
Thomism and Romantic Confusions of the Good: Beauty Is Truth, Truth Beauty

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For the realist, whose thought is concerned with being, the Good, the True and the Beautiful are in the fullest sense real, since they are simply being itself as desired, known and admired. But as soon as thought substitutes itself for knowledge, these transcendentals begin to float in the air without knowing where to perch themselves. This is why idealism spends its time “grounding” morality, knowledge and art, as though the way men should act were not written in the nature of man, the manner of knowing in the very structure of our intellect, and the arts in the practical activity of the artist himself.

Étienne Gilson, *Methodical Realism*

You will have recognized that my subtitle alludes to those famous concluding lines of John Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” the highly debatable lines that read:

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty”—That is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The lines are debatable as a proposition, of course, but there is a question preliminary to that debate, though a part of it. Keats punctuates the lines differently in two manuscripts, raising the question whether there is one speaker or two. Whether the urn is to be understood as “saying” the whole of the two lines, or whether the last line and a half are the poet’s own response, his turning upon the urn as it were, saying that such a proposition is well and good if one happens to be an urn or a poem, but is cold comfort if one happens to be an urn-maker or a poet.

You will also have recognized in my epigraph from Gilson a clear, precise putting of a central Thomistic point about “being itself” as the pivotal recognition separating the Thomistic realist from the Cartesian idealist. What interests me in putting these texts together is the light Gilson sheds on that large and amorphous intellectual movement in Western thought we speak of as “Romanticism,” and particularly that

movement as reflected in literature in English. Gilson makes his observation in the early 1930s, just as a very significant modern "Romantic" poet, T. S. Eliot, is becoming a realist—or rather is recognizing that almost unknown to himself, so sophisticated a Romantic has he been, that he has metamorphosed from secular idealist into a Christian realist. And it is at this same time that Eliot as critic begins to praise John Keats, after long disdain of the English Romantics. His praise, at heart, is for Keats's having recognized so clearly the difficulties to the poet in the Cartesian ambiance of thought that dislocated the poet increasingly from his desired position in community after the sixteenth century. To have recognized the difficulties is not, of course, to have overcome them, being only the first step necessary to a recovery from intellectual confusions. Much stumbling may, and does, follow for Keats and to an extent for Eliot before he at last comes to rest in what is essentially a Thomistic realism.

When Gilson in our epigraph says that "as soon as thought substitutes itself for knowledge," those transcendentals—the Good, the True, and the Beautiful—"begin to float in the air without knowing where to perch themselves," he puts the Romantic's dilemma rather clearly. The proximate perch of those transcendent realities is in the intellect, as the poet knows intuitively. Intellect is but a visitation site for the transcendent, for finite intellect is at best an uncertain roosting place, save through grace. Losing sight of this truth about the limits of finite intellect, modern philosophy, aided and abetted by the emerging empirical sciences, has since the Renaissance increasingly insisted that the desired, the known, and the admired are causally occasioned by finite intellect: that the Good, the True, and the Beautiful exist by and through the operation of finite intellect. The poet, intuitively disturbed by such a position, should he extend metaphor out of Gilson's figure of the floating transcendentals might well liken his own circumstances in this confused age to those of the falconer whose birds remain leashed, though circling near his outstretched but carefully gloved hand—that controlling perch of his own intellect. Such a violation of the reality of intellect through metaphorical *attribution* (in this Thomistic sense) will call forth at last an eruption, perhaps such a one as William Butler Yeats cries in famous lines:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world . . .

So apt are Yeats's words to the breaking asunder of intellect and reality in our century that they are his most quoted ones, characterizing as they do our centripetal intellectual chaos. Few philosophers dealing with that chaos can resist this very Romantic poet, whose work is a rich source of epigraphs to the explorations of our age's malaise in which intellect gasps as order dissipates—order being the intellect's necessary medium.

I think we may properly explore this confusion as signalled by our Romantic poets generally, and thereby rescue what has been too casually called the "Romantic" impulse. I rather take that impulse to be in its actuality a Thomistic intuition unrealized as such, and most often by the poet himself. It is a gift of intellect in its very nature, and so timeless, though in certain times and places more highly visible in the arts when an intellectual community begins to lose a common consent to the necessity of particular and communal order. In a recovery of the intuitive as legitimately real lies the significant future of Thomistic realism: in its clarification and then restoration to an ordinate service of intellect's complementary gift, the rational. Still, I am uncomfortable in speaking of a "future" of Thomism, even as I am restive when "Romanticism" is seen as a Western movement beginning in the eighteenth century. Sufficient unto the present moment of intellectual unrest are the evils of intellect misapplied. What is always at issue is the recovery of the particular soul's proper relation to complex reality, which is a relation possible only in this present moment. That recovery is by intellectual vision restored, a recovery of intellect to its proper engagement to reality.

