

Fernando Pessoa

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All art is the result of a collaboration between feeling and thought; not only in the sense that reason works, in building the work of art, upon elements which feeling-supplies, but also, and it is this that now concerns us, in the sense that the very feeling upon which reason thus works, and which is the matter on which reason puts form, is a special kind of feeling — a feeling within which thought collaborates.

Now thought may collaborate with feeling in three ways. It may be the basis of that feeling; it may interpret that feeling; and it may mix directly with that feeling, so as to intensify it by complexity. The first manner of feeling is that of classical art, the second that of the romantics, the third that which is peculiar to those artists, who have been described as decadent.

The true classical artist — leaving, as it does not concern us, the discipline and constructive reason he employs, for this is a formal and not a material element — thinks his poem first, and then feels on the basis of that thought. We can find quite near to our times some excellent examples of this: as Alfred de Vigny's "Moïse", which is patently an idea worked out through emotion; as Arnold's "Scholar Gipsy", as Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven" (so little classical in anything else except its basis); as Wordsworth's great Ode. It is not necessary to add that all great art is classical, even lyrically; for no art is great if it do not touch our mind at all points, both in feeling and in reason. This no poem does as the classical poem, thus composed. While, in its development, it wakes our feeling, it wakes it only that such feeling may give life to the immanent idea which, when the poem is fully read, completely emerges. No great lyrical poem was ever composed except on this reasoned or instinctive scheme.

The real decadent art is that of the romantics. Here the point of departure is feeling; intellect is used to interpret that feeling. Romanticism is nothing else. Hence the intolerable waste stretches of Hugo, where one trite or feeble feeling is drawn out by a subsidiary application of intellect, till the reader is tired; for the underlying sentiment cannot, being trite and vulgar, bear so

lengthy a development, and the subsidiary thought (besides its lie to human nature, for intellect, though later in evolution, is primary in all the higher life) can do no more than turn round and round the central emptiness of real inspiration. Take, for an instance, Hugo's "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre": this poem should be about one fifth of its real length, for the central feeling does not admit the rational development, and, as the feeling cannot admit it and yet the rational development is nevertheless made, the result is that most of that rational element is out of touch. . .

The system of mixing thought and feeling, though peculiar to decadents, is only really decadent when intellect is used to interpret the interpenetrated feeling; when it is used (as at first seems most decadent) to stimulate that feeling, it is used exactly as in the classicists. . .

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