

## *Maritain on Music: His Debt to Cocteau*

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Imagine for a moment the musically informed reader of 1927 consulting Jacques Maritain's *Art et scolastique* for aesthetic guidance. The index for proper names lists the following numbers of entries: for Bach, three; for Beethoven, two; for Chopin, one. So much for the "canon"! Now, note the entries for the "moderns": for Igor Stravinsky, four entries; for Erik Satie, five; for Richard Wagner, six. Surely, the reader would be astonished! Why, in a book about the perennial scholastic aesthetic, do the moderns get such a large piece of an admittedly small pie while Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin go away begging? The answer, I suggest, lies in Maritain's appropriation of Jean Cocteau's musical rhetoric for his principal project: namely, the reconstruction of anti-modernist Catholicism as the ultra-modernist movement of the Jazz Age.

### MARITAIN ON SATIE, STRAVINSKY, AND WAGNER

Let me begin with a passage from the original 1920 version of *Art et scolastique*:

The essential is not that the representation be exactly conformed with a given reality; it is rather that, through the material elements the beauty of the work, the clarity of a form should clearly shine, supreme and whole—of a form, and thus of *some truth*. . . . But if the joy of the beautiful work comes from *some truth*, it does not come from the truth *of the imitation as reproduction of things*; it comes rather from the perfection with which the work expresses or manifests the form, in the metaphysical sense of this word; it comes from the truth *of the imitation as manifestation of a form*. This is what is meant by the "formal" aspect of imitation in art: the expression or the manifestation, in a work harmoniously proportioned, of some principle of intelligibility

which shines forth. It is this act of expression which gives art its *joy of imitation*. This is also that which gives art its value of *universality*.<sup>1</sup>

In this context Maritain wants to distinguish between “imitation” in art as the “manifestation of a [metaphysical] form” and “imitation as a reproduction of things.” Apart from philosophical concerns, the cultural historian wants to note that Maritain’s entire cultural project—i.e., redefining Thomistic Catholicism as embracing the “ultramodern”—depends on this distinction. For if “imitation” is the “reproduction of things” in some realist or naturalist sense, then Maritain’s aesthetic theory is not going to be “universal”—not going to be able to account for 1920s artistic practice and its many forms of abstraction. This would be to reduce Neo-Thomism to a merely antiquarian system, and Maritain states his clear opposition to such reactionary irrelevance:

We love the art of the cathedrals, of Giotto and Angelico. But we detest the neo-Gothic and the pre-Raphaelism. We know that the course of time is irreversible; as much as we admire the century of Saint Louis, we do not want to *return to the Middle Ages* on that account, along an absurd path which certain penetrating critics generously accuse us of. We hope to see the spiritual principles and the eternal norms which medieval civilization has given us reproduced [*restituer*] in a new world, informing a new matter. [Medieval civilization gave us these eternal norms] in its best epochs, in a particular historical realization, superior in quality despite their enormous deficiencies, but definitely in the past.<sup>2</sup>

However, the originality of Maritain’s approach lies in making Thomism not an antiquarian system (as it was in Rome, for example, according to the complaint of young Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Paul VI<sup>3</sup>), but rather a “universal” system, capable of relevance in every historical epoch. By its very universality, he writes, Thomistic doctrine

infinitely overflows, into the past as well as into the future, the tightness of the present moment. It is not opposed to the modern systems as the past is related to the given present; but rather as the eternal is re-

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Art et scolastique* (Paris: Librairie de l’Art Catholique, 1920), hereafter cited as *AS 1920 Fr*, pp. 81–82 (emphases in original); Jacques Maritain, *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. John O’Connor (Ditchling, England: St. Dominic’s Press, 1923), hereafter *AS 1920 En*, pp. 86–87 (translation altered).

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Antimoderne* (1922), in *Jacques et Raïssa Maritain: Oeuvres Complètes*, eds. Jean-Marie Allion, Maurice Hany, Dominique and René Mougel, Michel Nurdin, and Heinz R. Schmitz (Paris: Éditions Saint-Paul, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 933–34 (translation mine; emphases in original).