And so I value Josef Pieper's cautionary words to my point: in respect to intuitive knowledge as it may be distinguished from rational knowledge, he reminds us, there is no "tension toward the future" in the intuitive, one of whose functions is to call unified intellect to the exigencies of this very moment. Now if the stirring in the poet's intellect caused by his intuitive gift fails in his rational exercise through a confused excess, neither his attempt nor the intuition are themselves wrong of necessity. Notably, when our Romantic poet fails in consequence of intuitive stirrings, it is likely to be because he has wrongly associated the intuitive with the temporal circumstances through which he struggles toward vision. That is, the failure is likely to be occasioned by a rational distortion of the nature of the soul's presence in time and place, the nature of this crucial present moment of its being. He inclines to make time the enemy, whereby he becomes time's pawn, increasingly enthralled either by nostalgia for an imagined moment in the past or an imagined moment in the future: enthralled by an Eden lost or by some

Eden yet to be established, the one occasioning passive lament, the other activist assaults upon time future.

The struggle to recover intuited reality through our intuitive nature to a respect by rational intellect, so conspicuous in nineteenth-century literature, is revealed most variously in theme and in genre. For instance, the attempt is very much present in those "Romantic" novels of Sir Walter Scott, which our gnostic humorist Mark Twain makes such fun of in his own attempt to recover Adam as his own possession, namely his *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The failures of Twain's own Romanticism, we note in passing, are forced upon him even as he ridicules the nostalgic Romantic. *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, pitting a modernist "Yankee" against Scott's medieval dream, ends most darkly, followed by Twain's many dark works reflecting despair in him. Intuitive stirrings such as those in Scott one finds also in Keats's nostalgic texture of "The Eve of St. Agnes," through whose sensual details a swooning of the senses is encouraged, and even sometimes effected, at least in sophomores who have not yet lost or had distorted entirely the virtues of their sensual nature, through which one is properly drawn toward the Good by fleeting glimpses of the Beautiful flickering in young love. For who in flowering youth can resist moonlight through those stained windows that are ripe with "quaint" devices of "carven imag'ries," falling with "warm gules on Madeline's fair breast." Not only Porphyro grows faint.

But these, alas—both Madeline and Porphyro, the old crone and the beadsman—are gone "ages long ago," leaving one to confront this present, fleeting moment. Both Scott and Keats share a turning back toward the medieval world in an attempt to regain faint stirrings of the Good, the True and the Beautiful. If they ignore or downplay unbeautiful particulars in that historical period, our century has been delighted to recover those particulars, in a derision of medievalism and in support of our favorite epithet for it, the "Dark Ages," only to be left with the recognition that derision does not effect vision, as Twain so sadly discovered.

Our century has exercised a proprietary authority over this dilemma to consciousness, its mislocation in contentions of time future with time past, which though mislocated speaks an intuitive hunger for a restitution of a fullness of intellect to reality. Such are intellect's stirrings after its long wanderings in Cartesian shadows of being, though we must be reminded often that such wanderings are not limited to either an age or a country or a literary movement. Which is to remind ourselves that, in posing Thomistic realism as it contends with Cartesian idealism, we are posing inherent intellectual difficulties not to be sufficiently accounted

for by historical designations. One might, with world enough and time, discover such contentions operative in the intellect of Homer or Aeschylus or Dante.

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However much the poet may become confused or willfully stubborn within the stifling idealist oppressiveness that is subversive of his hunger for order, that hunger continues in some degree present in his actions of making. So long as one is a maker, he has not yet completely lost a certain likeness to the cause of his given nature as maker. That is, he will not have lost that aspect of existing "in the image of God," existence itself of necessity an image of the Cause of existence in some degree. And so there remains in his concern and action as maker an awareness that it is the good of the thing made that is the guiding principle of making. The good of the poem as poem is at issue, but in which principle there is also implicit an intent to his own proper end through his participation in being by the action proper to his nature. We recall St. Thomas's insistence that "art does not belong to moral knowledge, which concerns things to be done (*agibilia*), since art is right reason about things to be made (*factibilia*)" (*ST* 2-2, Prologue). The maker as judged by his making is commendable by virtue of "the quality of his work." The work does not demonstrate a moral good as its primary principle of being but a good in itself in respect to order, proportion, and the like. As for the maker himself, however, there is an inescapable moral dimension to his actions whereby he is realized as participating in actions of making. The practical intellect, governed by the virtue of prudence, is necessary to the act of making, so that making, in its effect upon the maker, can never be absolutely removed from the necessity of moral order. Art, like fire, is indifferent in itself to the moral dimension of existence, but that is only to speak of art itself as removed from culpability in respect to the spiritual agent, the artist. The relation of beauty to truth for Keats's urn, the question of a moral dimension to the truth or beauty proper to art itself, is irrelevant to the urn or the poem as art. But the habit of making perfected by the maker is relevant to the good of his spiritual state as person, a state realized in part through that habit of making which is salient in that creature, the embodied soul.

