Poetic Experience [1]

By Jacques Maritain

THE subject I am discussing here deals with a very peculiar kind of knowledge — a kind of knowledge whose means is not concepts and reasoning, but affective inclination or affinity, and which is often disregarded by philosophers interested only in the rational kind of knowing. Henri Bergson liked to quote a sentence he found in the letters of a French philosopher; the sentence was as follows: "I have suffered from this friend enough to know him." When I know a friend to the core — not through having submitted him to a complete series of psychological tests, but because I have suffered from him and have got in myself the *habit of his nature* — then we may say in philosophical language that I know this man *by connaturality.*

My subject is the *nature of poetic knowledge.* Now the notion of knowledge by connaturality, or by inclination, not by intellectual conception, has been consecrated by Thomas Aquinas, when he explained how the mystical contemplators know divine things not by having learned them, but by having suffered or undergone them. Thus the *virtuous man* knows the matters of his virtue by listening to his own inclination, not by learning moral philosophy. Yet the sort of knowledge or experience of which I am speaking is a knowledge by connaturality quite different from mystical experience. It is the special character of poetic knowledge which we shall try to analyze and circumscribe.

I don't know whether this analysis would satisfy the claim for an *ontological criticism* that Mr. John Crowe Ransom made in his book, *The New Criticism.* At any rate, the need for ontology seems to me the crucial need of aesthetics as well as of philosophy in our day.

The subjects I should like to discuss in this connection are: FIRST,

1 The Aristotelian conception of *politics* is so wide and wise as to include all experiences affecting "the common interest," all the various activities "useful for the purposes of life." In any human society, the nature and function of art is, as Aristotle recognized, a problem of the greatest interest and importance. It is in this Aristotelian spirit that the editors present this essay, delivered in January of this year at the University of Chicago.

the specific character of *artistic activity,* which essentially tends, not to know, but to make;

SECOND, the basic element of *knowledge,* of experiential knowledge, which is nevertheless at the core of *poetry;*

THIRD, yet the fact remains that *poetic knowledge* or *poetic experience* is essentially a source of creative activity, and finds its expression not in conceptual statements, but in the very work made;

FOURTH, this poetic knowledge is knowledge *by connaturality;*

FIFTH, what is the *object* of this poetic knowledge;

SIXTH, what is its specific *means;*

and SEVENTH, the fact that the poet's work is both an *object* and a *sign.*

I

When a philosopher reflects on poetry, he observes first of all that poetry lies in the *line of art* or of creative activity. And art as such does not have as its end *knowledge,* but producing or *creating* — not after the fashion of nature, as radium produces helium or as a living being begets a living being, but rather in a mode proper to spirit and freedom: the point here is the *outward productivity of the intellect.*

The intellect is by its nature *expressive;* it produces inwardly the *mental words or concepts* which are for it *means of knowing,* but which are also effects of its spiritual *abundance,* expressions or internal manifestations of what it knows.

And by a natural *superabundance,* the intellect tends of itself to give expression and manifestation outwardly — to sing. It flows not only into its concepts or internal words, it demands that it *overflow into a work:* a natural desire which, since it seeks to cross the frontiers of the intellect itself, cannot be realized except by means of the *movement of the will* and the appetitive powers, which thus enable the intellect to go beyond itself according to its natural desire, and which thereby determine in an entirely general way the original dynamism of *art's activity.*

Reduced to its pure and essential metaphysical exigency, such is,

I believe, the deepest root of the poetic activity in the sense of *artistic activity*. This metaphysical root can be enmeshed by a tremendous amount of empirical conditioning, psychological and sociological, and by more obvious purposes of utility which we may see, for instance, in the purposes of magic in the most primitive painters, or in the natural human need for implements: but the metaphysical root is presupposed by these purposes and by this conditioning.

