

honour of the Sacred Wounds. The *Novena for a Catholic Europe* was repeated every month, and many Masses offered for this intention. In January, 1943, it was approved by His Grace, the Archbishop-Bishop of Southwark, who expressed his desire that 'as many as possible should join in praying for a just and lasting peace.' Since then the Novena has gained the further approval of the Apostolic Delegate, the Archbishops of Westminster, Birmingham and Cardiff, and the Bishop of Menevia.

Since then a further step has been taken, a '*Crusade for a Catholic Europe.*' Members undertake the monthly recitation of the Novena prayers, to which, at the suggestion of the Apostolic Delegate, there has been added the short indulgenced ejaculation, 'Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Thy kingdom come' (300 days Ind.), which sums up all we pray for. Members must endeavour to overcome the prejudices of false and exclusive nationalism in themselves, and must spread the Crusade by all means at their disposal. This Crusade is a movement of prayer to prepare our hearts for the working of the Holy Ghost. The spirit of the Crusader is one of humble and prayerful readiness, 'Lord, what will thou have me do?' We do not yet know, where He will lead us. But we do know, that we, too, in our generation, are called to do our utmost to restore all things in Christ.

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## ON POETIC KNOWLEDGE (II.)

At the beginning of this essay we noted that what a philosopher, reflecting on poetry, observes first of all is that it belongs to the sphere of Art or productive activity. Now the proper end of Art is not knowledge but production or 'creation,' not in the manner of physical nature, as radium produces helium or one living thing another, but in the free manner of the mind; it is intellectual productivity *ad extra*<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> There are *Speculative Arts*, logic for instance. As such they remain purely intellectual and the Will has nothing to do with them apart from the decision to exercise them. They bring the notion of Art to its limit where it is still realised and even most purely realised, because there is still a *factibile*, but where all is achieved within the mind. Note too that although one may speak of the poetry of logic, as of mathematics, inasmuch as both are contemplated *objectively*, yet within logic itself poetry and poetic knowledge have no place at all. If, then, logic be the purest form of art, it seems that poetry in its pure state (of which I speak later) and art in its pure state are diametrically opposed.

Of itself the intellect is expressive; it produces within itself its 'mental words' which, besides being the media through which it knows things, are also effects of its own spiritual plenitude, expressions or inward manifestations of the things it knows.

Further, this plenitude is a *superabundance* which tends of itself, naturally, to an external expression and manifestation, to a song. Not only does the mind's vitality form words within, it tends also to overflow into works; and this with a natural need or desire which reaches out over the frontiers of intellect itself, and which therefore can only be realized with the aid of the will and the other appetites whose movement, whereby the intellect goes out from itself following a desire natural to itself, is initiated and nourished at its source by the intellect, in such a way that, following this start, they predetermine in a general way the primary tendency of the operative intellect in a *poetic* (in the aristotelian sense) or in a practical direction. Once this original determination has been given, the 'poetic' activity develops along a line that is much more purely intellectual—the human will with its characteristic ends and purposes being far less involved—than is the line of moral activity (Ethics as a mode of the practical).

So it is clear that the will or appetite has some share in all the practical activities of the mind (speaking quite generally) although this share varies considerably, and that in the special case of the activity which make things, the part played by the will is smaller than in that of ethical activity. And the cause of the difference is this, that the 'idea' of the thing to be made is already of and by itself a practical idea, since it presupposes that primordial movement of the intellect, the will co-operating, towards the production of something outside itself.

Such I take to be the first root of poetic activity in the sense of an art-activity; regarded purely and simply as a metaphysical requirement. It may of course be enveloped in any amount of empirical conditioning, psychological and sociological, as well as by the more obvious utility-ends, for example, the magic-motive of primitive painting and the ordinary need of tools and equipment. But all these purposes and conditionings presuppose the one metaphysical root.

Understood in this way Art does not essentially imply a need to communicate with another person. There is such a need and it intervenes inevitably; but it does not *define* the activity of Art, which essentially is involved in a need to speak and express oneself in a thing made. Art flows from a spiritual superabundance, and would exist as a need or demand even (cruel anomaly!) were there no one to see or hear its effects. So true is this that while every artist wants

a public, it can happen that he suffers as much and more (more deeply) from one that 'understands' him as from one that ignores him. Being understood seems to lessen him somehow, it makes him uneasy. He wonders whether after all his work is not lacking in an extra 'something' which, had it been there, could not have been communicated. Not for men does he work; or, if it is for men, it is rather for posterity, conceived somehow as immaterial because it does not exist yet. What he wants is not to be understood, but to endure through history.

What follows from this from the point of view of knowledge?