While we may not justly indict either an art or a science which happens to be pervasive of a particular age is the case of a person's failure in his calling as a "maker" to the fulfillment of his person as a gifted, particular, specific being, the complex of intellectual circumstance, the intellectual climate coincident to his particular history as a person, must be recognized. But a person's failures as maker is ulti-

mately a spiritual consideration, and rests in his own will. Thus one must engage, as a soul in progress, the conditions impinging upon that progress. For his "calling" as maker is circumscribed by the finitudes of existence, by his own limited gifts which are potential and less decisively the immediacy of history as a context of his nature. Thus his own deportment as person he bears residually as a personal history, in response to the history of his age and the history of his civilization to which he responds by actions of intellect. At issue is his prudent response to circumstances. Pervasive of our age's history is the idea that he is determined in his response by circumstance, an idea quite distinct from saying that he is circumscribed by circumstances natural and historical. The deterministic idea is reductionist in its logical extension, making man an effect of nature and history. One may argue the idea by logic, but the evidence of experience underlines persuasively the innate resistance to that determinate pressure of circumstances. One need only pursue the argument with its advocate in pressing upon the advocate himself to discover that, while he may hold all other men determined, he himself will not consent to determination as the first and final principle of his own existence. In this respect his silence in the face of argument might possibly be his strongest argument, since the purely determined creature has no necessity of describing his state, the very description already intellect's taking a stand beyond the principle he insists is inclusive. Nevertheless, untenable ideas have effects seductive of imprudent intellect, and the deterministic principle has been generally operative in sociology and psychology in particular. It has seemed to justify the proponents in exceeding the descriptive limits of science by presuming philosophical authority in the question. As intellectual creature, one is required to understand the position as a circumstance to the pursuit of the truth of things. One remarks here the stifling oppressiveness upon the "maker" in our world, affecting his breathing through the virus of Cartesian idealism advanced as if fully established by empirical science.

Since the Enlightenment especially, intellect in its necessarily empirical address to the circumstances of being has tended in its communal authority to declare the reductionist end of idealism. This is to say that idealism and empiricism have too-much cooperated in the divorce of intellect from reality, nowhere more conspicuously than in the academy for this past hundred years and more. Like Chaucer's Physician and Apothecary, each has made the other for to win in the struggle over being against the realist. That struggle requires from that position a domination over other intellects. To understand this circumstance of history is to safeguard oneself against one's own abuse of knowledge.

For empirical science yields truth not to be reasonably denied. And *cogito ergo sum*, as Gilson says, expresses a philosophical truth, though "it is not the starting point" to an acceptable epistemology. To understand the limit in particular knowledge as learned through science is at once to value that knowledge in its limits and to move toward an understanding of that knowledge, the responsibility peculiar to intellect. It is the tensional response to circumstance by intellect, in its freedom of response, and within the mystery of limit that is thematic in what we recognize as that historical movement, Romanticism.

If order and proportion signify a Beauty that is worth the intellect's admiration and courtship through language, that order and proportion must rest at last, and in an ultimate way, in an absolute, lest the concepts themselves be left merely floating in the air, tenuously attached to intellect itself, which finds for itself no firm ground in being. This is to say that if the Beautiful is merely sprung from intellect's primary assertion of the True, which is an assertion as well that the Good is also determined by finite intellect, then intellect alone seems necessarily the primary cause of the good, the true, the beautiful. It creates for itself the desired, the known, the admired. But despair must be the final end of such conclusion. Narcissus may be the first captivated by the illusion of his own beauty, but the spiritually debilitating effect of *ennui* waits upon him, the most ancient of dragons. Wallace Stevens came at last to concede the point at the end of his life by his conversion of Christianity, having spent a lifetime as poet denying all power over being except that of the poet's imagination, the "necessary angel" as he called it, an agent at finite intellect's command executing those "supreme fictions" as the only absolute. Eliot realizes the danger earlier than Stevens, and from "Ash-Wednesday" to the end treats as the central issue to intellect the contention of hope and despair for his soul, a contention in the soul of the maker who cannot escape the reality of his existence as in the image of the First Maker. If one were to put the recognition in Thomistic terms, one might say that Eliot recognizes as the poet's danger a temptation to rivalry with the Holy Ghost over the power of *to make*. (Consider on this point the *Summa's* Question 14, of 2-2, concerned with blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.)

The necessity of some source of Beauty beyond the poet's own absolute power to make a beautiful thing is fleetingly recognized by Keats, as his great Odes discover to us. The urn seems to echo an abiding Beauty and Truth, though those transcendents as transcendents are prevented from Keats's visionary power. They are prevented largely by the reduction of his flickering vision to rather desperate aphoristic shibboleth—words clasped in a moment of intellectual despair which

crowds out the virtue of hope. Despair consequently makes dead ashes of his personal history which by a forced imaginative act he prematurely scatters onto the static, teasing urn. He is trapped in a reduction of himself as person by the accidents of his immediate circumstances. Similarly, that moment of transport in another Ode in an English garden, that erratic flight by willed imagination as if on the nightingale's wings, stirs intellect to the border of a stranger vision-held country which is suddenly lost. And because lost, that country is declared illusional, is declared a shadowy "thing" sprung from helpless day-dreaming.

