

LITERARY ART AND MORAL VALUES

by *Radoslav A. Tsanoff*

I should state clearly the basic point of view from which this discussion will proceed. It is the view of the normally integral character of human nature. Our bodies are rightly described as organisms, in which every part is truly and organically related to other organs and to the entire bodily constitution. Eyes, ears, brain, lungs, heart, hands, and feet do not operate each on its own but always in some active correlation. Likewise with every other aspect of our being. Of course, we may and we do distinguish our various activities—sense-perceptions, emotions, rational processes, imaginative creative activities, volitions. But these are all related to the character of our personality. We may and should distinguish them, but they cannot be separated and isolated from each other. And the more important is the activity which we are considering, the more thoroughly and vitally it is related to the other activities and aspects of our whole nature. This integral view of personality is essential to any adequate understanding of ourselves, although we often tend to forget it. So it is necessary to remind ourselves of it, and perhaps one profit of our discussion will be to emphasize this truth about human personality.

Critical thinking should grasp the distinguishing character of the arts without isolating them from the rest of experience, by recognizing the relation of art to the other human activities. In our age the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce undertook to point out the essential character of art in his *Breviary of Aesthetic*. This work has especial interest at Rice University, for it was first presented as a series of lectures at the opening of the Rice Institute, in October, 1912. Croce asked: "What is Art?" and proceeded to answer the question by a fourfold negation of statement of what art is not. First, he said, art is not a physical fact; it is not a material thing or object. Second, art is not a utilitarian act; its essential feature is not its usefulness or pleasurable quality. Third, it is not conceptual knowledge; it is not meant primarily to teach or instruct us. And fourth, it is not moral activity; it is not an edifying or reforming process or

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product, either individual or social. What is it, then? Croce answered: Art is vision, contemplation, and essentially it is expression.

Let us underline this word, expression. Note that expression is a phase of almost any human experience, and in the interest of clarity we must strive to avoid vague all-inclusiveness when we use it in aesthetics. To describe art more specifically, we require some qualifying terms, such as imaginative expression, or an expression of some aspect or object of experience with creative form and design, or an expression which reveals some significant slant or vision, or else some emotional tone of creative intelligence.

We are critically concerned here with the manner, the object, and the content of artistic expression. These three preserve some common features in all the various forms of art, but we observe also important differences. Some of the characteristics which Croce rightly refused to regard as the central essentials of art do actually color and qualify some particular forms of art more than others. While aesthetic value cannot be reduced basically to a judgment of utility, function must surely enter in the plan, production, and appraisal of a work of architecture. Many different designs may be beautiful, each in its place and for its purpose, but could you imagine an architect designing the Rayzor Hall of Humanities, alongside our Fondren Library, as a Swiss chalet? And while art may not be defined essentially as a physical fact, not only a cathedral but also a painting or a statue do have a certain physical objectivity.

Likewise the intellectual content or reference, what the work of art means or connotes: it is not the kernel of all artistic expression, yet in many works of art it is an important element. You can spread an Oriental rug of geometric figures in church or synagogue or mosque or Buddhist temple; but a similar indiscriminate distribution of painted or sculptured Madonnas in Mohammedan or Hinduist shrines would be precluded artistically as well as religiously. In the rich field of our complex and versatile mental life, artistic expression is bound to reflect, in various degrees, this or that phase of human character and experience: to include some but to neglect or subordinate others.

In this discourse the main attention will be devoted to Croce's fourth statement of what art is not, namely, moral activity. If aesthetic expression, which pervades and enkindles the creative life of the imagination, touches and is somehow affected in its various forms by the other phases of our experience, can moral import be entirely alien to art? Surely, art cannot be altogether neutral or resistant to the moral values which form so vital a part of our humanity.