<sup>3</sup> Philippe Chenaux, *Paul VI et Maritain: Les rapports du “Montinianisme” et du “Maritainisme”* (Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI, 1994), pp. 11–32, 97–100.

lated to the momentary. *Anti-modern* against the errors of the present time, it is *ultra-modern* for all the truths which are wrapped up in the time to come.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, for the sake of universality, Maritain *does not want* “imitation” as “reproduction of things.”

On the other hand, he *does want* “imitation” as the “manifestation of a form,” and “thus, of some truth.” For Maritain cannot maintain his position that art provides privileged access to reality unless it concern itself with something outside the subject—and it is precisely this claim of access to reality outside the self which made him so appealing to the youth who had survived the Great War. As Jean-Jacques Becker and Serge Bernstein have observed, the youth of the 1920s accused their positivistic and historicist elders not merely of having “obsolete ideas”—an accusation perhaps common to every classical generational conflict—but rather of having permitted an unjustifiable massacre by means of their attachment to “outmoded myths” [*des mythes dépassés*]. Thus, “realism” became the key word for this generation which set out to discard all the “outmoded ideologies” [*des idéologies dépassées*] by searching for the “real” prior to and underlying all social constructions. Surrealism became the dominant intellectual innovation of the 1920s, and the success of Maritain’s “critical realism” was due in large part to its attraction for those disillusioned by surrealism’s failure. Maritain himself appeals quite directly to this felt disappointment over “outmoded ideologies” when he writes acerbically,

It is well known, in fact, that Catholicism is as *anti-modern* by reason of its unshakeable attachment to the tradition as it is *ultra-modern* by reason of its boldness in adapting itself to the new conditions suddenly erupting in the life of the world. Is it necessary to remark, moreover, that today everything except Catholicism itself—even and perhaps above all those ideologies specifically modern (look at the Futurists, for example)—immediately appears to be old-fashioned and, as it were, a moon waxing full?<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Maritain, *Antimoderne*, p. 929 (translation mine; emphases in original).

<sup>5</sup> On the youth of the 1920s as “*une génération réaliste*” see Becker and Bernstein, *Victoire et frustrations, 1914–1929* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), pp. 390–95. On the attraction of Maritain for those disillusioned by surrealism, see Jean-Luc Barré, *Jacques et Raïssa Maritain: Les Mendians du ciel* (Paris: Stock, 1996), pp. 272ff.; *Correspondance Jean Cocteau-Jacques Maritain 1923–1963*, eds. Michel Bressolette and Pierre Glaudes (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), pp. 16ff; and Michel Bressolette, “Jacques Maritain et Jean Cocteau,” in *Jacques Maritain et ses contemporains*, eds. Bernard Hubert and Yves Floucat (Paris: Desclée, 1991), pp. 103–04. The Maritain quotation is from *Antimoderne*, p. 928 (translation mine; emphases in original).

Maritain's appeal to a disillusioned "realist generation" depended heavily on the promise he made of privileged access to a reality underlying mere surface appearances. An older generation of positivists and historicists had been satisfied with facts; a new generation desired truth. Thus, for philosophical as well as cultural reasons, Maritain's "form" being "imitated" must be an interior metaphysical one offering privileged intellectual access to the real, and not merely an epiphenomenal "shape" perceived only by the senses.

This philosophical move gains him entry into the heady air of 1920s neo-classicism, spearheaded by Cocteau's avant-garde, among others, which retrieves "classical" forms and ideals. As Maritain writes:

What makes the purity of the true classic is such a subordination of the matter to the light of the form . . . as admits into the work no material element except what is absolutely necessary to transmit this light [of the form] and which would otherwise dull or "debauch" the eye, the ear or the mind.<sup>6</sup>

Classical art expresses a "form"—not, as Maritain says, as a "reproduction of shape"—but rather "form" in the metaphysical sense, access to which gives art its "universal" value. Thus, the "classical" allows nothing "extraneous" or superfluous, nothing (as he says) except that "necessary to support or transmit this light" of the form. As examples of works which manifest and those which obfuscate such forms Maritain suggests the following:

Compare, from this point of view, in the order of thought, Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas to Luther or to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in the order of art the Gregorian melody or the music of Bach to the music of Wagner and Stravinsky.<sup>7</sup>