As if rebuking Keats's weak faith in art as savior to the finite intellect, William Butler Yeats is adamant. Art is the one possible transport of finite intellect beyond the clutches of time. In "Sailing to Byzantium," Yeats insists that intellect by its own power of making, or by its power through a Keatsean negative capability to enter the made thing of art as the vehicle of transport, may transcend its temporal and corporal entrapments. Keats's aphorism is thus certified as holy vision to the maker of things, though abandoned by Keats. Art, the "golden bird," transforms the natural bird and thereby becomes a timeless medium to transcendent reality. "Set upon a golden bough" beyond nature's decay, it sings a truth beyond "what is past, or passing, or to come" in the decaying world. Through its beauty, time's and space's seeming authority are reduced by a transcendent truth: the beauty of Idea—that old Platonic shadow concept that has haunted Western thought since the Renaissance in one guise or another. For Yeats, truth is the transcendent beauty of form faintly perceived through art, revealed as separate, self-subsistent forms beyond the ravages of temporal finitude.

Art, those artifacts strewn through history which Yeats in a memorable phrase calls "monuments of unaging intellect," thus solves for him history's enigma. Or so Yeats insists. But for Eliot as for Keats, Beauty must have primal cause more real and immediate to the world than an imagined or faintly remembered self-subsistent form among forms, even as it must be more real than an effect certified by the poet's assumed autonomous power of imagination in the making of monuments to itself. The truth of the soul's existence seems not sufficiently spoken to by art so conceived. Yeats's monuments therefore still leave in doubt for Keats and Eliot the makers of those monuments. One might, as maker, as well be sod to art's high estimate of transcendent truth and beauty, if truth and beauty are gnostically separated from the here and now in which intellect acts. In time and place, art if understood as by Yeats becomes at best but requiem for that collapsing sod, the poet. In brief, what is sensed is lost, as not rescued, is the *person*, the peculiar

discrete maker, this poet the world knows as John or Thomas Stearns or William Butler, though pinned and wriggling to the wall of our common memory in time as Keats, Eliot, Yeats by their piercing poems.

The prudent Romantic poet may in the end fear that metaphor is built only by attribution, thus leaving the poet isolated not only from the transcendent, but from the immediacy of creation itself whereby the potential of *person* moves toward perfections. Its monuments thus built to celebrate unaging intellect against the despair of isolation may prove but an effect of fancy, and therefore far removed from the truth which intellect desires by its very nature. For mere metaphor of attribution dooms art to fancy's province and so proves insufficient to the intuitive desire to understand, a perfection of intellect beyond merely knowing. Intellect, by understanding, might thus be both at home in its own mode of existence as finitely particularized and additionally more comfortable with being, with creation, beyond a walled-in autonomy that so much depends upon metaphor of attribution as the defense of its autonomy. For by building "supreme fictions" through attributive analogy, intellect would deflect the intrusiveness of reality as understood Thomistically.

The prudent Romantic, then, may well detect a desperation in a Stevens or a Joyce or Pound. Or in a Shelley, in whose words histrionics overwhelms poetry. Which is to say, overwhelms signs ordinally related to the complexity of being itself as encountered in diverse creation when there is a proper intensity of intellectual attention toward the mystery of being as known through actual experience of creaturely existences. That "knowing" is prelude to both conceptual knowledge and to artful articulations of that knowledge. Of course being is not inaccessible to sign: it is only always larger than any concept's or sign's power to contain it through and aggressive presumption of power over being by concept or sign. Shelly exhibits such an excess, as in his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." But Keats to the contrary, in a rare moment of vision upon his intellectual limit, speaking of his desire for the faculty of negative capability, recognizes the necessity in that faculty: intellect must consent to exist "in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" forced by its desire to control that gift of power called negative capability—the power of harmony in being.

A species of Shelley's desperation is in the early Eliot, though without Shelley's rhetorical excess against uncertainty. Eliot at first modifies and, to a degree, governs his desperation through ironic detachment, though that irony increasingly turns sardonic, that symptom of a festering intellect. The sardonic reflects an increasing uncer-

tainty in him till he must abandon irony altogether. We witness this change when we read his early poetry against his late poetry, his "Preludes" or "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" against "Ash-Wednesday." Relatively late in his career as poet and critic, we find him recovering himself to a reconciliation with existence larger than that self-loved which is so fearfully present in the early work. And he recovers through a Thomistic deportment of intellect, the self opened to being.

It is, incidentally, consequent to this change that Eliot reports his youthful infatuation with Shelley, whom he now finds intolerable. And along with this late acknowledgement comes his recognition of kinship with Wordsworth and Keats, a kinship that all along has been insipiently present. Eliot's desire has stirred him increasingly toward the Good, the True, and the Beautiful through intuitive intellect. Thus what he comes to value in Wordsworth and Keats is the presence of their person in the poetry itself, a presence reaching beyond sheer rationally decreed intellectual autonomy as poet which so easily burdens art with the merely autobiographical. The principle of intellectual autonomy, which comes to flourish in Western thought with the rejection of metaphysics, Eliot sees as portending spiritual cataclysm such as we witness pervasive of the intellectual community in our century, the chaos which leaves our intellectual community in disarray.

