in human knowledge which are not yet illuminated; others which can be seen only in glimpses; others which, though knocking on our consciousness, never direct us through the daylight of concept but only through the dark glass of images. And so he does not exclude from reality that which he must exclude from his syllogism, but by images, the nuances of neologism, and by delvings into suggestive analogies from non-artistic sciences, particularly theology (the Creative Idea, the Trinity), and philosophy (the concept of virtue, the hylomorphic structure of man), he captures the intuited, experiential data of poetic experience. Hence the sense of immediate certitude which his writing awakens in the reader. Nonetheless, what in the natural order is a virtue can also be a vice, and Maritain's criticism, seeking the secrets of art and self-limited by its belief in the untranslatable nature of poetic knowledge, occasionally offers symptoms of the romantic syndrome: his judgements are arbitrary, subjective, undemonstrable, unpredictable, unrelated to the most fundamental determinants of the type of work involved. One example can stand for many. When, in speaking of the "deliverance" of modern music, he cites the music of Lourie, it is to establish the premise: "It is born in the singular routes of the being, the nearest possible to that juncture of the soul and spirit, spoken of by Saint Paul."25 Except that we become half-consciously aware of a straining of the viscera for the center of the abdomen, what this teaches us about Lourie's music is difficult to say. We can re-establish that feeling of strain while we listen to the music; if the music sustains it we can conclude that Maritain's analysis was

correct. On the other hand, we can remember that this same indication of the synthetic source of great music—rising from a union or synthesis of faculties—is a common shibboleth of romantic criticism. The mention of St. Paul establishes more specific feelings; it also intensifies, for a Christian, the visceral search. But confusion remains. And it does not really help matters to remember that Maritain is applying a principle: the creative idea involves an object and a self; to further grasp the object, the subjectivity must continually deepen, because the knowledge of reality is had connaturally; this deepening is exhibited in Lourie's work.

Maritain concludes this particular discussion of Lourie's music by attributing a magical quality to his work, and by illustrating this attribute in naming other composers. Those whose music possesses magic become a family of spirits; other families can be recognized by other principles of differentiation. Maritain suggests two in this context, and these serve to illustrate his approach to art: those whose work is prudential, and those whose work is contemplative. These particular analogues are everywhere evident in his theoretical as well as his practical explanation, art being coupled with prudence and poetry with contemplation.

Though it may thus tend to subjective judgement, Maritain's criticism does not attempt to become autonomous; it never ceases to point. The best example of this is the use of plates and texts in his latest work, Creative Intuition, where both stand "without comment" for the reader, who must use them as exhibits which prove the author's contentions. Nor does he elsewhere refrain from specifying texts, though the attributes by which he identifies them may be amorphous. "Compare the Rites and the Wedding, where so many spirits of earth and
of the waters still haunt him, to other masterpieces like Apollo or that Capriccio of which the brilliant poetry depends in its entirety on the made object. Maritain's method is to refer us to an experience, not to provide us with it; he presumes we are attending to the work itself.

The work itself is, however, the least prominent of the terms into which his criticism can be dissolved. These are, we can say, four: (1) the fundamentals of art and of poetry (questions of rational psychology which, if epistemological, are considered by Maritain to be metaphysical questions); (2) the psychology of the poet—his creative process in its cognitional aspects; (3) the work itself; (4) general truths philosophical, psychological, or religious, made to stand as premises for deductions. When Maritain does arrive at the work itself it is not to consider it in its own specific structure, but to place it as a focal point in the reader's mind to which he is to relate data supplied by a consideration of the other three terms. The three essays in Art and Poetry would illustrate this. Maritain usually provides biographical data out of which emerge characteristics which belong to the artist and to his art. In Chagall's painting he discovers the painter's humility, cheer, and Jewish spirit; in Rouault he discovers a patient courage; in Severini probity. On the other hand, he supports and elaborates comments by references to aesthetic premises ("In every canvas of Rouault, the forms fill out the space . . . ") or to those of some other discipline (the "dark night" of moral theology is applied by analogy to Rouault).

26 Ibid., p. 102.
27 Ibid., p. 28.
Maritain usually develops his analyses by a dialectic built on pairs of terms, the quality of the artist under discussion being a power of synthesizing the opposing elements, if he is great, or a failure to do so, if he is mistaken. In the space of one page Maritain has Chagall renewed by remaining himself; abstract, but not cerebral; possessed of an ingenious technique which does not harm but results from his alert sensibility; rediscovering mediaeval inspiration by being more Jewish than ever.

The thesis of Maritain's more important essay on Rouault, for the Pocket Library of Great Art, is thus stated: "The point I should like to make deals with the superior power of vital synthesis—triumphing over the contrasting requirements and contrasting dangers which the creative mind meets—an outstanding example of which is offered us by Rouault." This gradual triumph is a process seen as a "blossoming forth of the spiritual energies of art." It is this process which Maritain traces, through his essay, beginning with Rouault's first synthesis, the "reconciliation of revolutionary search and continuity with tradition." This first synthesis occasions or is occasioned by a discussion of influences on Rouault. The second synthesis: "a vital unity between poetry and craftsmanship," or, in terms of Maritain's own aesthetic, between creative emotion and the working reason. The third synthesis is again established between two of Maritain's key terms: Rouault sustains the proper union between the creative self and the reality of things. What follows from this premise is a

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 20.}\]


\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{below plate 2.}\]
detailed critique which is typical of Maritain's method of development by polarities: Rouault is humble, because he is obedient to things; and bold, because he is assertive of self. He is realistic because he fills things with their proper being; yet his objects are at the same time full of signs and dreams. He is attached to the soil, and lives on spirit. He captures the essentials, and is abstract.

The fourth synthesis brings Maritain to the wound which has made Rouault's art great: previous achievements have enabled him to progress through a dark night (the prime incentive during which was hope for man) and to emerge with an art strong enough "to assume without bending a heavy burden of humanity." That is, his art can now express the tremendous spiritual greatness accumulated by his sufferings.

