

Fernando Pessoa

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It is a curious circumstance that frustrated types easily fall into celebrity. A frustrated type is a man who is too clever to be merely a clever man and not clever enough to be a man of talent. They are a sort of American golden mean.

There are higher frustrated types — those that lie between wit and genius and between talent and genius. The frustrated type of the first sort is the man who lies between his age and universality and is universal through his time, not, as in pure genius, in opposition to it. (...).

Men like Dryden and Pope are (to a certain extent) frustrate types; they are geniuses, but they are geniuses of a frustrating age. In cases like Whitman and Wilde the same frustration is seen.

The perfect illustration of frustration is seen in what is called “free verse” — the verse like Whitman’s, which has genius but not enough genius. The expression is not verse, properly such, neither is it prose.

The frustrated type must be carefully distinguished from the imperfect type. Shakespeare is an imperfect type; he was a greater genius than he was, he made an imperfect use of qualities never before or since paralleled in the mental history of mankind. Whereas a Dante or a Milton uses all his powers, a Shakespeare or a Goethe does not. Types like Dryden and Pope, who are frustrate, are not imperfect: they are perfect in themselves, but they are perfect as frustrate.

In the imperfect type the weakness lies in the will, or in the character, if intellect be excluded from character. In the frustrate type, the weakness lies in the intellect itself, or, rather, in the form of it.

In Literature, the frustrate type is at once recognised by its expression. That expression lies in a form rather than in a manner. The moment a poet expresses himself always through the ten-syllable-couplet, like Pope, or through free verse, like Whitman, he reveals his frustration.

There would seem to be in men like Ben Jonson and Pope something like mere talent, not genius. Yet there is genius, except that that genius is talent.

The frustrate type offers the one chance of celebrity in its own age to men of genius. By putting genius into wit or into talent, these men become understood as geniuses by their own times. They become rightly understood as geniuses. That is to say, they must be distinguished from mere wits who may be called geniuses because of their cleverness, but who are not geniuses at all.

The imperfect type consists of two sub-types — the man who has genius and wit but no talent, thus jumping an intermediate step, Shakespeare and Goethe being the supreme examples; and the man who has simple genius, without the balancing element of either talent or wit, as in the case of Blake. These are the strange singers (. . .).

A case like Poe. Poe had genius. Poe had talent for he has great reasoning powers, and reasoning is the formal expression of talent. (?)

Wit is divided into three types — wit proper, reasoning and criticism; talent into two types — constructive ability and philosophical ability; genius is of only one type — originality. The three mental degrees form a pyramid.

When there is genius without either talent or cleverness, the genius becomes consubstantial with insanity. This is the case of men like Blake. They present a universality; else they would not be geniuses, but mere madmen; but they present, by the very nature of their case, a limited universality, they figure an experience of all times, but common in all times to a very few men in each. These men, being geniuses, become immortal, but they will always be immortal at home, where they will not be seen unless they be visited. A Blake or a Shelley can never appeal to the generality of any age; they have the beauty of rarities rather than the beauty of perfect things. They may become, at one time or another, so long as that time is not theirs, very widely popular, but they will become so only by suggestion, decent coterieness, critical excitement.

Out of the diverse unions of any two or more of these six qualities and the diverse degrees of any quality in the union, are all mental types evolved.

We have types like Poe — genius and one element (reasoning) of cleverness. (His philosophical ability was a fiction, got out of dreams, and this is shown by his incapacity to reason clearly on philosophical matters, in spite of his admirable reasoning powers. His criticism, too, is false; it is built out of reasoning, as in his celebrated self-delusion of the building of "The Raven", no very remarkable poem, by the bye). We have types like Lamb, genius and one element (wit). We have types like Coleridge — genius and criticism. — All these men who balance genius with only one of the qualities of cleverness are on the verge of madness; and the three cases which serve as examples show this very clearly.

It must not be supposed that mental types describable by the union of the same elements are necessarily alike. Genius is of several types and wit, reasoning (least) and criticism of several types too. Thus, Coleridge is a union of genius and criticism; but Wilde is also a union of genius and criticism.

(Wrong: Wilde had both wit and criticism)

Analyse all this well. Another hypothesis:

Cleverness: a) power of expression, b) power of comparison, c) power of reasoning.

Talent: a) philosophical ability, b) constructive ability.

Genius: a) originality, only.

s. d.

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