It is worth noting as more than an aside to this point that, as we lose the understanding of the *personal* which lies at the heart of Scholastic metaphysics, we become more and more obsessed with the vague ghost of the personal, the "self." And we observe that the literary genre of the autobiographical becomes dominant, the poet or novelist such as Eliot or Joyce feeling the strain of exorcising the "personal" history in their art, with less success than they desire. Eliot's personal experience of intellectual disarray, consequent upon his embracing modernist ideology, leads him to speak more and more in anticipation of our own pending disarray, after he has overcome ideological possession through an exorcism of making art of his "personal grouses," such as his *Waste Land*. His forewarnings to intellectual community are in both his *Four Quartets* and in his prose. His changing perspective as critic is conspicuous in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), in which lectures he emphatically rejects Shelley as Romantic and embraces Wordsworth and Keats.¹

1. Note for instance, Eliot's remark that Wordsworth's "critical insight, in this one *Preface* and *Supplement*, is enough to give him the highest place." A decade earlier, Eliot had dismissed Wordsworth's argument in this "Preface," without ever naming the work or Wordsworth directly. By 1932, however, he finds in Wordsworth's

We may now recognize as Wordsworth's and Keats's problem the same one experienced by Eliot. Having accepted, if but passively, the reductionist view of intellect whereby intellect is separated from reality, intellect finds itself islanded. It becomes endangered by an overwhelming melancholy, the emotional effect of the soul's growing despair. For melancholy is symptom of soul's disorder. In that uneasy circumstance of the soul as experienced by Wordsworth and Keats, we observe, they do not turn back to the "Dark Ages" in their best art. Each is rather concerned to satisfy an immediate hunger of intellect for its present moment in existence—a hunger to be reconciled to that which is not intellect itself but a current to intellect flowing through present circumstances. St. Thomas might say of this disturbing intimation to these poets of some presence. The thing they encounter is a timeless abiding "thing," namely being itself, however much time-designated and determined it might appear to the encountering intellect. It is experienced in *this* time and in *this* place, and so appears to bear an aura of circumstantiality, as if it were ultimately designed by history. But what intellects in their varying particularities thus discover are rather hints of the ground of existential reality, treasured by memory, which intellect by its proper operations must reconcile itself to through concept and sign.

One understands how the poet, perhaps more than the philosopher might, becomes time-trapped in such a moment in which intellect finds itself at the border of vision. The absence from memory of the once known appears time-related, since what was present as a knowledge (so memory insists) is now seemingly absent or at best only partially present. And even this present moment of knowing seems fading, grasped at by intellect through images but held only fitfully in memory as now already "one moment past." Such seem the conditions to memory. St. Augustine speaks tellingly to the relation of intuitive desire as supported by memory in his *Confessions*. The argument in his "A Philosophy of Memory" and "Time and Eternity" (Books 10 and 11) proved a rescue to Eliot in his "Romantic" dilemma of intuition besieged by time, as they well might have to Wordsworth and Keats under their circumstantial labors.

The very finitudes of intellect thus seem to entrap intellect in history, seem to decree that memory in relation to desire dooms intellect to an entrapment by its own past as past event weighting memory residually and seemingly preventing a present encounter with truth by the dislo-

"poetry and in his Preface, a profound spiritual revival, an inspiration communicated rather to Pusey and Newman, to Ruskin, and to the great humanitarians, than to accredited poets of the next generation." One surely adds to the list Eliot gives Gerard Manley Hopkins.

cation of desire to its own history, to time past and passing. It is this confused reduction of memory's office that both Keats and Wordsworth struggle to surmount, for they would escape history's entrapment, that graveyard of nature vividly in decay. And so each is in this respect *modern*, if we may wrest that term from its abuse and transform it to a deeper Thomistic dimension. If Thomistic realism is valid, its salient nature is that it is always modern in that it is concerned most of all with this present moment of this particular, concerned soul. That soul by its concern is always presently vulnerable to the distortions of its realistic position if it fail to orient its inescapable attention to past or future by reference to an abiding present. That is the danger Eliot encounters when he comes to see at least, with the help of St. Augustine, I believe, a dimension to memory larger than the limit of history:

This is the use of memory;
For liberation—not less of live but expanding
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past.

Such is the "key" that both Wordsworth and Keats almost recover to the rescue of each's person in a present moment bordering upon vision.