Finally, Maritain points to specific groups of works or single works to illustrate the ascent to light revealed by Rouault's art, emphasizing the characteristics of his religious paintings. The essay is patently as much an essay on aesthetics as on the work of Rouault. But it is Coleridgean not only in this general sense—both speak of poetry and poet interchangeably; it is so because both theorists develop their remarks by seeking and describing syntheses established by the poet. Paragraphs are engendered by aesthetic terms, and developed by the suggestion of extremes which the poet avoids and yet captures.

There is usually a specific direction in which his essays move. In Rouault it is the religious suffering in humanity which marks him; Maritain shows how Rouault gained the power to express this. In each artist he seeks this central experience of reality, the poetic intuition out of which the works spring. There is, in fact, a central theory immanent in Maritain's critical
judgements which corresponds to the central intuition he seeks behind every
to poet's work. (Intolerant of attenuated analyses, we profit by remembering the
bases they have in his own philosophy, for we thereby learn something of his
philosophy at least.) This central theory is, again, that of poetic knowledge.
In fact, the self-thing nature of poetic knowledge accounts for the greater
part of at least two major aspects of Maritain's critical remarks.

(1) It leads to his interpretation of the progress of art through history.
Maritain reads the history of art as a gradual revelation of the artist's self.
Because it is the artist's creative subjectivity which makes art possible
(poetry, which is the germ of art, is the intercommunication of things and the
self, and the two mingle when the self is connaturalized with the being of
things, when the self is deepened, matured, so as to be able to "suffer"
reality), a revelation of self and thing is inevitable wherever there is art.
Art can be distinguished, then, by reference to the amount of self-concern it
reveals. Though there are differences between the Chinese and the Indian,
Oriental art shows a radical difference from Occidental art because the Oriental
attended to things rather than to the person working with things.31 This
Western concern with person and the personality was provoked by the Incarnation
and the dogma of the Trinity. The permeation of our art with individualism is
especially manifest since the Renaissance, and even more markedly manifest since
the German romantic movement, Baudelaire, and the poetic experiments of the
late nineteenth century. This is because of the realization of the creativity
of self, or the Person, revealed divinely in the Trinity, humanly in art.

31 Maritain, Creative Intuition, chapter I.
Though he is concerned with it as it affects art, Maritain considers that the acceleration of self-consciousness, reflexivity, a prise de conscience, is a characteristic of our world. "All the great forms of progress of the modern age, be it a question of art, of science, of philosophy, of poetry, of the spiritual life itself, seem largely to exhibit this growth of self-consciousness, this awareness."32

The extensive consideration which Maritain gives modern art throughout his books is engendered by this same concept. The modern artist has become enamoured of self and the discovery of his own spiritual powers. He has been enabled by his discovery to make great advances in art, and has been exposed to great dangers. His advances required first of all a willingness to surrender the logical sense in favor of the poetic sense. Unfortunately, the reigning concept of the intellect was Cartesian, and this rejection of that clear, conceptual kind of content held in the logical sense led the artists to believe they were non-intellectual or irrational. A broader, truer picture of the nature of the intellect would have enabled them to distinguish between the supra-rational logic of the poet and the anti-rational meanderings of such movements as that of the Dadaists. But this awareness of its own needs and nature did lead to freedom from antiquated forms and from crusted language patterns.

It also made possible the spectacular failures of those who fell into self-worship. ("It is the whole drama of the modern world that Dostoeievsky gathers into Kirilov's poor room: the history of the conquest of asceitas, Existence

32 Maritain, Theonas, p. 225.
through Self."

Insisting on the absolute priority of self, modern art forgets the thing, the object, thus tending to Narcissism, desiring to provide the self with a mirror. But the poetic intuition has caught the self only as it is inextricably bound with the existential aspects of a thing, and to substitute the ego for this creative self is to destroy poetry. The kind of egotism the artist is tempted to experience when he realizes his powers of transforming reality leads him to the apotheosis of art and to Prometheism and to the belief that art is exclusively a form of knowledge. Hence the proud gnosticism of exaggerated surrealisms. The best single description of this temptation which Maritain offers is contained in a Kenyon Review article (L, 145-159) entitled "Poetry's Dark Night." The theological analogue in the title is used to describe the modern (since Baudelaire and Rimbaud) poet's temptation to disengage poetry from its natural line of making, to make it become pure knowing. The result is "Angelism," a blunder which is one extreme—the other is materialism or naturalism—which Maritain's self-thing theory avoids.

The tendency to reject beauty for knowledge is due to the discovery of the roots of poetry and the creative power of the self which exists therein. If that power is willed for its own sake, rather than for the sake of the artifact, the making of which will alone bring the poetic vision into focus, the artist will lose sight of himself as well as the thing. This is because the self is known only when the another is known. As regards beauty, it is not the object, not a thing like some Platonic ideal, but an attribute of all beings. But one cannot produce an attribute of a being unless he produces the being. In this

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33Maritain, Art and Poetry, p. 56.
case the being will be the end of the process, the beauty of the being merely
the attendant on the end, or the end beyond the end. Modern poetry has some-
times surrendered making to knowing, and has thereby surrendered beauty; it
desired to reproduce the intuition but not the object contained within it. For
example, a modern poet will desire to chant words in such a way as to hold his
faculties at the heart of the initial experience. But the intuition needs a
work-making activity to actualize it. The language of the surrealists exists
in a state of potency, actually incapable of the discovery of self because it
has rejected the another. The modern artist gropes and rejects until he reaches
the void; this he foolishly calls the infinite. In its presence he is an angel.
But it is only "the natural void of the human intellect when uninvaded by the
other."35

(2) It makes him seek in each work of art for the "wound" out of which it
sprang. This "wound" is the result of the peculiar impact made by reality on
the subjectivity of the artist. (This is a concept parallel to that which
Maritain applies to philosophers: every philosopher suffers some primary in-
tuition out of which his philosophy springs. For Maritain himself, it would be
the intuition of being.) In the case of Dante, for example, it is Beatrice.