In Aristotle and St. Thomas as in Gregorian Chant and Bach, nothing obfuscates the form. On the other hand, Wagner is to Luther as Stravinsky is to Rousseau—all of them are confused and "debauch" the senses. Their bombast obfuscates the form; its intelligibility can neither shine through nor manifest itself. Those acquainted with Maritain's *Three Reformers* (1925) know that his invocation of Luther and Rousseau (the third "reformer" is Descartes) signals that extreme reaction for which he became known to his contemporaries as a "visceral antimodernist."<sup>8</sup> Richard Wagner, made popular in France through the *Revue Wagnérienne* as a focal

<sup>6</sup> *AS 1920 Fr.*, pp. 82–83; *AS 1920 En.*, p. 87 (translation altered).

<sup>7</sup> *AS 1920 Fr.*, p. 83; *AS 1920 En.*, p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> See Chenu, *Paul VI et Maritain*, pp. 26–27.

point for symbolism of every kind, became an object of contempt for those wanting to overcome what they perceived as *fin-de-siècle* decadence. As for Stravinsky, the Parisian première of his *Rite of Spring* provoked a riot at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on May 29, 1913; whether or not Maritain attended this performance, he was most certainly aware of its “scandal.”<sup>9</sup> Given Maritain’s idea of the “classic,” then, such a reactionary broadside against the overblown Wagner and Stravinsky makes sense. For him, plainchant and Bach convey something eternal and “universal” while Wagner and Stravinsky are hopelessly contingent and particular.

Well then, given the interior logic of the passage, how can we possibly account for two astonishing alterations in the 1927 edition of *Art et scolastique*? First, all reference to Aristotle, Aquinas, Luther, and Rousseau is erased and reads simply, “Compare, from this point of view, the Gregorian melody or the music of Bach to the music of Wagner and Stravinsky.”<sup>10</sup> The “visceral antimodernism” is suppressed.

Secondly, to what remains of this passage, Maritain appends the following note—not at the end as with the other one hundred-and-sixty endnotes, but rather as a retraction statement prominently displayed at the bottom of the page:

I regret having thus spoken of Stravinsky. All I had heard [when I wrote the first edition] was *The Rite of Spring*, and I should have perceived then that Stravinsky was turning his back on everything we find distasteful in Wagner. Since then [Stravinsky] has shown that genius conserves and increases its strength by renewing it in light. Exuberant with truth, his admirably disciplined work teaches the best lesson of any today of grandeur and creative energy, and best answers the strict classical “austerity” here in question. His purity, his authenticity, his glorious spiritual strength, are to the gigantism of [Wagner’s] “Parsifal” and the [“Ring” Cycle] as a miracle of Moses to the enchantments of the Egyptians.<sup>11</sup>

How can we explain this abrupt reversal from the 1920 text painting Stravinsky as the Wagnerian villain to this 1927 script: Stravinsky as the

<sup>9</sup> For Stravinsky and Wagner see Jay Scott Messing’s *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Research Press, 1988). For the *Rite of Spring* see the first chapter of Modris Eksteins’ *Rites of Spring: the Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Art et scolastique* (Paris: Louis Rouart et fils, 1927), hereafter cited as *AS 1927 Fr*, pp. 97–98; Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism: with other essays*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (New York: Scribner’s, 1939), hereafter *AS 1927 En*, p. 60 (translation altered).

<sup>11</sup> *AS 1927 Fr*, p. 98; *AS 1927 En*, p. 60 (translation altered).

miracle-making Moses leading the Chosen [French] People out of their musical enslavement to the Teutons? Even bracketing the melodrama, consider that during the Great War Stravinsky's music did indeed change: he began to incorporate elements like imported American ragtime rhythms! How then can we possibly account for Maritain's use of Stravinsky as the paradigm of "strict classical 'austerity'"? As the purveyor of "purity"? Of "authenticity" and "truth" and of "glorious spiritual strength"? All in all, Maritain could not have chosen a better representative of the cacophonous avant-garde unless he had chosen Erik Satie—which, of course, he does.

