



MARITAIN · CREATIVE INTUITION IN ART AND POH

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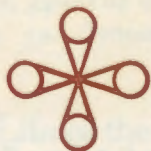
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JACQUES MARITAIN

CREATIVE INTUITION
IN
ART AND POETRY

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Conversely, in connection with aesthetic feeling there is always, to some degree, a sort of invasion of Nature by man.

Take the objects of aesthetic delight which are the most completely remote from any impact of humanity: say, either a beautiful mathematical demonstration—or, in the domain of art, a beautiful abstract arrangement, an Arabic mosaic or piece of stuccowork;—or a shining flower, a gleaming sunset, a tropical bird;—or any of the great spectacles offered by wild Nature, desert, virgin forest, mountains, or those big noisy waterfalls which offer innumerable families of tourists the thrill of the sublime. Everywhere, in reality, man is there, under cover. Man's measure is present, though hidden. All these nonhuman things return to man a quality of the human mind which is concealed in them: intellectual proportion and consistency in the case of a beautiful or "elegant" mathematical demonstration, or in the case of a beautiful abstract arrangement. In the case of that beauty which simply delights the senses, number or proportion is there again, and makes the senses rejoice in a property of their own; and as to physical qualities themselves, if a beautiful color in its relation to other surrounding colors "washes the eye," as Degas put it, it is because it corresponds in things to the need of the eye for rhythmical concentration and release, and to that immaterial transparency through which the inner operation of the sense reaches fulfillment.⁴

Finally, what about the great spectacles of wild Nature? Something of man is still involved—this time a certain feeling (related of itself to no aesthetic perception, I would say a brute feeling, or a merely subjective feeling) which is produced in us, and projected by us into things, and re-

4. "What a marvelous thing it is," Tieck observed, "to plunge oneself really into the contemplation of a color, considered simply as color! How is it that the distant blue of the sky stirs our nostalgia, that the purple of evening moves us, that a clear golden yellow can console and appease us? And whence comes that inexhaustible pleasure of looking at fresh greenness, where the eye can never

completely slake its thirst?" Ludwig Tieck, *Phantasia* (in *Sämtliche Werke*, Paris, 1837, Vol. I), p. 347; cited in Albert Béguin, *L'Âme romantique et le Rêve* (Marseille: Cahiers du Sud, 1937), Vol. II, p. 152.—Yet here not only the "simple color" is involved, but also, as Tieck himself went on to remark, an impact of the "internal dream we bear in ourselves."

for evidence from our modern Western artists, we may remember this statement of Robert Henri: "The object, which is back of every true work of art, is *the attainment of a state of being*, a state of high functioning, a more than ordinary moment of existence. In such moments activity is inevitable, and whether this activity is with brush, pen, chisel, or tongue, its result is but a by-product of the state, a trace, the footprint of the state."⁴⁵ We may (if we are not afraid of the Romantics) take into consideration the aphorisms of Caspar-David Friedrich: "Close your physical eye, in order first to see your picture with the eye of the spirit. Then make what you have seen in your night rise to daylight, in order for your action to be exercised in turn on other beings, from the outside toward the inside."⁴⁶ "The painter must not paint only what he sees before himself, but also what he sees within himself. If he sees nothing within himself, let him give up painting what he sees without."⁴⁷ We may hear Rouault speaking of the painter's "interior promptings," or Picasso asserting that "a painter paints to unload himself of feelings and visions."⁴⁸ Yet I think that, if we are interested in the unexpressed bearing of the simplest expressions, when they are used in the unsophisticated style proper to painters, we shall especially enjoy Cézanne's exclamation to Ambroise Vollard: "I damn well have to be let alone when I *meditate*."⁴⁹ A deep "meditation," to be sure, since the only possible revenge for having been troubled in it by some pest was to destroy the nearest of his paintings at hand.

I would conclude this attempt at an analysis by saying that poetic experience, though the motion it involves terminates "in an arrangement of

45. *Artists on Art* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945), p. 401.

46. *Bekennnisse*, 1924, p. 121. (Béguin, *L'Âme romantique et le Rêve*, Marseille: Cahiers du Sud, 1937, Vol. I, p. 233.)