And the feeling that every great poet has . . . of a certain would which
has set free in him the creative source, and has separated him from other
men . . . is carried in Dante to the point of a perfectly clear awareness.
He knows his wound and believes it; and cherishes it . . . (And) this
trauma, penetrating to the very center of the powers of the spirit, has
made of his relation to Beatrice the unshakeable personal truth on which

34Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 167.
35Maritain, Art and Poetry, p. 71.
his poetic intuitivity will live, the nest of his creative emotion, the basic belief through which all the realities of the visible and the invisible world will awaken his creative subjectivity.  

Similarly, a poem of Donne's exists by virtue of the author's experience of "some incomprehensible contrast—poisonous minerals, and me," and one of Blake's by a similar contrast between "dust of pride and God's glory." It is in reaching this ultimate intuition, the secret of the artifact before him, that the reader finds the greatest value of art, and the critic his appointed task.

The Art and Morality Problem

As James Collins pointed out in an article in Commonweal magazine, "Maritain occupies a lofty but lonely prominence in aesthetics. Catholic thinkers have done little to exploit his suggestions about art, beauty and poetic experience." The aspect which has been exploited most frequently is that of morality. We might, as a second aspect of the relationship of art to audience, sketch Maritain's theory of the relationship between artistic and moral values and reveal, incidentally, three examples of the kind of desultory treatment hitherto accorded it by Catholic thinkers.

The problem of art and morality involves a question of the relationship of the two values in the work itself, not the comparative worth of the two. (There is no art-morality problem, of course, for those who identify morality and art by subsuming one in the other, by making morality a branch of aesthetics or the

36 Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 371.
37 Ibid., p. 363.
38 Commonweal, LX (June 11, 1954), 249.
reverse.) The critic has the right to wear the mask of the ethician only if moral values essentially affect, because they effect, the critical object; if the values are distinct in the work a confusion of the two roles results in a rather common schizoid criticism which both obscures the work of art and makes a glutton of morality.

Maritain believes that the criteria of morality do not identify the value of a work of art, but that there are some ways, though not in the order of formal causality, in which weak moral values harm art. By specifying those ways, he properly locates and clarifies the problem and suggests its solution.

First, with regard to art considered in itself. Here one must allow Maritain at least three distinctions. (1) We can speak of art in itself, though it exists as a quality of a human subject, just as we can speak of soul in itself, though it is substantially united with body. We can mean, by art, either the work-making activity of the intellect or the artifact. (2) The mind is capable of working in two different ways—focused on its own good and the achievement thereof (knowing, the perfection of the knowing power), and focused on the good of the object in the making of it (acting, specifically, acting so as to make a thing). Here it may be objected that no one uses art except for the sake of his own proper good, pleasure, for example. But this is not the point. The point is that once he begins to work, his mind is capable of attending to the good of the object which he has chosen to make, and to that good alone. There is here no implication that the mind, because it is capable of working in this way, must work this way. A person can refuse to travel to New York; he must, if he chooses to go there for pleasure or education, move in its direction, not in the direction of New Orleans. One of the most common experi-
ences of life (in this day of do-it-yourself suburbanism especially) is offered by Maritain to illustrate this power of the intellect to focus on the good of the object: egotism ceases on the threshold of the workshop or the studio.\textsuperscript{39}

This is the most important premise in Maritain's theory of art, determining his definition of art as a virtue of the practical intellect concerned with the undeviating determination of the work to be done.

Finally, (3) one must admit that the good of the work is not the good of the artist. Once again we must refrain from identifying, by qualifying, terms. The artist identifies the good of the work with his own good, or makes it a means to his own good; but the two goods are formally distinct. The movement of the artist away from the supreme Good through moral disorder does not make the poem any the less beautiful. It may, and probably will, but essentially does not, any more than does the artist's loss of wages affects his conception of the requirements of a painting for a precise amount of chrome yellow in a given area. To reject these distinctions is to deny that the intellect can function in any way apart from the will.

With Maritain the evaluation of art and morality does not result in the comparison of artifact and human being, but of two different conditions within man, one his relationship with his own good and ultimately with the supreme Good, the other his relationship with the good of the work. Those who compare a neuter artifact with a human being are wont to shrug off the art-morality problem, for it is obvious to them which is the more valuable object. In case of fire, one would save the child, not the statue of the child. But this

\textsuperscript{39}Maritain, \textit{Art and Scholasticism}, p. 6.
rather glib solution depends on the obliteration of necessary distinctions, and turns from art as making to art as artifact.

Regarding the second major term of Maritain's aesthetic—poetry—the moral problem does not exist. First, because we deal here with knowledge—experience, not activity, judgement, choice. And knowledge, for Maritain, is of being, not relationship. "Creative innocence is in no way moral innocence. It is, as I have indicated above, of an ontologic, not a moral nature. It has essentially to do with the intuition of the poet, not with his loves."\(^{40}\) Second, the creative intuition takes place at a point in the soul where all its powers are brought into unity, not opposition.\(^{41}\)

Even a theoretical consideration of art, however, would not be complete if we did not consider its state of existence. Its existence in the human order exposes it to morality in such a way as to be essentially affected, if not essentially comprised, by it. Because it is of the human order it is subject to the guide of the human order—prudence. And the use of prudence as a means to achieve an end higher than that of art gives it a right to control art. "Because it is in man and because its good is not the good of man, art is subject in its exercise to a control from without, imposed in the name of a higher end, the very beatitude of the living creature in whom it resides."\(^{42}\) This "control from without" can originate from any source which has as its end the protection of human beatitude. Hence the artist, on this principle, can control

\(^{40}\) Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, p. 374.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 375.

the exercise of his art, and so also can the Church, and possibly the State. (Naturally, these latter two agencies control the artifact, not the exercise of the virtue of art.) Public control is, however, no more able to govern art's essential good than is private. Both can decide whether art is to be allowed, but the work, once permitted, must determine its own direction.