In the 1927 edition Maritain writes that, after an epoch of decadence, 1920s music is evolving to a "respect for genuine subordination" to the truth, to "obedience, to sacrifice." The villainous Wagner, continues Maritain, had led music astray. But "the example of Satie is teaching it once more a chaste honesty" while Stravinsky is teaching it "grandeur." Appealing to a realist generation, Maritain writes that "after so much sentimentality," the evolution of art now wants "*hard contact with stripped and naked reality [le réel dépouillé, dénudé]*."<sup>12</sup> In support of this appeal to "sacrifice" Maritain quotes Jean Cocteau, surely one of the most notorious figures of the postwar avant-garde (and hardly known for his "chastity"): "St. Thérèse of Lisieux says: *I prefer sacrifice to any ecstasy*. A poet ought to have these words tattooed upon his heart."<sup>13</sup>

Now, the musically informed 1920s reader, seeing Satie's name evoked along with Cocteau's, would immediately have remembered Satie's infamous collaboration with Cocteau and Picasso on the ballet *Parade*. Cocteau premiered *Parade*—with its sets by Picasso and music by Satie—as a benefit for the soldiers mutilated in war [*mutilés de guerre*] on May 18, 1917. Satie had scored *Parade* for an orchestra including, among other instruments, sirens, pistol shots, a lottery wheel, and a typewriter. After twenty minutes the audience jeered, hooted, and took to fist-fighting while shouting, "Krauts!," "Traitors!," and "Munich art!"<sup>14</sup> In a cacophony of this magnitude, what kind of obedience, sacrifice, subordination, chastity, and classical simplicity could Maritain possibly have been thinking about?

In short, how can we explain this astonishing paradox: that the artists

<sup>12</sup> AS 1927 Fr, pp. 185–86; AS 1927 En, pp. 120–21 (emphases added; translation altered).

<sup>13</sup> Jean Cocteau, *Letter to Jacques Maritain* (1926), in AS 1927 Fr, p. 338, n. 191; AS 1927 En, p. 231 (emphases in originals).

<sup>14</sup> See Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 115–26.

chosen by the “visceral anti-modernist” Thomist to represent best his vision of the scholastic aesthetic spirit would be Erik Satie and Igor Stravinsky?

### COCTEAU ON SATIE, STRAVINSKY, AND WAGNER

If we want to know the source of Maritain’s rhetorical uses of Wagner, Stravinsky, and Satie, I suggest we must look at Jean Cocteau’s own aesthetic work, *Le Coq et l’Arlequin*, which Fr. Charles Henrion brought to the Maritains.<sup>15</sup> Written in 1918 as an attempt to reaffirm Cocteau’s patriotism after the debacle of *Parade*, this book served as a manifesto for the post-War “neo-classical” movement in music. The rhetoric of classicism had been deployed by both the political Right and Left during the Great War both as a vehicle for mourning the unexpectedly large numbers of casualties as well as legitimization of France as a “Latin” culture. After the War, *néoclassicisme*—formerly a pejorative term in French musical circles—was reconstructed as the new authentically “Latin” aesthetic movement for a resurrected France. Specifically, it eventually came to mean (for French commentators) the music of Stravinsky as opposed to that of Berlin’s Arnold Schoenberg. Thus, the extreme jingoistic call in Cocteau’s *Le Coq et l’Arlequin* for “a French music for the French” purged of all “foreign influences” served the post-War purpose of inscribing neo-classicism within a larger nationalistic project—namely, a resurrected French culture.<sup>16</sup>

In the dedication to *Le Coq*, Cocteau sets up an opposition between the French cockerel (i.e., *le coq gaulois*, traditional emblem of the “French fighting spirit”) who reawakens with the morning sun and lives proudly in the full light of day. The cockerel, writes Cocteau, shuns the colossal because “he has *escaped from Germany [évadé d’Allemagne]*.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the Harlequin, a stock buffoon character in Italian opera, is constructed to represent German artists masquerading as Frenchmen. Cocteau writes: the Harlequin only comes out at night, prefers darkness and its dissimulating possibilities, hides his face behind a black mask, and wears a

<sup>15</sup> See *Jean Cocteau-Jacques Maritain Correspondance 1923–1963*, p. 63, n. 3.