The activity of art thus understood does not of itself refer to a need to *communicate to another* (this need is real, and in fact intervenes inevitably in artistic activity, but it does not *define* that activity); the activity of art refers essentially to the need *to speak* and *to achieve manifestation* in a work-to-be-made out of a spiritual super-abundance, even though (what would, moreover, be a cruel anomaly) there may be nobody to see this work or to hear it. As for the very *public* with which the artist wishes to enter into communion, the fact is that he suffers from it as much when he is "appreciated" by it as when he is not "appreciated" — and perhaps he suffers more profoundly. To be appreciated takes something away from him, leaves him out of his element; and he begins to wonder if the work does not lack the one thing which, if it were there, would be incommunicable. In the remarkable lecture he recently gave at the University of Chicago, Igor Strawinsky rightly insisted on the active participation which is required from the listener. Yet genuine listeners are rare. I wonder whether a composer, when thousands of listeners cheer his work, is not tempted to think: "If they are so satisfied, there must be something silly in my work." It is the same with philosophy. When I am approved by my fellow-philosophers, I start suspecting myself. (And when they disapprove of me, I suspect myself also.) It is not for men that the artist produces his work; at most it is for some future generations which he conceives as somehow immaterial beings because they have no existence now. His wish is not that he might be appreciated, but that he might endure in history.

In any case, the activity of art is not of itself an activity of knowledge, but of creation; what it aspires to is the *making of an object* according to the inward demands and the proper good of that object. And poetry lies, by its own nature, in the line of art. This is my first point.

II

The second point is as follows. Poetry, when it reaches the state of self-consciousness, nevertheless becomes aware of being first and originally a kind of *knowledge or experience* — so much so that it then runs the risk of becoming intoxicated with knowledge and of entering into conflict with art, in burdening itself, illusively, with the functions proper to metaphysics, ethics and sanctity.

Let us note here the importance of the phenomenon of taking consciousness of oneself. It corresponds to a characteristic of activity in the spiritual order.

We may admit that it was in the nineteenth century, with the romanticist preparations and above all with Edgar Allan Poe, Baudelaire and Rimbaud that poetry began, *among the poets,* deliberately and systematically to become conscious of itself.

A first phase in the *prise de conscience* of poetry as poetry is related still, it seems to me, to a specific function of art; that is, the *creation of an object.* But poetry transfigures this function and this need: it is not an object of art which it labors to create. Rather, it is a *world;* the poem alone will be unto itself a *sufficient universe,* without any need to mean anything outside itself, a world to which the soul must come blindfolded to be locked in, to receive — as though through the pores, as though through the whole surface of the body — the emanations of night which penetrate to the heart without our knowing how. *I am as dark as feeling,* wrote the French poet Pierre Reverdy, and his poems are just as dark. In order to discover their beauty, which is great, we must consent first to this obscurity. Indeed such a preliminary consent — I mean consent to the intentions of the artist — is always required for the understanding of the work of art and the communication which this understanding presupposes.

A second important phase in the progressive self-awareness of poetry relates, I believe, to the essences of the *poetic state;* there we see poetry flung into an infinity of mystery to be explored and to be known, below consciousness and above it. A great contemporary poet like T. S. Eliot is more interested in and more aware of what the poetic state consists in than Milton or Donne were.

In a lecture given at Buenos Aires in the summer of 1936, Henri

Michaux admirably described the despoiling required by the relentless task to which poetry feels today committed, of discovering and laying bare the truth of its own pure substance and its proper inspiration. Rhythm, rhyme, lines and verses, all the clothing of words, of music, of human intelligibility, to which the poem seems to owe its texture — none of these is what we are seeking and all are obstacles to the search we are pursuing. Are we then to reduce poetry to the impossible in order to test its resistance? Or perhaps we shall enter into a kind of dark night wherein the hidden essence of poetry will be attained in an incommunicable experience, and whence we shall return later to the company of men — all our means of expression transformed and purified by a fire which seems to exhaust them but which really releases unknown energies in them.

Meanwhile, the very work, inasmuch as it yields to the efforts toward self-knowledge which we are considering, the very work done is placed in singular conditions of asceticism: it ceases to be a song, as it demands to be by its very nature; it would become rather a hidden revelation of the secret working of poetic powers in the substance of the poet — a hidden revelation which could no more than try to strike us at the heart in forbidden ways.

