

Fernando Pessoa

The aim of art is not to please.

The aim of art is not to please. Pleasure is here a means; it is not in this case an end. The aim of art is to elevate.

Before this principle then the famous question of art and morality is quite easy of solution. We do not elevate a thing by making it tend towards evil.

But is not then philosophy an art? Is not the aim of philosophy to elevate also? It is, for knowledge elevates — it cannot lower anyone. My definition of the end of art is then too wide, too extensive. Considering better, then, the aim of art is elevation of man by the means of beauty. The aim of science is the elevation of man by means of truth. The aim of religion is the elevation of man by means of good.

By this classification we can see how it is that religion means so much; how it is so hard to make men relinquish it. It is that religion is the practical art.

But I am far from attempting a defence of religion. Indeed it is my hope that we found a religion without God — a religion purely of man, one which has benevolence and kindness as its basis instead of faith and of belief.

By religion — be it noticed — I do not mean theology. Theology is, if it be anything, a science, forming a part of metaphysics. Theology, being this, is theory; religion is practical. The creed of Auguste Comte is more religion than theology — it is perhaps even more, for it has not the egoistic element of a care for self-salvation.

How do we explain the taste of so many authors for subjects which are coarse, unpleasant, repugnant? How are we to explain the (...) of Zola; how the “Black Cat” of Edgar Allan Poe?

One reason for this taste is, I believe, to be found in the scientific and analytic spirit of the author. Another consists in the originality of the subject. Is it in the cultivation of a novelty of sensations?

Is such a taste pathologic or is it not?

Do these poets and the psychologist [...]

Do they, as Baudelaire in his “Le voyage”, descend “au fond de l’enfer pour trouver du nouveau”?

In idealistic compositions the symbol must be vague. By vague, however, I do not mean obscure. Its meaning should be grasped as vague in its limits

and in its boundaries — in itself it must be clear. The idealistic symbol must resemble those lofty woman [?] creations of Shelley; the outlines, the contours of whose ineffable beauty are uncertain and undestined.

The satiric symbol, on the other hand, must be clear, quite clear. If it be vague it ceases to be striking.

1907?

Páginas de Estética e de Teoria Literárias. Fernando Pessoa. (Textos estabelecidos e prefaciados por Georg Rudolf Lind e Jacinto do Prado Coelho.) Lisboa: Ática, 1966: 26.