<sup>16</sup> For classicism during the War see Martha Hanna’s chapter “The Classicist Revival” in *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers During the War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 142–66. For musical “neoclassicism” both before and after the Great War see Jay Scott Messing’s *Neoclassicism in Music*.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Cocteau, *Le Rappel à l’ordre*, in *Oeuvres Complètes de Jean Cocteau*, vol. 9 (Paris: Éd. Marguerat, 1950), hereafter cited as *Coq Arl Fr*, p. 13; Jean Cocteau, *A Call to Order: written between the years 1918 and 1926 and including “Cock and Harlequin,” “Professional secrets,” and other critical essays*, trans. Rollo H. Myers (New York: Henry Holt, 1926), hereafter *Coq Arl En*, p. 3. This phrase is italicized in the original.

"hodge-podge" costume made up of French and German scraps. As Cocteau observes acerbically in a footnote, the *Dictionnaire Larousse* gives as one connotation of Harlequin "a dish composed of various scraps" [*mets composé de restes divers*].<sup>18</sup> Like the Impressionist painters, the Harlequin for Cocteau is a German masquerading as a Frenchman! Hence, he is also a wartime traitor. Cocteau overlays this treason with biblical tones: "After denying the cock's crow, [Harlequin] goes away to hide." The allusion is plain: like St. Peter who denied Christ, the German Harlequin hears the French cockerel's crow at dawn and runs off to hide.

Given this primary opposition between pure French music and German music masquerading as French music, Cocteau goes on to consider three figures: Wagner, Satie, and Stravinsky.

First, Richard Wagner. For Wagner—pure unadulterated Teutonic colossalism—Cocteau has nothing but contempt. One of several vicious aphorisms dedicated to excoriating Wagner will suffice here:

There are certain long works which are short.

Wagner's works are long works which are long, and *long-drawn-out*, because this old sorcerer looked upon boredom as a useful drug for the stupefaction of the faithful.<sup>19</sup>

In short, Cocteau deployed Wagner as the symbol for all that was decadent and "anti-classical."

Second, Erik Satie. If Wagner is the melodramatic villain, Satie plays the rescuing hero. Cocteau establishes Satie's purity indirectly by painting the Impressionism of poor Claude Debussy in a vicious light. In a wonderfully illuminating passage Cocteau cites Satie's three *Gymnopédies*, those famous little sketches for piano meant to evoke the simple gracefulness of classical Greek gymnasts. Cocteau contrasts Satie's simple piano arrangements of these *Gymnopédies* with Debussy's impressionistic orchestral arrangements of them and then offers this critique:

Debussy has deviated: on account of the German ambush, he fell into the Russian trap. Once again, the [piano] pedal grounds the rhythm, creates a kind of fuzzy atmosphere favorable to short-sighted ears. Satie remains intact. Hear his 'Gymnopédies' so clear in their form and melancholy feeling. Debussy orchestrates them, confuses them, and wraps their exquisite architecture in a cloud. . . . The thick lighting-pierced fog of Bayreuth becomes a thin snowy mist flecked with impressionist sunshine. Satie speaks of Ingres; Debussy transposes Claude Monet "in the Russian style."

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Coq Arl Fr*, p. 22. *Coq Arl En*, p. 14.

You can't get lost in a Debussy mist as you can in a Wagner fog, but you can still catch cold.<sup>20</sup>

We see Cocteau's opposition clearly: Satie's piano arrangements, like the work of Ingres, are marked by extraordinary simplicity in composition and clarity in line. But when Debussy orchestrates Satie, he blurs the simple lines with lavish Romantic textures and transforms the classical into the impressionist—a Wagnerian fog flecked with a snowy Valhalla mist. Worse yet, it is Monet inflected *à la Russe*—"i.e., in the Russian style." Put pithily, "Debussy played [the piano] in French, but he used the Russian pedal."<sup>21</sup>

Cocteau's post-World War jingoism reserves special venom for such cross-breeding: "Russian music is admirable because it is Russian music," he says. "Russian-French music or German-French music is necessarily bastard [*forcément bâtarde*], even if it be inspired by a Stravinsky, a Wagner. . . . The music I want must be French, of France."<sup>22</sup> This harsh use of the word "bastard" is echoed by Maritain in a passage astonishingly similar to Cocteau's:

By reason of its subject and of its roots, [art] is of a particular age and of a particular country. . . . That is why in the history of free peoples the eras of cosmopolitanism are times of intellectual bastardization [*d'abâtardissement intellectuel*].<sup>23</sup>

Since both Cocteau and Maritain were large intellectual figures during a period of astonishing cosmopolitanism—Maritain himself marrying a Russian Jewish *émigrée*—this self-indicting passage about "bastardy" seems difficult to explain. The irrationality of Maritain's statement is compounded when one considers that Thomas Aquinas's great accomplishment was precisely the synthesis of ancient Greek, Biblical Christian, and medieval Islamic authors during an extraordinarily "cosmopolitan" epoch of thirteenth-century Paris. Perhaps following recent cultural history we should follow the connection between *irrational fantasies* and *unsettled identities*.<sup>24</sup> In this case, then, attention to uncertain *paternité* points to trauma: a postwar anxiety, perhaps, over both illegitimate wartime births as well as over an uncertain *patrie*.

<sup>20</sup> *Coq Arl Fr.* pp. 24, 39; *Coq Arl En.* pp. 16–17, 33 (altered).

<sup>21</sup> *Coq Arl Fr.* p. 38; *Coq Arl En.* p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> *Coq Arl Fr.* p. 24; *Coq Arl En.* p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> The italicized words indicate that portion of the 1920 text which Maritain completely suppressed in the 1927 edition. *AS 1920 Fr.* p. 106; *AS 1920 En.* p. 112 (altered); *AS 1927 Fr.* p. 128; *AS 1927 En.* p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> See for example Gavin I. Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 253–55, 291–305.

In any event, Cocteau's particularly ungracious aphorism directed against Debussy's Russian-French pedigree brings us to a genuinely Russian composer, Igor Stravinsky. In this 1918 edition, Cocteau was especially vicious to Stravinsky who only five years earlier had financially rescued him. Alluding to the Odysseus tale in which the singing of the Sirens lured ships to wreck themselves on the rocks, Cocteau writes:

The theatre corrupts everything, even a Stravinsky. . . . I should not like this paragraph to affect our faithful friendship [*sic!*], but it is useful to put our young compatriots on their guard against . . . these stout golden sirens who caused even so formidable a ship [i.e., Stravinsky] to change its course. . . . Stravinsky gets at us by other means than Wagner; he does not try to hypnotize us or plunge us in a semi-darkness; he hits us deliberately over the head. . . .<sup>25</sup>

Despite Cocteau's fond hopes that these remarks would not "affect our faithful friendship," Stravinsky took them very personally indeed and their friendship foundered. These remarks are from the 1918 edition—the edition Maritain had read when he wrote the first edition of *Art et scolastique*.

In 1924, however, Cocteau issued a new edition of *Le Coq* collected with several other essays and entitled it, significantly, *The Call to Order* [*Le Rappel à l'ordre*]. In this revision, he appended a note positioned at the bottom of the page, retracted his "unjust remark," and then directed the reader to his appendix entitled "Stravinsky: Stop the Press!": "This unjust phrase is obviously annulled by *A Soldier's Tale* which I did not know at the time [1918] and by all the present work of Stravinsky."<sup>26</sup>

As seen above, Maritain's retraction three years later, inserted in exactly the same manner at the bottom of the page, read:

I regret having thus spoken of Stravinsky [in 1920]. All I had heard was *The Rite of Spring*, and I should have perceived then that Stravinsky was turning his back on everything we find distasteful in Wagner.<sup>27</sup>

Maritain cites as his "turning point" the 1913 *Rite of Spring* ballet, clearly written during Stravinsky's "Russian" period. In citing the wartime *Soldier's Tale*, more ambiguously located on the cusp of Stravinsky's turn away from his Russian period to neo-classicism, Cocteau quite deliberately denies that *The Rite of Spring* carried the cultural meaning that Maritain gives it. Whatever this incongruity means, it seems unlikely that any al-

<sup>25</sup> *Coq Arl Fr*, p. 39; *Coq Arl En*, pp. 33–34.

<sup>26</sup> See "Stravinsky-Stop-Press!" (Appendix 1924).