I have been speaking of a second phase or moment in the awakening of poetry to itself, *as poetry,* a moment which concerned chiefly the *poetic state.* I think we can, at least by abstraction, discern now a third, more profound phase, which is related most of all to *poetic knowledge* — I mean to say, knowledge of reality, of the inwardness of things, or of their reverse sides; a knowledge proper to poetry or to the spirit of poetry.

The more deeply poetry becomes conscious of itself, the more deeply it becomes conscious also of its power *to know,* and of the mysterious movement by which, as Jules Supervielle put it, it draws near to the sources of being.

At this point we may observe that every taking consciousness of oneself, every attempt toward self-scrutiny is accompanied by a risk of perversion. The risk here was that poetry might wish to evade the line of work and turn back to the soul itself, thinking to flood the soul with pure knowledge, and to become the absolute end, the god of man.

It is surely true that one can be a poet without producing — without having yet produced — any work of art; but if one is a poet, he is virtually turned toward operation: it is essential to poetry to be in the line of operation just as the tree is in the line of the fruit. But in becoming self-conscious, or aware of itself, poetry releases itself in some measure from the work to be done. For *knowing itself* means *turning back upon itself,* upon its inner sources. Thus poetry enters into conflict with art, though by nature poetry is bound to follow the way of art. Whereas art requires an intellectual shaping according to a creative idea, poetry, under such circumstances, asks to remain passive, to listen, to descend to the roots of being, to the unknown which no idea can circumscribe. "Because *I* is another," said Arthur Rimbaud[2]— and how can we better define this descent into the lived-in subject, which is poetic knowledge? One moment of dizziness is enough then. If poetry lose foothold here, it is cut off from its operative ends. It becomes a means of knowledge; it no longer seeks to create, but to know. While art asks to produce, poetry, freed from its natural ties, asks to *know.*

But knowledge — what a temptation, and what an absolute! That very knowledge which involves the whole of man, and which gives the world to man, letting him suffer the whole world within himself! If, released (or believing itself to be so) from the relativities of art, poetry finds a soul which is claimed by nothing else and which offers no opposition, it will develop a terrible appetite for knowledge, a vampire's appetite which will drain all the metaphysical sap which is in man, and even all his flesh.

The experience of Arthur Rimbaud is decisive here.

And the conclusion, announced with an astonishing lucidity in *Une Saison en Enfer,* was inevitable. Poetry, in order to realize itself in its plenitude, aspires to free itself from every determined and limited condition of existence, poetic knowledge exalts itself even to the point of claiming for itself the gift of absolute life; and thus poetry becomes engaged in a dialectic of self-destruction. It wishes to be all things and to provide all things — act, holiness, transubstantiation, and miracle: it assumes the burden of humanity. But whatever it may do, it is really kept by its nature to one line only — and one which is utterly particularized and very humble indeed: the line of art and of

2 Lettre à Izambard (Lettre du Voyant).

the work to be done. Finally there is nothing else to do but to keep silent, to renounce at the same time art and poetry. Rimbaud not only ceased to write; he revenged himself on poetry: he attempted to cast it from himself as a monster.[3]

III

Thus — here is my third point — we realize that poetic experience, if it is relieved of the temptation to which Rimbaud yielded, and considered in its very nature, tends by itself toward creation, and cannot escape this law without destroying itself and the poet. And here I must make it clear that when I speak of poetry and poetic experience, I do not speak only of the activity of the poet, but also of the painter, the composer, the architect; I speak of poetry and poetic experience as the inner source and animating soul of all kinds of arts.

Why does poetic experience tend by itself toward creation? Why is the content of poetic experience, as such non-conceptualizable, not *to be known* but *to be expressed in a work,* to be cast into being? Why is it a source of creative activity?

To reply to this question we must first bring our attention to bear on *subjectivity* as such. Man's subjectivity is linked to the privileges of spirituality and of self-immanence proper to personality. Subjectivity is spiritual, it is that very center of our root-activities, the source of the super-existence of knowledge and the super-existence of love; and if for its activities all specification derives from the object, all vitality, in return, and all vital productivity derives from subjectivity itself; subjectivity appears thus, according to its most profound properties, as a center or universe unto itself of productive vitality and spiritual emanation.