The existence of art in the human order determines a second relationship between it and morality. All the stuff of the artist's mind becomes for him the forms by which the ontological significances of things are conveyed; hence these forms are subject to morality to the extent to which immorality causes decay in that stuff. "To the extent to which moral deformity always involves some ontologic defect, some naught, there will be, if the things in question, the poet's intellectual and moral supply, are corroded by such naught, some lack or deficiency in their new nature as forms of the revelation of being through creative emotion."\(^{43}\) But these are only "comparative imperfections" and can exist, and usually do exist, without marring the poetic purity of the intuitional knowledge. And this because of a principle important to Maritain's theory: the metaphysical order does not dominate the human order:

In the things of this world . . . truth, beauty, goodness, etc., are aspects of being distinct according to their formal reason and what is true simpliciter (speaking absolutely) may be good or beautiful only secundum quid (in a certain relation . . . what is beautiful simpliciter may be good or true only secundum quid . . . . For this reason beauty, truth and goodness (moral good) command distinct spheres of human activity, and it would be foolish to deny a priori that they may possibly conflict, on the pretext that transcendentals are indissolubly bound to one another. As a principle of metaphysics this is perfectly true, but it needs to be properly understood.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{43}\) Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, p. 375.

\(^{44}\) Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, note 65.
We shall see that this is the premise which Victor Hamm implicitly attacked in his opposition to Maritain, and that it is the premise which unites Wimsatt's position on art and morality with Maritain's.

The art-morality problem is made peculiarly difficult for the great artist by virtue of the fact that art, if to any extent it engenders in beauty, is a habit intrinsically nobler than prudence. Because a transcendental cannot be used for anything (beauty is useless) it is an end in itself. Hence a concern for the beautiful approximates an action to that of a speculative virtue. But the moral virtues are means, and art, by virtue of its concern with what is an end in itself, is higher in the metaphysical order than prudence.45 But, again, the metaphysical order does not dominate the human order, and art remains subservient from certain points of view to the human agency of which it is a quality or product.

Immorality cannot make art bad in its essence, but it is intrinsically related to art through the artist, through the efficient cause. Here a distinction (frequently overlooked because for Maritain art is in the artist, a quality of the artist) can be made between principal agent and instrumental cause: art is the instrument the artist uses to achieve his end. And because the good of the end is higher than the good of the means, the "virtue of art is instrumentally subordinate to the soul which acts by means of it."46 A proper understanding of this distinction is helpful because it gives us further terms by which to distinguish (1) art itself from the artist and thereby (2) the ends of

45 Ibid., note 156.
46 Ibid., p. 103.
art from the artist's ends. The first distinction reveals that what the artist can do is choose to practice or not to practice the virtue of art; this is his prerogative as principal agent. Because prudence (the power by which man moves in the line of his own good) governs the entire realm of action, and because making is a kind of action (productive action), the artist is, during the work-making activity of art, aware of two ends: the proper end of action (his human good), and the proper end of the productive action in which he is engaged (the good of the work being produced). If there is a conflict between these ends he must choose one or the other. If he chooses prudently, then he steps out of the line of making, simply because he is no longer moving toward the good of the work. Needless to say, the truly great artist will be sufficiently strong to create an art the demands of which will lie directly in the line of the artist's proper good. Yet he has no prerogative over the instrument in itself, which is concerned in its design with the work to be done. An artist can decide to paint or not to paint; once he chooses to paint he moves into the realm of the demands of the instrumental cause, demands which he can no more change than he can the design of brushes which are uniquely adapted to a specific task.

The second distinction specifically reminds us that art must have, by virtue of its instrumental nature, a human end as well as an end proper to itself: the artist manages to attain, in making use of art without violating its natural demands for freedom, his own ends, much as an artist, by employing a brush in the way demanded by the work, does by that very fact create a work which he desires to bring him fame, to decorate a chapel, or the like.

These distinctions are precisely what those who identify art and morality
in too intimate a way refuse to make. Victor Hamm, for example, focuses his argument on the efficient cause of art. In summary, he argues that since all art is the product of human agency, it must all be informed by the moral character of human nature. Thus he ignores Maritain's distinction between the good of the subject and the formal good of the work of art; hence he believes he is refuting Maritain's set of values when he is only refusing Maritain's distinctions. Hamm goes so far as to say, commenting on Maritain's analytical separation of the prudent man as such and the artist as such, "show me a 'prudent man as such.'" If one ignores the fact that his own proper ends are not the constant concern of his intellect, any demand for artistic ends not immediately translatable into human terms becomes a kind of impertinence. Moreover, any evaluation based on the good of the work rather than on the human values involved seems to be an attack on human values. Hence much of Hamm's article is a fervent plea for the superiority of moral over artistic values by virtue of the human soul out of which both spring. Maritain would not deny this superiority. For him as well as for Hamm the ultimate judgement must be based on the artist as the human principal agent of art, but Maritain does not therefore feel required to ignore the fact that good art can be made by bad humans.

Thus Hamm's argument is, in relation to Maritain's, not so much refutable as irrelevant. Hamm argues that the artistic act (in literature at least—Hamm conceives of literature as essentially an expression of human nature) is moral because it is free and conscious. If it is unconscious, or inspired, the artist

48 Ibid., p. 269.
would still be able to close his mind to it. Therefore one cannot separate man
and artist because the essentially human nature of the artistic act makes it
essentially moral. Again, Maritain would agree, though he would deny the im-
plication that artistic and moral values are perforce the same. It is a fact,
Maritain would insist, that although the soul is one (the heart of Hamm's
thesis) its operations can be diverse in nature and ends. Nor would he agree
with Hamm's Arnoldian use of the term moral: if a value is human it is moral—
a rose provides us with moral truth when it suggests the transience of life.
In a sense this makes Hamm a less demanding moralist than Maritain, because
Maritain believes that subjectivity (human nature therefore) is involved in all
art, not only what Hamm calls literature.