This moral concern and involvement may be relevant in certain forms of art only incidentally or scarcely at all, but in others it may be of vital

importance. We should have no zeal for subjecting arabesques or mosaics to moral appraisal; on the other hand, an utter exclusion of moral considerations in the appraisal of a tragedy would be tragic indeed. Although we may not rule out as entirely unreasonable an inquiry into the moral elements in the artistic worth of certain paintings or statues, and even more directly into the moral springs and currents of musical art, our direct concern on this occasion will be with literary art and moral values. We should explore some of their interrelations.

The first important discussion of the interplay of moral and aesthetic values is that of Plato. Plato's reflections on this subject proceed in two directions; or rather on two levels, and later thought has given one of them more than its share of attention and criticism. Plato's first principle in his philosophy of life is the principle of harmonious realization and fulfillment of all sides of human nature, with the right distribution of emphasis. The perfection of man consists in his recognizing the highest values and giving them first place in his life, in his keeping less important goods subordinate, and in his rejection of low or corrupting inclinations.

Plato's ideal of human character was the achievement of rational harmony, but his examination of human nature disclosed many conflicting interests and capacities. How are these to be correlated intelligently? Men are creatures of desires, moved by appetites and passions which cannot be suppressed altogether but which must be controlled and moderated, lest in their intemperate indulgence they lure us to dissipation and ruin. We are also stirred by a dynamic of will-energy or mettle; it drives us to action and is a prime determinant of our vigorous life of achievement. But this energetic sweep of our powers can prove destructive if it is not guided in the right direction. Plato therefore emphasized the need of rational direction of our active will, to keep us from impetuous plunging into disaster. We need the dominance of reason to control our appetites and passions and to direct our will-energy in its onward drive.

The life of excellence must have this quality of harmony and radiant truth, without confusion or misdirection or corruption of purposes and satisfactions. It must be a life of temperance, courage, and wisdom. Its essential characteristic is the due recognition of all our powers and interests, in rational harmony. So Plato called the chief virtue of his practical philosophy of life "justice": giving everything its due.

The development of this philosophy naturally raises the question: In such a well-ordered life, what is to be the role of poetry and of the arts generally? Plato gives a double answer to this question. As a severe critic of many corrupting and pernicious influences of poetry and art, he advocates moral censorship of the arts in his ideal republic. A superficial reader may be led to infer that Plato was unresponsive aesthetically, but

this would be altogether unwarranted. Plato is the supreme artist of philosophical style, and he is critical of some forms of art just because he was intensely conscious of the great power of art and the high function of true beauty. So he wrote: "Let our artists be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful; then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from the earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason. . . . And when a beautiful soul harmonizes with a beautiful form, and the two are cast in one mould, that will be the fairest of sights to him who has eyes to see it."

This is Plato's ideal for poetry and the arts: the expression, through the creative imagination, of a true insight into nature and human character, without shallow or perverse oneness, without distortion or exaggeration. This is the philosophical expression of the Classical spirit: balanced, harmonious, rational contemplation and expression.

Against this high vision which he entertained for poetry and the arts Plato denounced artistic corruptions. He saw corruption in the arts of his time, but he probed and exposed taints even in Hesiod and Homer. These are great poets, and Plato acknowledged Homer as the greatest of all, but he felt that we must resist the lure of their mighty speech when they express misleading ideas of human character or traditional but unworthy views of divine perfection. We cannot allow any poet, not even Homer, to lead us astray, especially our youth who start their education with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Plato's views involve us in the essential issues of our problem. We should agree with Plato that art is not mere amusement of oneself or others. For better or worse, it is a powerful force in our lives and therefore it is a matter of great importance and concern. But I doubt if we share his view that poets and dramatists should be subjected to moral censorship of their works. We ask: Who is to do the censoring and by what standards? And further and more to the main point, we may question whether poetry, or aesthetic values generally, should be subordinated to explicitly moral values. The issues involved in our problem seem to be of two sorts; the proposed solutions are also twofold, and they do not have equal merit.

