

PASSAGE 4

From Plato to Tolstoy art has been accused of exciting our emotions and thus of disturbing the order and harmony of our moral life. Poetical imagination, according to Plato, waters our experience of lust and anger, of desire and pain, and makes them grow when they ought to starve with drought. Tolstoy sees in art a source of infection. Not only in infection, he says, is a sign of art, but the degree of infectiousness also the sole measure of excellence in art. But the flaw in this theory is obvious. Tolstoy suppresses a fundamental moment of art, the moment of form.

The aesthetic experience — the experience of contemplation — is a different state of mind from the coolness of our theoretical and the sobriety of our moral judgment. It is filled with the liveliest energies of passion, but passion itself is here transformed both in its nature and in its meaning. Wordsworth defines poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquility". But the tranquility we feel in great poetry is not that of recollection. The emotions aroused by the poet do not belong to a remote past. They are "here"-alive and immediate. We are aware of their full strength, but this strength tends in a new direction. It is rather seen than immediately felt. Our passions are no longer dark and impenetrable powers; they become, as it were, transparent. Shakespeare never gives us an aesthetic theory. He does not speculate about the nature of art. Yet in the only passage in which he speaks of the character and function of dramatic art the whole stress is laid upon this point. "The purpose of playing," as Hamlet explains, "both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as were, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." But the image of a passion is not the passion itself. The poet who represents a passion does not infect us with this passion. At a Shakespeare play we are not infected with the ambition of Macbeth, with the cruelty of Richard III, or with the jealousy of Othello. We are not at the mercy of these emotions; we look through them; we seem to penetrate into their very nature and essence. In this respect Shakespeare's theory of dramatic art, if he had such a theory, is in complete agreement with the conception of the fine arts of the great painters and sculptors.

(419 words)

Fine Art and its impact on Emotions

From earliest times art has been blamed of disturbing the moral life. According to Plato it enhances emotional experiences, when they should be suppressed. For Tolstoy art is an infection. But his theory is also flawed, because the experience of ~~mind~~ art occurs in a state of mind other than reality. For Wordsworth poetry is a ~~self~~ recollection of emotions. But in actual the emotions a reader feels do not belong to a past. They are present at the moment. In Shakespeare's theory of dramatic arts, he speculated that passion is not its own image or infection. For example in Shakespeare's play we are not influenced by the emotions of its characters. Hence we only go through these emotion and are not infected by them. In this way Shakespeare's theory aligns with the ~~can~~ fine arts conception.

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