The failure to realize these same distinctions relevant to the artist ac-
counts, Maritain points out, for the type of false freedom espoused by those of
the art-for-art's-sake persuasion. (There is another type of false freedom, one
already described, not relevant to the morality problem—it is the attempt to
make art free from all material conditions by making it free from all matter.
Hence art is materially destroyed in a way, however, not moral but ontological;
being itself is set aside in favor of the void.) The art-for-art's-sakists
literally identify the virtue of art, which should be made use of by the artist,
with the artist, forgetting that it is a quality of his intellect which is in-
strumentally subordinate to him and will therefore as inevitably be an expres-
sion of him as a brush conducts the impress of the workman's mind. It is true
that man can choose to make the end of art his end, and this is what he does
when he uses art morally. He wills the good of the work in order to achieve his
own ends. There is then no conflict between the demands of the artist and those
of art. To reverse this identification is to make man an instrument of his own quality. And hence there is no way in which art can be made subordinate to the higher ends of the artist, simply because the two are identified: the end of art is, and is the only, end of the artist. When this is established, the measure of morality becomes the success with which he achieves that end—the work to be made becomes an absolute, the rules of making it well become the criteria of morality. Man suffers idolatry; he has made a means an end. But when the good of the art becomes the good of man, instead of a means to it, he is destroyed not only morally, but integrally as well. The art-for-art's-sake says "that the man who is also an artist ought to be an artist only—and therefore ought not to be a man. But," Maritain adds, "if there is no man there can be no artist: by devouring humanity, art destroys itself."\textsuperscript{49} Maritain implies throughout his criticism that the energy for this kind of idolatry, though it depends for its exercise on an unwillingness to allow a proper distinction between art as instrument and man as agent, originates in the belief that the artist is not merely making a thing, but literally creating; modern artists have thought to eliminate material conditions from art as well as the human ends for which it exists so as to warrant themselves makers of pure intellectual forms, or makers out of nothing.

Distinctions pertinent to the efficient cause of art explain the presence throughout Maritain's writing of two seemingly opposed principles. It is with regard to the degree of autonomy demanded by the instrumental cause (the brush's demand to be a brush before it is a tool) that Maritain argues to the effect

\textsuperscript{49}Maritain, "Art and Morality," \textit{Art and Scholasticism}, p. 99.
that, as Wilde put it, "The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose." But to say that art is not in itself harmed by immorality, because its formal object (good of work) is as removed from that of the artist (good of human nature) as the exigencies of the brush are, in view of a particular work to be done, from the spiritual exigencies of the man, is to speak of essences. But art does not exist in itself; it exists in man, of whom it is a quality or power. With regard to the agent, then, the principle which governs Maritain's discussion is operatio sequitur esse. "Art being of man, who should it not depend upon the moods of the subject in which it is situate? They do not constitute it, but they determine its expression." 

The "conditions" of the subject determine art in two ways: (1) extrinsically, through subjective causality, because if the agent is bad the work will ultimately be affected. "By protecting his humanity, it (morality) indirectly protects his art as well. For however beautiful it may be in other respects, the work of art always ends by betraying with infallible cunning the vices of the workman." And Maritain quotes Baudelaire: "Excessive specialization of a faculty ends in nothing." (2) Intrinsically, through material causality, by destroying the very stuff which art needs in its work making. Morality "takes its roots in the whole reality, of which it manifests a certain order of laws; not to acknowledge it is to diminish the real and so to impoverish the materials of art."

\[50\text{Ibid., p. 78.}\]
\[51\text{Ibid., p. 118.}\]
\[52\text{Ibid., p. 99.}\]
\[53\text{Ibid., p. 78.}\]
In these two ways—extrinsically and intrinsically—evils not properly moral also enter art. For example, the cult of the artist as hero results when the ego is substituted for the creative self so that the artist is unable to determine undeviatingly the work simply because of the warp which a movement toward the good of the self rather than the good of the work will demand. Or, through material causality, moral pedantry can destroy art because it distorts reality in the name of pre-conceptions and hence destroys the matter of art.

In these two ways, also, virtues not specifically artistic enter art. Here Maritain's discussion of Christian art is illuminating. By such art he does not mean ecclesiastical art which, because its object is the making of works with certain functions, is concerned with works which can be made in only certain ways. Hence a specification of art is necessary if the art is to be good. By Christian art Maritain means simply art "bearing on the face of it the character of Christianity." 54 This art is free from any specifying object. If the artist is Christian his art, which reveals the artist's subjectivity, will reveal his Christianity. It is the direction of the artist's will and the content of the artist's soul which affect the work so as to make it Christian. "For the virtue of art which directly affects and controls it presupposes the rectification of the appetite so far as the beauty of the work is concerned. And if the beauty of the work is Christian, it is because the appetite of the artist is rectified in regard to such a beauty, and because Christ is present in the soul of the artist by love." 55 On condition, then, that the artist and the Christian are

55 Ibid., p. 55.
one in intention, so that there arises no conflict in regard to the work-making activity itself, the art will be Christian because of the freedom and docility Christianity gives the artist in the face of reality, which the Christian loves, and because of the beauty he can find because of his possession of grace. Because it is through these two ways—subjective and material causality—and not through formal or final causality that Christianity affects art, the analogical principles of Maritain's theory are as applicable to Christian as to all other art.

Because the first effect of morality on art is extrinsic, immorality may never seriously damage art: the lives of the great ones are not often edifying. Even the intrinsic effect immorality will have on art need not be vital, not only because it is only "eventual," but because it may affect only a portion of reality. The point is that the materials of art are "impoverished," they are not annihilated. We must recall here that Maritain separates the moral and ontological orders: moral decay tends to wound the being of things, but in practice this wound will not make poetry impure. Maritain offers no theoretical denial of what is certain: great art exists which is not concerned with that part of reality which would be most diminished by immorality: the beauties of the moral virtues, for example.