Now subjectivity, when it knows by means of concepts and ideas, does not grasp itself, but the known object. If subjectivity can be grasped *insofar as it is subjectivity,* this will happen only when it is grasped insofar as it is a center of productive vitality, as it is *productive,* not insofar as it is knowing by means of concepts and ideas. And if an experience of oneself by oneself takes hold of the subject

3 Cf. my article "Poetry's Dark Night," in *The Kenyon Review*, Spring 1942. Note: For permission to reprint here some portions of this article the Editors of the REVIEW OF POLITICS are very grateful to the Editors of the *Kenyon Review*.

insofar as it is subject, that is to say, insofar as it is the root principle of productive vitality and of spiritual emanation, such an experience will, for that very reason, be a fecundation of that productivity. And such a grasping of the substance of the subject can take place only in a non-conceptual and non-logical fashion, therefore in an essentially obscure manner, in the instant and by the same stroke that a reality of the universe will be taken hold of in an intuitive emotion in which the universe and the subject together will reveal themselves to the subject as in a ray of darkness. For it is by awakening to the world, it is by dimly grasping some substantial secret of things that the soul of man dimly grasps itself.

Thus it is that poetic experience is necessarily formative or operative, because poetic experience refers to subjectivity in the very exercise of the latter; because this experience awakens and actuates the subject *as subject,* or as a center of productive vitality and of spiritual emanation, and because, on the other hand, such an experience, in attaining reality as embodied in subjectivity itself and therefore as impossible to express in a concept, is unable to emerge into ideas and conceptual statements, into that fruit of knowledge which is formed within the mind. As a result, it can emerge only into a work externally produced.

That is poetic experience or poetic knowledge, where subjectivity is not grasped as an object, but as a source and in the very grasping of things by resonance in the subject; knowledge mainly unaware; knowledge which is a minimum of knowledge but a maximum of germinal virtuality; and which will come to objectivation only in the work, in a thing made.

It follows from these considerations that poetic knowledge, if it is placed in the line of making, is not, for all that, *simultaneous with the poem itself.* Between it and the poem there is the entire intellectual elaboration of art, and first of all that formative idea which forms itself progressively and by degrees. The shock of poetic intuition can be felt in the depths of the subject and remain there as in a latent state; poetic intuition will thus endure for a long time; or, after a first brilliance fall into inertia, and reappear later on in spiritual memory, without having lost anything of its emotional or realizational power. And finally the poet will also be able, thwarting the nature of things, to turn this intuition away from its operative finalities, and

seek in it, by violence, and for his own misfortune, as I have tried to point out, pure knowledge. There is no poem without poetic experience. There may be poetic experience without a poem (although there is no poetic experience without a secret seed, no matter how small, of a poem).

IV

As for my fourth point, I should like to insist upon the mode or manner proper to poetic knowledge: such a knowledge comes into existence *in virtue of vital union or connaturality.*

An act of thought which by its essence is creative, which shapes some thing into being instead of itself being formed by things — what does it express and make manifest in producing the work, but the very being and substance of the one who creates? Yet the substance of the man is a darkness to himself; it is in receiving and *suffering* things, it is in awakening himself to the world that man awakens himself to himself. The poet cannot express his own substance in a work except on condition that things strike their resonance in him and that in him, in the same revelation, they and he are stirred from their slumber. Everything that he discerns and divines in things is thus perceived as inseparable from himself — and more precisely, as *identical* with himself. And all this he perceives in order to grasp his own being darkly within himself, by a knowledge which achieves itself only in being creative.[4] That is why, as Jean Cocteau has said, the poet can show the Grail to others, but he cannot see it himself.[5] His intuition, the creative intuition or emotion, is an obscure grasping of self and things together in a knowledge by union or connaturality, which takes form and fructifies only in his work, and which moves with all its living burden toward making and producing. Here is a knowledge different indeed from that which we commonly call knowledge; a knowledge which is not expressible in ideas and judgments, but which is rather *experience* than knowledge, and creative experience, for it seeks to express itself and is expressible only in a work. This knowledge is not preliminary to or presupposed by the creative activity but is intimately one with it, consubstantial with the movement toward the work; and it is properly this that I call *poetic knowledge.*