Art, taken by itself, is not a knowing but a making; it aims at making an objective thing according to certain requirements and to a definite goodness intrinsic to that thing. True, it presupposes and draws upon a *foregoing* knowledge. Because it is an intellectual or spiritual productivity it cannot content itself with that particular object towards which, as merely *productive*, it tends; for this object is only a specimen of one class of beings. As intellectual it must somehow, and even precisely in so far as it is creative, tend towards sheer being transcending all classes of being. Hence the object made—even a clay pot or a fishing-boat—must *signify* something more than itself, must be a sign as well as a thing, alive with a meaning that extends beyond the limits of its individuality. Hence too an instant of contemplation is implied by all Art, productive though it essentially is; it implies a melody, a meaning that quickens a form<sup>2</sup>. This is the basis of Aristotle's saying that imitation is intrinsic to Art; which means first and most obviously (but not most profoundly<sup>3</sup>) a speculative knowledge preceding the art-activity and presupposed by it, but still extrinsic to it and including all the ordinary human knowledge that the artist obtains by keeping his eyes and his mind open to the world of nature and culture. Art-activity proper begins *after* all this, because it is creative and because as such it asks of the mind not that it be informed by a thing known, but that, from its side, it form something to be projected into existence.

But we are still only on the frontier of the mystery. Let us try to penetrate further.

An act of thought which is essentially productive, which forms a thing into existence instead of being itself formed by something, such a thought can express and reveal only one thing; the being and substance of him who thinks it. But a man's own substance is hidden from him at first. He must first receive from outside and be

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Arthur Lourié, *De la Mélodie*, 'La Vie Intellectuelle.' 24 Dec., 1935.

<sup>3</sup> Considered on the deepest and least obvious level the Aristotelian 'imitation' must be connected with poetic knowledge itself.

affected by other things and awake to the world before he awakes to himself. Only on condition that things reverberate in him, and in such a way that both they and he arise from sleep together, with a common awakening, can the poet express in his work his own substance. What he discerns in things, what he glimpses, is then discerned and glimpsed as something inseparable from himself and his emotion; or, better, as his very self indeed; and this happens precisely inasmuch as he tends toward an obscure self-knowledge which, completed, is purely creative<sup>4</sup>. Therefore he reveals the Graal to others and sees it not himself<sup>5</sup>. His intuition, the creative intuition or 'feeling' is a dim awareness of self and exterior things together in one, a knowledge by connaturality which only forms itself and bears fruit in a word which is also a work, in something made and produced; and to this making its entire vitality tends. Knowledge of a sort it is, but very different from all that is commonly called knowledge. It cannot be expressed in ideas and judgments; it is experience rather than 'knowledge,' and creative experience for it desires to express itself, and this precisely in a thing made, in a 'work.' Nor does it precede creative activity as if presupposed by it; rather it is contained in this very activity, because it is identical with the urge towards expression, towards a 'work.' Precisely this is what I call poetic knowledge, it being conceded that the term 'knowledge' is analogical, and that it means here not that state of mind which comes to rest in an assimilation to things, but that in which the mind rests in its having given being to something. Poetic knowledge then is a certain vital energy hidden, as it were, within the seed of art, in that spiritual seed of the work of art which the ancients called its idea or exemplar.

It and poetry came to self-consciousness together; more precisely, they are one thing—poetry and this dim intuitive awareness, this leap in the dark that is not wholly dark. Sensitively, passionately obscurely the soul hunts and holds, within the sensible, within passion, in darkness, the hidden *meaning* of things and of the self, and so doing fixes it in a medium. And this meaning is at one and the same time perceived (in the way described) in an object and alive in the thing made, being the melody, as I have called it, of every true work of art; and in such a way that, in this meaning or melody, the outer thing made and the deepest soul of the maker, the sign and the signified, communicate, commingle in a single song and a single sense.

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. *Frontières de la Poésie*, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup>J. Cocteau, *Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde*.

Philosophers at all times have speculated about poetry, but always, naturally, from outside. Let us admit that not till the 19th century—as I have tried to explain—did poetry begin, in the poets themselves, to become deliberately and systematically conscious of itself. The way was prepared by the Romantics and followed more particularly by Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Now every advance to consciousness is in peril of perversion. The risk here was that poetry might seek to stray from the creative task, might turn in upon the soul itself, trying to fulfil it with pure knowledge, with an absolute good.

One can certainly be a poet without producing—yet—any work, but a poet's being is virtually productive; poetry is necessarily orientated towards a work, as a tree to fruit. But by becoming self-conscious it can liberate itself from production, in the degree in which self-knowledge is a withdrawal into the self.

