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Jacques Maritain, Creative intuition, ...

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The Artist's N. Y. Times B. R. Torment

CREATIVE INTUITION IN ART AND
POETRY. By Jacques Maritain. Col-
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ed. 423 pp. New York: Pantheon
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By WILLIAM BARRETT

WHETHER one would say a good word for intuition nowadays must expect from some quarters a very stiff resistance, if not downright suspicion. Jacques Maritain, the French Catholic philosopher, has therefore his job cut out for him in this book, which grew out of the Mellon Lectures, delivered at the National Gallery in Washington in 1952.

The philosophers of the Catholic Church, following the Greeks, had interpreted art as a rational technique for making objects, whether poems, paintings, statues or shoes. But even as early as Plato there was the other view of poetry as requiring a certain "madness" or inspiration, in the poet. Maritain's job in this book is to reconcile these two views. He does so by insisting, first, that the "technical reason" of the artist must be fed from the underground springs of intuition, but that, on the other hand, this intuition is not essentially anti-rational. It belongs rather to what he calls "the pre-conceptual life of the intellect."

Such a "pre-conceptual life of the intellect" is possible, Maritain holds, because there is in

man a "spiritual unconscious" as well as the unconscious of blood and flesh, of repressed memories and desires. Maritain sees the unconscious not merely as a cesspool of repressed material but also as the great creative matrix out of which emerge the highest products of the human mind. And if these works of the mind come out of the unconscious, why need there be any final contradiction between it and reason?

ON the other hand, why then should so much of modern art be a desperate struggle to escape from reason and its confining shackles? In essence, the artist's struggle has been to re-affirm his creative subjectivity in the face of a society surrendering more and more to the impersonal routines of things.

This very desperation of the artist has created his own equally desperate lack of balance: thirsting after the living spirit, he has ended by pursuing demons, turning his art to a cult of magic and sometimes even of black magic. As a Catholic, Maritain is, of course, severely disapproving of all this, yet such is his intellectual charity and sensitivity that he writes about the struggle as if he were taking the side of the artist against the modern world.

Among recent works on esthetics, only André Malraux's "Psychology of Art" overshadows this book.

Mr. Barrett is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at New York University.

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Maritain, Jacques, 1882-1973

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