This is also the argument, based ultimately on the separation of the moral and ontological orders, of W. K. Wimsatt Jr., whose separation of poetic and

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56 Maritain, Creative Intuition, p. 375.

moral values is similar to Maritain's: both believe these values are distinct; both believe that a successful union of them would make for the highest art, but that there is reality which is not distinctly morally determined, which may, in fact, be immorally determined, suitable for great, if not the greatest, art. Wimsatt's example exemplifies this argument: *Antony and Cleopatra* is a beautiful play, made so by a celebration of actions which are morally evil. But because these actions are chosen by the characters as good, and because they are celebrated by the poet as good, and because in reality values and feelings resulting from the same actions would be those of the play, the play is true and therefore good. The premises of Wimsatt's argument: (1) evil is chosen under the guise of good (Maritain points out the error of believing evil can create); (2) that which is true is ontologically good even though, in the order of morality, it may not be the good appropriate to the situation. So with Maritain: beauty is the ontological splendor of the true, and one need not identify, in the human order, the true and the morally good.

What differences exist between Maritain and Wimsatt seem to originate, fundamentally, because of a difference in orientation: for Wimsatt the meaning of the poem exists in the mind of the reader as he takes it from the poem, whereas for Maritain the meaning exists in the mind of the reader as he takes it from the mind of the poet through the poem. The latter concern is what Wimsatt would consider the intentional fallacy, although it is founded on what might be considered the authority of critical instinct—one naturally recognizes the voice of the author when he hears it and so identifies it—and in Maritain's

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theory: subjectivity is revealed by objectivity, the poet by the poem, because it is by means of the impact of reality on the self that creation begins.

Wimsatt's emphasis on the absolute autonomy of the work tends to exclude that which, for Maritain, the work must reveal: qualities of the author's self. Indeed, for Maritain our understanding of the work is increased by a thorough knowledge of the author's intent.

Perhaps the basic agreements in premises and conclusions between Wimsatt and Maritain would be more obvious did Wimsatt not treat Maritain carelessly. This carelessness is indicated in his article cited, where he takes a passage quoted from Maritain out of context. In "An Essay on Art," in Art and Scholasticism, from which the passage is taken, Maritain is refuting two kinds of false freedoms claimed by some artists: freedom from matter, and freedom from any human ends. This second freedom, claimed by the art-for-art's-sake group, is being described in the very paragraph which Wimsatt chooses to make represent the affirmation of Maritain's own theory. Thus Wimsatt places Maritain among the adherents of a theory which Maritain himself calls "singularly specious."

We can note, however, that Maritain, in discussing the essence of art, and stressing its autonomy in its proper, formal demands, frequently speaks in much the same way as he does in this paragraph, though Wimsatt's misreading is nonetheless unfortunate in the cast it gives to Maritain's theory. We must note too that Wimsatt's misunderstanding of Maritain's real theses is still evident in this article as revised for The Verbal Icon where Wimsatt corrects his earlier error, only to insist that the distorted conclusion resulting from it is valid anyway.

Finally, to reverse our point of view, to ask how art affects the artist,
is not to change the terms of the argument: art affects its efficient cause in a way analogous to that of a moral virtue (hence the moral tone of the artist), demanding sacrifice, purity, and obedience to its own best ends which, however, because they are not the ends of the artist, avail him nothing in the line of his own good. "The painter may damn himself, painting doesn't care a straw, if the fire where he burns bakes a beautiful stained-glass window." \(^{59}\) However, just as art is affected through subjective and material causality, so its demands on the artist tend thereby to create strength in him (an ability to suffer and to overcome matter, for example) by which he is the more readily prepared to determine his spiritual direction. By this conditioning to things of the spirit he is prepared for the life of grace and the Spirit. Indeed, art goes directly to God, not as man's end, but as the source of beauty. The problem of the artist is that of recognizing he is where his own good lies. \(^{60}\)

Distinctions and pluralistic evaluations must also be permitted when we consider art as it affects its audience: we can judge a work in moral terms if we please, or we can judge it in artistic terms; to judge it morally is not to judge it artistically. This premise, invalid as we have seen for those who identify the formal good of art and the formal good of man, and who deny the intellect's power of making a work without reference to the moral condition of itself as agent for the work, will be equally invalid for those who define art as a communication of human truths. The morality problem, for one whose con-


\(^{60}\)Ibid., p. 97.
ception of art is that of communication, will be centered on the audience. Thus we might consider here the argument of Father A. Little, S. J., 61 who has attempted the most extensive rebuttal of Maritain's position. Father Little believes that the aim of significant art (by "significant" art Father Little means that art which has not only a beautiful form, like an amphora, which is its intrinsic beauty, but which means something to the beholder) is to provide man with the self-knowledge requisite for morality, and that it always represents the laws of human nature involved by means of emotions; hence it invariably arouses desires in the audience which, because they move one toward or away from his proper ends, must make art a moral act. To the extent that the laws of human nature are distorted, art must fall short of its aim. His argument has two major premises. (1) Art is an act of the moral order because of its moral effects. This, Little qualifies, only makes art subject to a second moral code—it does not yet identify moral and artistic values. Maritain would reject this first premise as a definition of the moral nature of art on two bases: (a) art is not an act of a moral order because the sphere of making is an amoral sphere, concerned only with the good of the object; (b) the emotion by means of which the poetic sense is conveyed is not brute emotion, awakening directive passions, but intentional emotion, a mode of knowing. Yet, because art is accompanied by emotional effects, Little's observation helps us to understand the source of the moral aspect of art's effects on the audience.