4 Cf. Frontières de la Poésie, p. 197.
5 In *Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde.*

It must be clearly understood that the word "knowledge" is an analogical term which designates here a knowledge in which the mind does not tend, as it were, to its repose in "becoming other things," but to "producing a thing in being." *Poetic knowledge* is thus, as I pointed out a moment ago, the secret vital force of this spiritual seed which the ancients called the idea of the work, the working or artistic idea.

V

Coming now to my fifth point, that is, to the *object* of poetic knowledge, I would observe that Poetic Knowledge has become conscious of itself at the same time that poetry has become self-aware; or rather this piercing divination is poetry itself, it is the spirit which, in the sensible and by the sensible, in passion and by passion, in obscure densities and by them, captures the secret *meanings* of things and of the self in order to cast these secret meanings into matter; the same meaning being at once the meaning perceived in *being* and the meaning which animates the work to be done. This meaning may be called the melody of every genuine work of art; a meaning or melody in which the work and the depths of existence and of the subject communicate — and are two in one song.

Thus poetic experience proceeds from a natural and eminently spontaneous movement of the soul, which seeks itself by communing with things through the sense and imagination permeated with intelligence. Poetic contemplation is as natural to the spirit as is the return of the bird to its nest, and it is the entire world which returns with the spirit to the mysterious nest of the soul. Poetic emotion is sovereignly determined and individualized; and if poetry is, as Aristotle believed, more philosophical than history, this is because it is related to the most intimate of essences and qualities in which the real and the singular abound. And this is why poetic intuition and the object created abound in *significance,* give to the spirit, in one fell swoop, the universe in a countenance. As William Blake said,

> To see a World in a grain of sand,
> And a Heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And Eternity in an hour.

Poetic experience, however, does not tend to grasp essences and to form ideas expressing the nature of things, which is the job of philosophy, not of poetry. Its mode is entirely existential. Applied to the mode, to the manner of knowing, to the manner of taking hold of the real, no expression is too strong to avert from poetic intuition the laws proper to the conceptual understanding of essences. For, as I have noted, the content of poetic experience is grasped as non-conceptualizable.

Poetic experience is not ordered to grasp essences. It is ordered to give utterance to the subject, it awakens subjectivity to itself so that the inner recesses of the artist may manifest themselves insofar as they are transparent to some ray of being and in act of communication with the world — however fleeting and light, however small may be the ray which sets up the contact. If such a ray is allowed to pass, an almost silent poem of two lines is of more value than a large noisy machine working to decipher the alphabet of essences. The volume of the work counts certainly, according as, in art, it is itself a qualitative element. All things being equal, a large poem is more valuable than a small one, but *on condition* that it be as humble and as movable in the breeze as the divine little cloud of intuitive emotion in the inner sky of the poet. Poetry dislikes noise.

There is a poetic knowledge of the world, but it is not made *for* knowing nor *for* knowing the world, it is made to reveal the creative subject dimly to itself and to fertilize it in its spiritual sources. If you try to make use of poetic knowledge for knowing, it vanishes in your hands.

The poet is not, as Paul Claudel believes, a hierarch who "calls all things into being by giving each thing its inalienable and proper name"; the poet would rather be a child who tames things by giving them the name of his loves, and who creates with them a paradise. They tell him their names in riddles, he enters into their games, blind-folded, he plays with them the game of life and death.