And at the same time it discerns its own active principle, pure poetic knowledge: that indescribable, pregnant experience that Plato called enthusiasm and which I have been trying briefly to characterise. And at this point awakes in it a desire, until now hidden by its own transcendence and spirituality, a metaphysical aspiration to break through the limits of its own nature, to pass the boundaries of its own level of being. At once poetry is at odds with art; for it was this its limited nature that obliged it to follow the way of art. But now, when art seeks to fashion something to the likeness of an idea, intelligently, poetry seeks to receive merely, to listen merely, to communicate in the depths of the self with someone who is unknown and whom no idea can enclose. 'For the "I" is someone else,' said Rimbaud. Could one possibly express more clearly how poetic knowledge is engulfed as it were in the very being of the self who knows? One moment's giddiness would suffice now; if it lose its foothold now poetry falls right away; immediately, from any sort of production; it becomes simply a way to knowledge, it creates no more, it merely knows. Art cries out for work but poetry, cut away from the conditions of its nature, seeks knowledge only.

And what a temptation! For knowledge is a sort of absolute; and this knowledge involves the whole of a man and gains the whole world for him through his passivity! If poetry, set free from the relationships imposed by Art—or so fancying itself—finds a soul that is not preoccupied, if it runs with no rival in that soul, it must flourish into a frightful lust for knowledge, whose end is utter exhaustion of soul and body.

Rimbaud's experience is decisive on this point. Unlike the sur-

realists, who later made use of his name and who ended by working with poetry as with an instrument to satisfy a sort of scientific curiosity, Rimbaud gave himself up, deliberately and consciously, to the last tyrannical demands of poetic knowledge gone completely wild; and, following this lead, flung himself into violence and 'debauchery' in his terrible search for the treasures of the spirit.

I am quoting from the *Lettre du Voyant*, in which he says expressly that he is 'debauching himself,' and in the same place that the good he seeks is knowledge. The text is supremely important as evidence, and infinitely worth commenting on.

'The man who wants to be a poet'—who *wants* to be, says Rimbaud; it is a deliberate, conscious undertaking, and there already the snare is set—'makes a complete study of himself. He hunts out his soul, inspects it, tries it, learns all about it; and as soon as known it must be cultivated. Oh, it sounds simple enough; everyone's mind grows up of course; and plenty of *egoists* are authors and let us know it; and plenty more credit themselves with their intellectual progress! But I'm talking about making the soul monstrous! . . . Imagine a man planting himself and cultivating warts on his own face. I say one must be *able to see*, one must turn oneself into a *seer*.

'This the poet does by an immensely long and logical derangement of all the senses. Every kind of love and suffering and insanity. He seeks out in himself and consumes every poison, to leave only quintessences. It's a frightful torment and calls for all the faith and strength he can bring to it, and this to a superhuman degree; but its reward is greatness, greatness in sickness, crime, damnation—and in knowledge! For thus the *unknown* is reached—through cultivation of this particular soul, already rich beyond all others! He reaches the unknown; if now his visions blind him and drive him mad, still he has seen them! Let him smash himself with leaping past unnameable horrors, others will take up the fearful struggle; and that horizon will be their starting point, there where he dies!'

Expressed with astonishing lucidity in *Une Saison en Enfer* the conclusion was inevitable. Poetry strives for full self-realisation by ridding itself of every condition which keeps it in being. It dares to claim an *absolute* life, and so runs headlong down a dialectic of suicide. It wants to be all and give all, life itself, holy, transfigured, miraculous; it takes all humanity under its wings. And all the time, whatever it does, the nature of things restricts it to one sphere of life only, and a quite subordinate sphere when all is said and done, to the business of making a work of art. In the end there is one

issue : silence, with renunciation of both poetry and craftsmanship together. Rimbaud ceased to write ; not only that, he also took his revenge on poetry. He stripped himself of it as of something unclean.

The foregoing considerations suggest that poetry of *itself* cannot be in harmony with anything else—not with Faith, not with Metaphysics, not with Sanctity ; as, in general, nothing that tends to infinity can of itself keep in step with anything else. To offer one's whole soul to it alone leads to madness, as we have observed. But to give it a place along with all the rest, with the other spiritual powers and energies, is to ask for trouble indeed ; how can it lie down with them ? In truth all these energies, being transcendental, aspire, like poetry, to break free from their limitations, to reach to infinity. Each is a condition of the existence of the rest, they all maintain one another with a mutual invigoration, but they hate one another too (in one sense ; for in another sense they love one another) and impose limits on one another, and each strives to reduce the rest to impotence. Only in this conflict can they exist and grow. Everything is wounded : art, poetry, metaphysics, prayer, contemplation—they are all wounded at their heart and centre. It is the very condition of life. And it is the man who *has* these powers who must perforce unify them, weep over them, die daily to them, and so win his peace and their's.

(*To be concluded*).

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*Translated by Kenelm Foster, O.P.*

NOTE : This essay is translated from *Situation de la Poésie* (Desléc : 1928). The material of the essay was recently used by Professor Maritain in a lecture in Chicago, and this will appear in the next issue of *Review of Politics* (Notre Dame, Indiana).