<sup>27</sup> *Coq Arl Fr*, p. 40; *Coq Arl En*, p. 35; *AS 1927 Fr*, p. 98; *AS 1927 En*, p. 60 (translation altered).

leged change in Stravinsky's musical aesthetic provoked such a sea-change in this criticism on the part of Cocteau and Maritain. For this sea-change we must look to another kind of explanation.

In Cocteau's 1924 appendix, "Stravinsky—Stop the Press!" one line stands out in glaring relief. Recalling an incident in which Stravinsky translated a conversation from Russian to French, Cocteau writes:

For it is the first time I have ever observed this miracle . . . A case of oriental romanticism (with its uneasiness and savage upheavals) submitting to the discipline of Latin order.<sup>28</sup>

Once again the universal French mission civilizes the oriental savages! Stravinsky himself, the exotic Russian primitivist composer of *The Rite of Spring*, is saved by submission to "Latin order." Recent scholarship suggests that Cocteau is here engaging in a discourse common to early twentieth-century French imperialism: the "wrapping" of native cultures within the "high culture" of France provided a way of retaining the exoticism of primitivism for consumption while at the same time subordinating those cultures to the Empire's.<sup>29</sup> Thus "wrapped" and packaged, redeemed by Latin order, Stravinsky is welcomed back into the fold.

As Cocteau concludes, "Genius cannot be analyzed any more than electricity. You either have it or you don't. Stravinsky has it. . . ." <sup>30</sup> Or as Maritain echoes in his own rehabilitating note, "Stravinsky has shown that genius conserves and increases its strength by renewing it in light."<sup>31</sup> This mutual assessment of Stravinsky's "genius" after his turn from a "particular" nationalism to a "universal" neo-classicism—the precise timing over which Cocteau and Maritain mutually contradict one another—has less to do with aesthetic theory than it does with a French rhetoric of musical cultural meanings.

### REINVENTING THE ANTIMODERN AS THE ULTRAMODERN

Maritain's position as the "ultra-modernist" Thomist owed Cocteau at least a twofold debt: first, for his nationalist rhetoric of musical cultural meanings; secondly, for wider cultural legitimation.

<sup>28</sup> *Coq Arl Fr*, p. 56; *Coq Arl En*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 101–29; and Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900–1945* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 51–97.

<sup>30</sup> *Coq Arl Fr*, p. 56; *Coq Arl En*, p. 60 (translation altered).

<sup>31</sup> *AS 1927 Fr*, p. 98; *AS 1927 En*, p. 60 (translation altered).

A nationalist rhetoric carved out a meeting place where the French right and left could find common ground in the early twentieth century. Guillaume Apollinaire (the symbolist poet who coined the phrase “sur-réel”), André Gide (co-founder of the literary left’s *La Nouvelle Revue Française*), and Marcel Proust all read and admired Charles Maurras’s ultra-nationalist *Action Française* during the War.<sup>32</sup> Maritain consciously drew on this paradox: even after the 1926 papal condemnation of *Action Française*, Maritain appealed to both André Gide’s *Reflections on Germany* and Charles Maurras’s *Anthinéa* in order to legitimate his claim that the most “universal” is in fact what is most “national.”<sup>33</sup> As Maritain argued,

The most universal and most humane works are those which bear most openly the distinguishing mark of their country [*la marque de leur patrie*]. The age of Pascal and Bossuet was an age of vigorous nationalism. When France, at the time of Cluny’s amazingly peaceful victories, and in St. Louis’s reign, spread over Christendom an intellectual radiance most authentically French, then it was that the world knew the purest and freest International [Movement] of the mind, and the most universal culture.

Thus it would appear that a certain kind of nationalism—*political and territorial* nationalism—is the natural safeguard of . . . the very universality of intelligence and art.<sup>34</sup>

After the papal condemnation of Maurras in 1926, Maritain retained this powerful note but substituted the words “a vigorous political and territorial attachment to the nation” for “a certain nationalism—a political and territorial nationalism.”<sup>35</sup> One must wonder: why would he retain such a provocative note?