Eliot is surely right in praising Wordsworth as a great philosophical poet, since Wordsworth is intent upon the significant question of intellectual existence in its present circumstances. Wordsworth's concern is first for an epistemology that might rescue intellect from its isolation from reality and restore soul to a reality intuited in the present sensual moment. Surely Gilson is right, in *Methodical Realism*, to chide us for a modernist obsession with epistemology. But surely that is a concern to be anticipated once Cartesian ideology has so generally separated intellect from reality. Happily, the soul is always attempting to come to terms with reality in this moment of its existence—in a presence of itself to being—whatever tangential uses it may make of time past, or passing, or to come. It can do so, it supposes, only if it regains a confidence in its capacity to know reality here and now, beyond the shadowing of knowledge by time. That is, in Eliot's term, the soul first and last (such is the burden of discursive intellect) seeks a *still point* in the turning world. In Wordsworth's less well-known term, it seeks a *spot of time*.

What these prudent Romantics Wordsworth and Eliot reach toward intuitively through such metaphor, attempting to put time in its subordinate relation to being, is a recovery to intellect of what we term Thomistic realism. They do so at risk of melancholy if not deep despair

if they fail. Moved intuitively, the poet struggles to recover a knowledge of being beyond mere thoughts about being, however ill-equipped he may be as philosopher to do so, or however much he may think himself by the pervasiveness of Cartesian idealism. We ought to note that actually this idealism in Western thought has been principal antagonist to the poet's recovery in community at least since the advent of Renaissance Humanism, a demarcation point recognized to a degree by the nineteenth-century Romantic, as evidenced by his attempt to return to the Middle Ages to discover where we began wandering in the darkening woods of this world, sometimes led, sometimes followed by the poet. One need only recall Pico della Mirandola's words in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, whereby Pico puts words in God's mouth addressed to Man: "You shall determine your own nature without constraint from any barriers, by the means of the freedom whose power I have intrusted [to] you. . . . I have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal so that, like a free and sovereign artificer, you might mold and fashion yourself into that form you yourself shall have chosen." A sufficient license to the poet as freed artificer is implicit, Pico prophetic of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus.

And so it may be an irony suited to the amusement of a Socrates that our age, which so highly values its sophistications of intellect, is so much obsessed with the problem of epistemology. For that is a problem early to philosophical approaches to a metaphysics, whose analogy might perhaps be the child's wonderful awakening amid multitudinous existences, his struggling to keep straight the names of things. Eliot of course shared with his nineteenth-century predecessors—as do we all—a capacity of recovery to reality limited by epistemological confusions. That is why he at last sees himself like them and not superior to them as he had at first supposed. For he comes to know all too well that the poet's and the philosopher's medium, the sign, much decayed in that authority anchored in reality, proves increasingly uncertain in its manifestations through idealist dislocations of thought. But uncertainty about knowing does not prove the uncertainty of that reality itself toward which poet and philosopher reach through signs:

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.

It will never occur to the Thomistic realist, Gilson says, to make "thought the starting point of his reflections, because for him a thought

is only possible where there is first of all knowledge." Such is the truth lost to Keats and to Wordsworth, leaving them threatened by thought as somehow alien to their true nature. For it seems to them that thought intrudes as if an invading malignancy, reducing intuitive knowledge to an illusion. The truth which is held as knowledge from an intellectual experience of being is thus obscured, leaving only an ephemeral beauty, faintly remembered from past experience, a forlorn means to rescue. As Keats puts the concern, here in this time and place we find that

but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs.

The experience of a being *per se* which is anterior to thought appears to thought itself as always "past," just how long past not the issue. Only its pastness seems of concern. Thus Wordsworth returns to his childhood in an attempt to solve the mystery of memory. Keats in the instance of his "Ode to a Nightingale" remembers a transport through the nightingale's song freed of thought's curse. But it *was* a moment, a past, though "but one moment past."

It is only by a wavering faith in beauty that this illusive truth may be certified as having existed if one lose the experience of that truth which is the gift of being *per se* to intellect, a gift requiring no desperate certification by thought. What is required first of all is an open acceptance of that gift. But, alas for ephemeral Beauty! It is inadequate in that "Romantic" arrest to establish Truth. In that perspective as divorced from reality—the recognition to the soul of its exile—Beauty cannot be itself established intellectually as resting in Truth. And merely to interchange terms, to declare that "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty," is to bite the ashes of being, an empty sign. Intellect is thus reduced to that Keatsean condition wherein *person*, either as poet or as man, "grows pale and spectre-thin and dies" toward the oblivion of nonexistence, through having declared all existence illusional. That is Keats's personal prospect as a young man struggling to reconcile Beauty's fading attraction to intellect as he has experienced it in the world's conspicuous decay. It is also Gerontion's prospect as Eliot dramatizes this Keatsean dilemma in the "little old man" who speaks his poem, and in "Gerontion" Eliot is himself still endangered by despair.

A reconciliation of mind and heart, of rational and intuitive modes of intellect, is not satisfactorily made by assertion alone, but the will's forcing signs beyond their proper limit of measure of reality by finite intellect, however strong the desire for reconciliation or how moving the words that would justify desire in the user of words. Very soon after

"Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth experienced the shock of a death close to him, the death of a person who apparently only at the moment of her death was approaching the age Wordsworth remembers as his own when "like a roe" he

bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams
Wherever nature led.