47. *Ibid.*, p. 193. (Béguin, *ibid.*) — Chirico was right when he wrote: "A work of art must narrate something that does not appear within its outline. The objects and figures represented in it must likewise poetically tell you of something that is far away from them and also of what their shapes materially hide from us. A certain

dog painted by Corot is like the story of a poetic and romantic hunt." *Artists on Art*, p. 440.

48. *Artists on Art*, p. 421.

49. "Excusez un peu, Monsieur Vollard," he said to the famous picture dealer before one of his paintings which he had slashed in a fit of anger because someone had interrupted him in his work, "mais quand je médite, j'ai besoin qu'on me foute la paix." Ambroise Vollard, *Paul Cézanne* (Paris: Crès, 1924), p. 143.

On the other hand, there is the intuitive way of poetry, the way of the preconscious, nonconceptual activity of the intellect. Poetic intuition is born in this preconscious activity, it involves an obscure, emotive knowledge, ineffable and unconceptualizable in itself. It stirs the intuitive pulsions, both imaginal and emotional, of which I spoke at the beginning, so as to make its mysterious content known or seen in a manner, and brought to consciousness. The images thus stirred are themselves in a state of fluidity—not organized but movable by every wind—and part of the preconscious life of the spirit. They are images in Category number three, illuminated by the diffuse light of the Illuminating Intellect, and instruments for some intelligibility to be brought out—while keeping their own wild life, beneath the threshold of the abstractive process of formation of ideas. Thus an image is seized upon as the vehicle of some intelligible meaning, radiating from poetic intuition, and in being expressed in a word, it conveys this intelligible meaning and makes a certain thing intelligibly, though not conceptually, grasped. As when Yeats said:

The winds that awakened the stars
Are blowing through my blood.²⁹

2 Here we may observe that the image is rationally, or astronomically, rather questionable, for in nature no star has ever been awakened by any wind. But this is precisely, I think, a confirmation of my point. Yeats did not write, and could not have written, according to the classical pattern: "Just as the winds awakened the stars" (one term in a purposive comparison), "so, etc." (the other term in a purposive comparison).³⁰ In reality his image was not taken from the facts of astronomy and the externals of the imagination, it came from the *preconceptual imagination*, and was used only, irrespective of any truth already known about the winds and the stars, to make known and expressed something which is not even named,

29. "Maid Quiet."

30. In classical poetry he would have said that the same *forces* which gave birth to the stars were stirring his blood—the conceptualization would have washed away the illuminating image (the winds).

say, the poet's passionate exaltation. And so it is all the more meaningful.

Be it added that of course it is not only with respect to the central creative intuition, it is also with respect to any particular intuitive pulsion, any fleeting flash awakened during the production of the work and dealing with any of its parts, minute as it may be, that the images can be used in this way. Thus it is for instance that in order to make known and expressed what is totally singular and conceptually inexpressible in the deliciousness of having "nothing but the blanket between you and your snugness and the cold of the outer air," Melville wrote: "There you lie like the one warm spark in the heart of an arctic crystal."³¹

That is what I call the *immediately illuminating image*, without the intermediary of any concept—illuminating because it is illuminated both by the Illuminating Intellect and by poetic intuition or spark of intuition. Everything, here, comes about in the depths of the preconceptual life of the intellect and the imagination. Two things are not compared, but rather one thing is made known through the image of another. One thing already known is not brought near to another thing already known. One thing which was unknown³²—only contained in the obscurity of emotive intuition—is discovered, and expressed, by means of another already known, and by the same stroke their similarity is discovered: all that, as Reverdy put it, as a result of the creativity of the spirit. The second thing (the warm spark in the heart of an arctic crystal, or the winds that awakened the stars) is brought near the first (what is ineffable, and not yet made known, either in the snugness of the sleeper or in the exaltation of the poet) not because both are the objects of two concepts naturally joined together, but because, in the preconscious ocean of images, the image of the second thing has been moved and lifted by the common activity of emotive intuition and the Illuminating Intellect, in search of

31. *Moby Dick* (The Modern Library), p. 53. découvre que ce qu'on ne connaît pas." Paul Eluard, *Donner à voir* (Paris: Gallimard,

1939), p. 124.
32. "Pour lui [le poète], rien ne se décrit si bien que ce qui se connaît à peine. On ne