Nationalism, I suggest, provided the site where the “anti-modernist” Thomist and the “ultra-modernist” aesthetician could find a sacred union. On this nationalist ground, Cocteau’s musical aesthetic—a “particularist” French aesthetic which was, simultaneously, a call for a “universalist” Latin neo-classicism—nicely accommodated Maritain’s own seemingly contradictory appeals. This nationalist rhetoric of musical cultural meanings was the first debt that Maritain owed Cocteau.

<sup>32</sup> See Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 111. For Maritain’s collaboration with Maurras and Massis on the *Revue Universelle*, see Martha Hanna’s “Intellectuals and the Action Française: The Appeal of an Adversative Idiom for Jacques Maritain, André Gide, and Georges Bernanos” (Diss. Georgetown University, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> See notes 142 and 143 in all editions of *Art et scolastique*.

<sup>34</sup> *AS 1920 Fr*, pp. 106–07; *AS 1920 En*, pp. 112–13.

<sup>35</sup> *AS 1927 Fr*, p. 129; *AS 1927 En*, p. 79.

As for cultural legitimation, Cocteau's ambiguous version of the "avant-garde" provided an avenue by which Maritain's rhetoric of eternal universals might sound just as hip as jazz. As early as 1914, Cocteau's hesitation between a self-conscious modernism and anti-modernist reaction had revealed itself.<sup>36</sup> If Cocteau's avant-garde could sound a "call to order" for "Latin forms," this made it eminently malleable for Maritain's purpose of reconstructing the "antimodern" as the "ultramodern." For Cocteau as for Maritain, art does not "imitate" forms in the sense of reproducing shapes; that would condemn art to repetition of the past. Rather, the avant-garde dresses up eternal forms in the latest fashions. (One might even say that eternal forms are the precondition for the very possibility of inexhaustible novelty.) However, only the avant-garde artist can perceive the eternal; the masses hold ignorantly onto past representations. As Cocteau put it in bold capital letters:

**TRADITION APPEARS AT EVERY EPOCH UNDER A DIFFERENT DISGUISE,  
BUT THE PUBLIC DOES NOT RECOGNIZE IT EASILY  
AND NEVER DISCOVERS IT UNDERNEATH ITS MASKS.<sup>37</sup>**

This peculiar mix of avant-garde gnosticism with a neo-classical twist made Cocteau the ideal precursor for Maritain's project. Cocteau's avant-garde credentials offered ultra-modernist legitimation to what might otherwise have seemed yet another episode in reactionary Catholic literature stretching back to the 1880s.<sup>38</sup> With Cocteau's assistance, however, Maritain's project surprised expectations and created something quite radically new.

That project, to conclude, was the re-invention of pre-War marginal anti-modern Catholicism as the culturally central ultra-modernism—all this in service of a universal civilizing mission both embracing and expanding the traditional vocation of France. As Maritain wrote:

Speaking of the Athenian people, Charles Maurras wrote: "The philosophical spirit, quickness to conceive the Universal, permeated all their arts. . . . Once it yielded to this tendency, it put itself in perpetual communion with the human race. . . . The classical, the Attic, is the more universal in proportion as it is more austere Athenian—Athenian of an epoch and a taste better purged of all foreign influence. In the high moment when it was itself alone, Attica was the human race." *It*

<sup>36</sup> See Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-garde and the First World War, 1914–1925*, pp. 74–145.

<sup>37</sup> *Coq Arl Fr*, p. 32; *Coq Arl En*, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> See Richard M. Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution. The Catholic Revival in French Literature, 1870–1914* (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1965).

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*would appear that at the present time the French genius has a similar mission, but one compelling it to serve a more exalted universality than that of pure reason—the full catholicity of natural and supernatural truth.*<sup>39</sup>

Eternal Latin order dressed up as the Jazz Age: this, I suggest, is anti-modern ultra-modernism.

<sup>39</sup> *AS 1927 Fr*, pp. 324–25; *AS 1927 En*, pp. 220–21. The italicized words indicate the text which Maritain added after the papal condemnation to lessen the Maurasian tone. The 1920 final line, with the indicative “has” and not the subjunctive “would seem to have,” read: “French genius has, in modern times, analogous characteristics” (*AS 1920 Fr*, p. 177; *AS 1920 En*, p. 113).