Nature, through death, seems at last to have betrayed that child despite her opening love for creation. The experience left the high sentences of "Tintern Abbey" empty, those that declare that "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her." The famous "Lucy" poems are in this respect a recantation of the argument of "Tintern Abbey," and after those poignant poems Wordsworth turns somewhat desperately toward Platonism as reflected in his "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," in which he attempts to go back earlier than the roe-like stage that seemed visionary at the time of "Tintern Abbey." Such a visionary moment, he comes now to believe, was actually an illusion advanced through the trickery of thought. Lulled by thought's "remoter charm," thought's seeming separation of consciousness from reality it now appears, he must now conclude himself seduced thereby into a "slumber" of spirit in which his intellect sojourned still disjoined from waking reality.

That is the way Wordsworth puts it in those two moving quatrains beginning "A slumber did my spirit seal." In that slumber he "had no human fears," since he saw "Lucy" as a "thing that could not feel/ The touch of earthly years." Now she is a "thing" in quite another sense, being dead: a thing with no "motion . . . no force," who "neither hears nor sees" her loved things in nature. A pathos of loss in the words prevents self-excoriation, or a direct recantation of those high, now seemingly empty pronouncements recorded in "Tintern Abbey," though even in his lamentations Wordsworth cannot at last entirely reject the memory of visionary moments. For in that recovery of emotional balance called the "Intimations Ode," itself heavy with illusional high sentences, he cries that loss as once real. This present May day world, and a memory of other days in glad nature, now speak only to him "of something that is gone":

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

That gleam out of nature, a "glory" hallowing creation, will be spoken to more effectively by a later "Romantic" poet, Hopkins.

Meanwhile, it remained to Eliot to pick up Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" slumber in his opening gambit as anti-Romantic poet. Wordsworth had declared the "mind" a "mansion for all lovely form" and "memory . . . a dwelling place/ For all sweet sounds and harmonies." This metaphor Eliot gives a sardonic twist. Not a mansion, but a run-down tenement wherein are housed "a thousand sordid images" holding awareness itself hostage. It will not be till Eliot reaches the point of view upon reality reflected in "Ash-Wednesday" that he will be prepared to rescue from Wordsworth, and from Keats, their intuitive inclination of intellect which by their "thought" becomes reduced from truth to illusion. And in that rescue intellect becomes enabled to move the soul beyond nature and history, from which rescue follows a return to nature and history to see them "for the first time," the poet having learned at last both "to care and not to care."

In that movement which Eliot experiences, vision is a possibility to intellect in its pursuit of truth which is relatively independent of nature and history, a possibility through which the soul through grace may at any moment or in any place of its journey find light through the dark woods it journeys. Such is that "still point of the turning world" in which the world and history and time are "redeemed." Thus intuition restores a present vision, aided by memory but beyond a memory supposed limited by history, either personal or general. Memory is thus no longer circumscribed by and reduced to the world, including that little world of the finite particular intellect seemingly confined and "peculiar and private" to itself as F. H. Bradley asserted of it. What is restored is a possibility of a present experience of reality through which the soul may recover its prospect upon timeless being: this *very* present, in which alone intellect ever sees truly the truth of things, sees into "the life of things," to quote again from "Tintern Abbey." In that recovery, intellect beholds all things sustained in being by their cause and proper end, each thing according to its given nature. Intellect, thus having made a journey from a pre-conceptual harmony with being, discovers itself possessed of a knowledge antecedent to its conceptual awakening and journeying toward the soul's proper end. It is enabled thereby to return, as Eliot has it, to the "place" from which it set out and "know the place for the first time." Such is the possible reconciliation of the soul to time and place, once freed of the entrapments of time and place. Then the soul may conclude that, in the words of Dame Julian and Eliot, "all manner of thing shall be well." It will have learned how "to care and not to care."

It is in this circumstance of intellect alive to being that one may also conclude with Gilson that "the Good, the True and the Beautiful are in

the fullest sense real, since they are simply being itself as desired, known and admired." As for the poet or philosopher, this new life of intellect depends for its proper feeding upon those correspondences discovered in existent things as proper to the thing in its own nature and limit, and not an attribution *upon* the thing by intellect itself as dictator of the order of conception. For conception is anchored in reality and not imposed by the willed desire for order by intellect. What is thus to be discovered is the limits of the truth of particular things within—a community of being. It is here that significant metaphor at last must rest—*significant* signing of the thing's truth rather than form imposed by intellect upon the thing and declared the thing's truth by virtue of intellectual imposition. Or so Thomistic realism holds. There must follow, from poet or philosopher, the obligation of his peculiar art whereby he recovers sign, he recovers metaphor and analogy beyond the impatient inclinations to mere attribution. In brief, the labor is to recover sign as oriented by being itself as seen in the light of the concept of that proper proportionality whereby things *are* as they *specifically* are.²