(2) Art, in its effect, is necessarily moral by intention, as well as

means, and fails as art to the degree to which it fails morally. This follows from Little's definition of art as "the communication of experience significant of nature in its specific nobility." Art aims at the spiritual good of man and fails to the extent to which it causes moral, spiritual (the terms are used synonymously) harm. In other words, man chooses the activity involved in art for the sake of his own good; if the activity does not lead to his own good, it is therefore not good activity. This is, once more, an argument which excludes the distinction between the ends of the artist and the end of the artistic activity as such. Maritain would agree that the artist must not harm himself, but he would also insist on the special exigencies of the work. Little, of course, cannot accept the distinction between proper good of art and that of artist because in his definition of art as the communication of man's good they are the same. The opposition between Maritain and Little can be reconciled not in the area of the morality problem, but in that of the nature of art itself, because both of their solutions are logical deductions from their definitions of art.

Little opposes what he identifies as Maritain's theory with three arguments. (1) A work's intrinsic beauty cannot explain the intensity of our reaction to great art. (2) It cannot explain the nature of our reaction. (3) It cannot explain how a work can be beautiful which, by its very nature, appears ugly. These are refutations aimed at a theory which is not Maritain's. First of all, for Maritain all things mean. When he argues that beauty is intrinsic

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62 Ibid., p. 247.
63 Ibid., esp. chapter III.
to an artifact, he is not admiring the proportion of its contours alone, he is admiring the ontological secret of the thing—dynamic, not static, transcendent, not merely individual. Little's interpretation is inexplicably tangential to Maritain's central theses on the intellectual nature of art and the transcendent implications of any beautiful object. For Maritain the world does exist in a grain of sand; the amphora by its very form has meaning, and Maritain would not recognize Little's limiting term, "significant art," because all art is charged with being and therefore meaning. "A fatal defect of Maritain's theory is that it cannot admit suggestiveness as an essential property of any kind of art."

This could not be further from the truth, unless one interprets Maritain in the most material way, ignoring his own statement that the beauty of a work of art is not that of the object represented, but the beauty of the form which is made to shine through that body. The beautiful is not the type of specific perfection; Maritain would shun this concept as pseudo-Platonic.

Nonetheless, an important relevant issue is explicitly treated by both Maritain and Little which, because it exposes the heart of the art-morality problem, should be described. Little believes, with Maritain, that the virtue of art is intellectual and that what tends to weaken the intellect will force weaken art. Little opposes Maritain in believing that immorality will ruin the intellect. Here Little rejects the Aristotelian position upheld by Maritain (and Wimsatt) that the defeat of the will in its proper human tendencies does not cause defeat of the intellect's calculation in establishing means to the proper artistic ends—the good of the work. The Aristotelian position

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64 Ibid., p. 41.
is simple: because the virtue of art is concerned with determining means in regard to the good of a certain non-human end, the will's deviation from that non-human end is the only pertinent consideration; its deviation from its human end is irrelevant. Little, on the other hand, because he identifies the moral nature of man with his ontological integrity, and because he believes that the function of significant art is to tell man of his spiritual greatness, argues that "whatever is good to the intellect is good to the will and vice versa; truth and goodness in anything are exactly equal because they are identical. And since there are only two spiritual faculties, intellect and will, and the good of one is the good of the other, it follows that an activity calculated to harm man in one spiritual order cannot be good for him in another." So the creative process, even in its origins, is ruined by immorality. Maritain, as we have seen, would not so identify the ontological and moral orders in speaking of man's intellect.

In a sense, Little's solution to the morality problem in art is easier to define than Maritain's because it involves only one term, artistic and moral values having become dependent, whereas for Maritain art's autonomy in the line of its own good creates a kind of conflict between it and the demands of prudence. Maritain's solution therefore requires an analysis of the effects of art in relationship to the demands of prudence, and then an effort to properly order the two values.

To establish the effects of art in the audience is, again more difficult for Maritain than for Little, because for Little the work has as aim the pro-

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65Ibid., p. 209.
duction of effects, a belief which tends to validate a subjective or affective rather than an always difficult objective analysis. Hence Maritain is required to distinguish between the intrinsic and the extrinsic ends of a work of art. Both ends originate in the mind of the artist, but only the intrinsic end can be understood in terms of effects alone. The extrinsic end is also given in terms of effects, but because it is not the very nature of the object to function in such terms, one must refer to the author's intentions or the structure of the work. For example, a sign reading "No Smoking" has as its intrinsic end to inform people that smoking is prohibited. Its extrinsic end may be the prevention of fire, cleanliness, health, or other objects. If the effects had on a certain person are exclusively extrinsic to the work, no moral problem arises because that person will have made use of the work for something removed from its nature. For Little such a distinction does not weigh.

But if the work is intrinsically capable of creating dangerous effects in its audience it can be controlled, not in its own way of working, but in its freedom to work. Thus the condemnation by the Church of certain works of art as immoral is defended,66 not because they are bad art, or even because they are essentially immoral—but because the audience is not trained to see them as they are. Just as the artist, as man, has the obligation to control the making of art if it is not tending to his own good, so any authority whose proper function is prudential has the right to protect its members from the effects of art. Moreover, the artist is himself responsible for the effects of his work, for art can make man deviate from his proper ends not only in his

66Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, note 154.
making of the work but in the use made of the work by its audience. In summary, there is no way in which morality can force art to adopt morality's own unique measure of good, because art's object is not morality's own; it can, because art's efficient cause is its own, control the exercise of art, and this under any one of three conditions: (1) if the activity harms the artist; (2) if the product by its intrinsic effect harms the audience; (3) if the product can be put to evil use, and is put to such a use by a majority of people.

Because all four theories mentioned in this sketch are based on fundamentally the same moral values, it is clear that complications are due to the diversity of directions inherent in premises and definitions. Hence the art-morality problem serves as an example of the kind of intellectual Babel (one gradually to be translated, we hope, by such work as that of the "Chicago critics") created when one subject is discussed in the terms of an alien critical vocabulary. Father Little, seeing art in terms of its effects on an audience, deduces his solution to the morality problem, as well as his definition of art, from such a position. His conclusions are much the same as, though his premises are distinct from, Victor Hamm's, who, focusing on the artist himself and his integrity and unilateral faculties, has resolved the morality problem in that area. Wimsatt, closest to Maritain in this problem, argues in the line of formal causality, hence reserving the integrity of the poetic object itself as something distinct from its source or from its effects.