Things are not only what they are; they constantly pass beyond themselves, and give more than they have, because from every side they are pervaded by the creative influx of the first cause. They are better and worse than themselves, because being superabounds, and

because nothingness attracts that which comes from nothingness. Thus they communicate in existence, in an infinity of modes and by an infinity of actions and contacts, correspondences, sympathies and malices, breaks and reboundings of being. This communication in existence and in the spiritual flux from which existence proceeds, communication which brings to things the secret creative sources — that above all is perhaps what the poet experiences and suffers, and grasps without knowing it, or knows as unknown. At the culmination of our knowledge we know God as unknown, St. Thomas said, after the pseudo-Dionysius, with regard to mystical contemplation. We must say of the poet: at the source of his creative movement he knows things "as unknown," together with his own soul; he knows as unknown the communion of things (among themselves and with himself) in the passages of the spirit which causes things to be; and this is still another way — altogether different from contemplation — of being a neighbor to God.

To summarize all this, let us say that the object of poetic experience concerns things in their existential *inter-communications* and *intermeanings,* insofar as the divine creative impulse in which they commune fills them with particular and concrete significance.

VI

I have spoken of the *mode* and of the *object* of poetic experience. Another point — my sixth point — must be examined, namely the *means* of this experience. Here I should first like to observe that in the case of the poet, contrary to other men (particularly those engaged in civilized life) the soul, doubtless considered not in its substance but in its faculties and at the very root of the latter, remains, so to speak, available to itself, retains a reserve of spirituality not absorbed by the exterior and by the *work* of the faculties; and this profound unemployed reserve of the spirit, being *unemployed,* is so to speak, a sleep of the soul; being *of the spirit,* it is in act, I mean virtually, by means of a tension and a virtual reversion of the spirit to itself and to everything which is in it. The soul sleeps but its heart keeps watch, let it sleep. And often it is in mature age, when the spirit has been nourished with experience and suffering and returns to itself, that it best knows this sleep; which also exists in another, more pre-

carious, fashion, and with the tartness of overly young saps, in the child or the primitive.

Now when to the depths of such a secretly vigilant sleep and of such a spiritual tension, of such a dormant flame, emotion comes suddenly, then spiritualized emotion delivers the very world of which it is pregnant, it conveys this world to the poet, in the vitality of the expectant intellect virtually turned towards the substance of the soul and all its treasures. Then it is that emotion becomes intentional and intuitive, and passes to the state of grasping reality: because emotion is then engrossed in the vitality and productivity of the spirit, to which productivity it brings a determination in the manner of a seed. In such intuitive emotion the real and the subjectivity, the world and the soul coexist actively. Then sense and sensation, images and imagination are brought back to the heart, blood to the spirit, passion to intuition. And by means of the vital actuation of the intellect all the faculties are also actuated in their depth and at their root. It is the soul which becomes known through the experience of the world and it is the world which is known through the experience of the soul, by means of a knowledge which is not aware of itself, for where is the concept by means of which such a knowledge would express itself? What it knows, I said a while ago, it knows as unknown, and not to know but to produce. Objectivation will take place in the object made, in the work. It is to creation that this experience tends.

We see that in poetic knowledge *the most immediate* is the experience of the things of the world — because it is natural for the human soul to know things before it knows itself; but *the most important* is the experience of the subject — because it is in a knowledge of oneself, however obscure it may be, that the productive vitality wherein the emotion becomes intentional and sees is awakened and actuated.

We also see that in using in this analysis the term *emotion,* I have used it in a quite particular sense. Here it is not a question of emotion as a particular *state of consciousness* and a merely affective phenomenon, offering *matter* to be enclosed in and expressed by the work. Creative emotion, as I just tried to explain, is permeated with intelligence and spirit. Creative emotion is not a *matter* of the work of art, it is, on the contrary, the *form* forming this work; it is not emotion

as a thing, as a given object, but an intuitive and intentional emotion, which bears in itself much more than itself. It is the Self of the poet, his most mysterious substantial identity in act of spiritual communication and of a gift of itself, which is the content of this emotion.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I should like to insist upon the distinction I just made between merely affective emotion and creative or intuitive emotion. I deeply distrust any emotional or sentimental art, I hate the idea that art should aim at communicating emotions or suggesting thrills or ecstasies. To have the feelings or emotions of other persons, even sublime poets, planted inside ourselves through the magic spells of art, would be, in my opinion, exceedingly disgraceful and immodest. Even when it is a question of ideas, I remember what the French painter Degas said after a conversation with a raseur, that is, a zealously boring person: "Well, we exchanged some ideas; I feel quite dull-brained." Yet the ideas of our neighbors can provide us with some truth, and it is good fortune and a joy to commune with our neighbors, with scientists or philosophers, in truth perceived and known.