That growth to intellectual liveliness requires no formulaic concept, though intellect may profit from concept prudently formulated, a necessity to intellectual community as distinct from the reflective and meditative harmony possible to the separate, distinct soul. Nevertheless, the end suitably issuing from communal intellect, from minds engaged in a common recovery of the meaning of the mind's journey in reality, a recovery on the soul's behalf, is a rediscovery of the meditative state suited to the solitary, though not lonely, intellect in its reflective journeying. This is to say that the discrete participant in intellectual community tends, intentionally if not tacitly so, toward a post-conceptual harmony of soul such as contemplation sometimes allows the solitary soul. That is why St. Thomas sets contemplation as the intellect's highest office. Intellect moves toward contemplation through metaphysical reflection, aided by such rationalized pursuit of metaphysical vision as St. Thomas's "principle of proper proportionality."

In the end, each of us is "Romantic," whether poet or philosopher, and may be strengthened in our intuitive journey, through which in the end we return to the place from which we set out intellectually, return to a recognition that intellect possesses knowledge as a gift from an initial and initiating experience anterior to the movement of intellect through concepts. That recognition justifies, in a Thomistic sense, the

2. The phrase "things *are* as they *specifically* are" intends to catch the relation between *being* and *specific* being, between the thing as it shares being and the thing which is concomitantly—even as it is consequentially—the thing that it is by essence.

journey, accommodating the will to knowledge as always a gift to intellect. One of the immediate ways of strengthening intellect on its journey is to turn to St. Thomas's "On Being and Essence." The poet will find there a protection against the temptation to constitute his awareness as a little world revolving arrogantly or helplessly on the uncertain axis of his own self-awareness, as it seemed to do to Eliot at his setting out. Nor will he feel justified by the illusion of autonomy, as if freed by awareness of all worlds other than the signing self, supposing that self thereby empowered to reconstitute being by attribution. That proved an irresistible temptation to Joyce and Stevens and Pound as poets.

If we fail to determine this proper point for intellect's embarkation, we shall be endangered by an illusionary state of mind whereby thought attributes being to the intellect as being's causal agent. To make that error is to find in our signs only a reflection of our lone self, an intolerable company to keep in the increasingly isolated state, more and more separated from the inexhaustible wonder of encompassing being through which one makes his way toward that end of perfection of gift which the Fathers and Doctors call Beatitude. Failing that drawing of our intuitive inclination to a proper end, one can hardly escape such despair as threatens Keats, "where but to think is to be filled with sorrow and leaden-eyed despair." Joyce at the end feared darkly such error: that as maker he had succumbed to fancy over the gift of liberating imagination. Pound, in the final fragments of his *Cantos*, feels forced to confess "I am not a demigod, / I cannot make it cohere" and to call for "A little light, like a rushlight / to lead back to splendour." *Splendour* here seems to touch, whether intended to do so or not, on Wordsworth's lament over having lost that "splendour in the grass," that halo of presence in being which is beyond the power of attribution.

Symbol, sign, has for a hundred years and more gradually turned mirror of the self, rather than a window opening the self to reality. For the most part, our poets, however much entrapped by confusions out of Cartesian idealism (a generic term we have said and not historical), continue disquieted by the entrapment in their own signs. That is why our age in its letters has been the Age of Melancholy, the Age of Alienation from being, the Age of Emotional Pathos. Such is a state of intellect little propitious to the highest prospects of art's celebrations of Beauty. Our "Romantic" poetry nevertheless, even in its failures, bears witness to a truth to be pondered beyond Beauty's allure. It bears witness to the timeless, continuing hunger in intellect stirred toward recovery of a key to open intellect to reality, both to its own reality and to the diversity of that modernist philosophical mystery, the Other, from which it senses its disturbing isolation. That opening may at last issue

upon the transcendent as intellect's proper causal end no less than its giving beginning. Such is, I believe, always the proper "future" of Thomism, which is not a future of temporal implication but a present still point in which the soul is reconciled to time past, passing, and to come. In such still points come visionary glimpses of an abiding Presence, which Eliot came to speak of as the "Word in the desert." Those glimpses, which is knowledge understood, however limited that knowledge and that understanding by intellectual finitude, is a glimpse of the reality of that Cause of intellect and of its journeying. We may well say *glimpse*, rather than *vision*, for such is our impatience that vision seems to promise a continuing resting of the intellectual eye upon truth. St. Thomas might well remind us that it is given only to the Eye holding all creation to rest in vision in what is metaphorically an unwavering and everlasting "seventh day." Granted only glimpses of that Presence, from Whom all things have (as Eliot say of those roses in a garden at Burnt Norton) the look of things that are looked at beyond our limited sight—granted only such glimpse of being seen as we struggle to see as struggle we must, we may be content to rest while journeying. One may, as Eliot found necessary be at once "still and still moving." Or, in Keats's version, one may find himself "being capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts," content in knowing if not fully understanding that all manner of thing shall be well at last.