But aside from the basic divergencies in orientation exhibited by their arguments, and their refusal to seriously consider each other's terms, there

67 Ibid., p. 59.
appear certain differences of theory the clarification of which would obviate much confusion.

Any critic of Maritain, first of all, must decide whether or not an artist can (not may) see and be regulated by and determine ends other than his own. Can he discover goods which are not his own proper goods, or is his view absolutely unitary, encompassing inevitably and simultaneously ontological and moral good? In other words, is there psychological justification for the acting-making distinction at the heart of Maritain's theory of art? If the mind cannot compartmentalize its working, a unitary, not a pluralistic, evaluation of art is necessary. An aspect of this question is that of the effect of immorality on the artist as artist: Is the power of intellect (on which, all agree, the making of art depends) really harmed by the artist's immorality?

Secondly, one must understand the relationship between the transcendental order and the human order. The critic who desires a unitary evaluation of art and morality will tend, as Hamm and Little do, to fall back on the principle that the transcendentals are really united anyway. If a critic fails to make his position clear he may use the term moral in such an equivocal way that in one paragraph immorality seems to refer to a contravening of, or a refusal to cooperate with, the order of reality itself. Hence a work is poor which is not good. Quite so. Whereas in another paragraph immorality seems to have specific reference: to reality as shaped or designed in the light of its ultimate relationship to God. Now it may be true that the second use of the term identifies what is simply a more remote determination of reality than the first, but in dealing with art, the existence of which depends on the knowledge and sensibility possessed by an author and his audience, such a simple identification of
ontological and moral situations, and what the intellect may possibly know to be the ultimate disposition of things and the way things are, is certainly not helpful. To return to Wimsatt's example: Antony and Cleopatra may certainly be said to dispose themselves immorally, both by their lust and by their suicides. But one cannot therefore condemn a play as evil, because it is actually a lyrically beautiful celebration of the good, admittedly relative, found by the lovers in their love and in their triumphant deaths, and because, if it is to be condemned, it must be judged by data not inherent in the fabric of the play itself.

To do so would be to deny values which are universal, instinctive, and certainly the source of much great art. The value of Maritain's explanation of the relationship between artistic and moral values is that it is at once able to comprehend both and at the same time so to distinguish between them as to deny the nature of neither.
Maritain has written a major defense and explanation of that perennial artistic theory which desires to hold man in existential, affective contact or involvement with reality, be it nature or his own idealistic visions; which insists on the creative nature of personality; which condemns mere logic in thinking or in producing. Originating in mediaeval sources, Maritain's theories are profoundly colored by modern experience.

It is this blending of ancient and modern which gives Maritain's writing its appearance of perennial wisdom and omniscience. The reconciliations he effects support this appearance. Modern idealism is reconciled with Thomistic realism in his theory of connatural knowledge and the creativity of self. Bergsonian and nineteenth century transcendentalism are reconciled with the scholastic tradition in his theory of beauty's transcendentality and being's tendentialism. The reaction in favor of intuition, which is a result of his being tutored by Bergson and Professor Driesch into an anti-"scientistic" concept of reason and a feeling for organism, accounts for his deep interest in scholastic writings on mystical knowledge, an interest which, in turn, informs his writing on art, often giving it a mystical or theological turn.

Into the orbit of his principles are made to swing many testimonies taken from art and artists.

With slight but subtle alterations Maritain repeatedly fits traditional
pronouncements about art (from the ancient Chinese to T. S. Eliot) into his own theory. This at once gives to his theory an empirical strength and illuminates the patterns of artistic evolution and revolution. We are given, for example, profound definitions of the distinctions between Indian and Chinese art, classic and romantic-modern art, symbolism and surrealism, abstract painting and imagistic poetry.

If his key concepts—the creative idea, with its creativity of self and theory of self-reflexivity, art as a virtue of the practical intellect, the transcendental nature of the beautiful, the nature of the intellect and of intuition—are scholastic, they develop along roads designed by modern art. When, for example, Maritain writes of the musical or melodious nature of the initial stages in which poetic intuition stirs the contents of the poet's spirit, we realize he is stimulated by a notion beginning especially with Kant and Schopenhauer and impregnating the work of the English romantics from Coleridge to Pater and Wilde, and the French symbolists. The frequency of the appearance of Wilde's name in Art and Scholasticism and the startling similarities between Pater's writing and Maritain's (note especially the latter half of Pater's "Wincklemann" essay), as well as the marked preference for data taken from French symbolists, indicates sufficiently well that Maritain was prompted to his revenge on the blasphemies of modern art by aestheticism itself.

That his principles are relevant and valuable for critics as well as aestheticians is evident in his revelations about modern poetry—for example, its "angelism," its narcissism, and many qualities of its fabric. Indeed, so constant is our awareness, especially in Creative Intuition, of the applicability of his generalities to very particular works that we become by that fact
alone persuaded to believe in his accuracy. It is, of course, necessary to remember how self-limiting is Maritain's emphasis on the mysterious and supra-conceptual nature of poetry. But an aesthetic so well able to include the best that has been thought and said on the subject of art is itself deserving of serious attention.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

This was not intended as a treatise on aesthetics or on epistemological questions, but as an exposition of Maritain's own theory. For this reason primary sources are of almost exclusive interest. In fact, nothing of real importance was found to have been written on Maritain's aesthetic. The secondary sources listed are works which were found helpful for illuminating, by explanation or disagreement, one or more aspects of Maritain's theory.

I. PRIMARY SOURCES


II. SECONDARY SOURCES


The thesis submitted by Richard J. Williams has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 22, 1956
Date

Signature of Adviser