In the same way it is good fortune and a joy for the mind to commune with the artist and the poet in the beauty of the work and in the truth, the truth inexpressible in concepts, which they have perceived in virtue of their poetic experience. When I speak of creative or intuitive emotion, what I mean is the very means or instrument through which the artist has perceived this truth in the realities of the world. Such an emotion is *but one* with the imagination and the intellect. It has been spiritualized; it awakens the subconscious sources of the spirit; it brings into these sources an intellectual seed; here we have the intellect, the imagination and the emotion brought to unity, in the depths of the root activity of the soul. Reason is there at work, more than ever. But reason in its more profound and hidden life, reason in its intuitive function, in that intuitive cloud, full of eyes and vision, which precedes the labor of logical conceptualization; and which, in the poet and the artist, will actualize itself not in a set of conceptual statements, but in the very work to be done. Creative or intuitive emotion is but the experiential name of what is in truth the subconscious flash of the spirit, the subconscious intuitive act of creative reason, of

the creative intellect, when it grasps obscurely existential reality in virtue of the vital impact of imagination and emotion, at the common root of all the powers of the soul.

I think that no poet has been more aware of this intellectual intuition, immersed in imagination, than Charles Baudelaire. Yet it is enough to remember Giotto or Michael Angelo, or Rembrandt, or Cézanne — or Bach or Mozart or Moussorgsky — to verify the presence of this poetic intuition at the root of every great work of art.

To sum up, the means of poetic experience is the *intuitivity* and *intentionality* with which emotion is endowed when it is involved in the creative sources of the spirit and of the intellect.

VII

Seventh point — a last characteristic must be pointed out: the poet's work is an *object* which is at the same time a *sign,* and which abounds and overflows with signs and meanings. For if the experience which we have tried to describe is at the source of poetic action, and if the obscure grasping of resonant reality in creative subjectivity is by the same stroke the obscure grasping of his own soul by the poet, the work done must be at the same time the manifestation of both.

This work is an *object* and must always keep its consistency and its inherent value of an object, and at the same time is a *sign,* both a "direct" sign of the secrets perceived in things, of their avowal, of some unimpeached truth of their nature or adventure pierced by creative intuition, and a "reversed" sign of the inner potentialities and inside story of the poet. And as all things commune in being, and as being abounds in signs, so too the object abounds in meanings, and will say more than it is, and will make available to knowledge, at the same time as itself, something other than itself, and something other than that other, and, if possible, the entire universe as in the mirror of a Monad. By a sort of poetic *amplification,* Beatrice, remaining the woman that Dante loved, is also, in virtue of the sign, the Wisdom which leads him; Sophie von Kuhn, remaining the dead fiancée of Novalis, is also, in virtue of the sign, the call of God which captivates him.

There would thus be no poetic work, but a merely servile one, if the object were only object. And if the object were only a sign, there would be no poetic work, but allegory. And it is only by and in the object, by and in the visible signs in which the object abounds, that at the end of the poetic operation the content of poetic experience is finally and in addition manifested and known in a communicable manner. In short, the object created by the poet, the poem, the painting, the symphony, is like the glory of the poet, and it is in this glory, by means of which he makes himself manifest to the world, that he makes himself manifest also to himself and becomes definitely aware, but in an inevitably imperfect and unsatisfactory manner, of his original experience.

If I looked for a poem incarnating in itself and manifesting in the finest way poetic experience as I have tried to describe it, I would suggest Gerard Manley Hopkins' sonnet entitled *God's Grandeur*:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Here a powerful intellectual matter has been vitalized and brought to a creative spiritual unity in the inner flame of intuitive emotion, and the created object appears as necessary in each of its syllables and as abounding in meanings as a fully rounded world, because everything in it has been formed and vitally determined by this intuitive emotion.