First, we may distinguish moral and aesthetic values and question the warrant for subjecting literary works to moral judgment. Against such proposed censorship some men have always proclaimed the autonomy of literature and the arts to play their own roles in human experience, without intrusion or dictation by any other concern, intellectual or moral. But there is a second way of looking at our problem, in which the alternatives

would require revision. We may start by recognizing the ideal integrity of our higher life, in which the various distinguishable values—intellectual, aesthetic, moral, religious—are actually in continual interplay. Each of these values reflects and influences the others, and defective development in any of them would affect the others adversely. A narrow or shallow intellectual life would be reflected in a one-sided morality or a routine art. A stiffly conformist or prudish morality would be intolerant of intellectual critical reconstruction as well as of artistic freedom and utmost expression. A willful literary or rampant artistic imagination would be unresponsive to sober rational appeal or moral protest. Sound judgment here cannot be imposed arbitrarily by any one of these three values upon the others, but should express the sovereign worth of spiritual integrity that should guide all three of them.

Let us now examine these two views of the interplay of morality and art. Our choice to deal more specifically with literature is justified here, because the literary arts—poetry, novel, drama—deal directly with human character and experience, find their expression in ideas and language, and thus are involved more definitely with moral problems. As a proposal to subject literature to an explicitly moral judgment, a moralistic aesthetic, we may consider Tolstoy's work, *What is Art?* Tolstoy proposed both a definition and an evaluation of art. A work of art, in his view, is the effective imaginative communication of feelings. This emotional contagion of a poem, a novel, a drama, may be good or bad art, Tolstoy maintained, depending upon the kind of emotion which is expressed and communicated. A work of literary art which transmits corrupt feelings is bad art, and the best art is that which arouses the highest feelings, namely, the religious emotions—love of God and loving sympathy with our fellowmen.

From this point of view Tolstoy appraised literature as morally and socially binding or else as a disruptive force. Against any exclusive, morbid, erotic, or otherwise perverse and corrupt literature, he championed preeminently two kinds of literary works: those which, like the folksongs and tales of popular tradition, express with simple clarity the feelings, the joys and sorrows of mankind; and those which, like the inspired words of prophets and saints, rouse in men the supreme emotions of moral regeneration and religious devotion. As we may surmise, a great deal of famous literature, by this moralistic standard, was rejected as unworthy. On his top shelf of good literature, Tolstoy put works of lofty humanitarian appeal, like Schiller's *Robbers* and Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, along with *The Christmas Carol* and *Adam Bede* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In his old age Tolstoy passed severe judgment on many of his own works. *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* could not pass his moral test, and he would retain as his own choice writings only some of his tales of

universal popular tone which any peasant could understand, and his stories of moral and religious appeal: "God Sees the Truth," "Walk in the Light." This is Tolstoy's conclusion: "The destiny of art in our time is to transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth that well-being for men consists in their being united together, and to set up, in place of the existing reign of force, that Kingdom of God, that is of love, which we all recognize to be the highest aim of human life."

In spite of the lofty idealism of Tolstoy's moral outlook and his deeply religious plea for human betterment and fellowship in peace and justice, can we follow him in his moralistic judgment of literary art? The artist may protest that his artistic function is imaginative expression to the utmost. The poet, the novelist, the dramatist are not, as artists, impelled either by a moral or an immoral motivation. Their works are not meant explicitly to arouse either noble or corrupt emotions. Artists are not intentionally either reformers or seducers. Their works are echoes and visions across the entire gamut of human experience, luminous or dark, noble or ignoble.

What the artist finds objectionable in a moralistic aesthetics, is the presumption of the moralist to bring literature and the other arts before his own court of justice, with himself as moralizer sitting at the bench and pronouncing judgment. By what warrant can we thus magisterially subordinate aesthetic values to moral values? To the moralist's severe judgment of his works, the artist may well reply: "I may not conform to your moral rules, but let me tell you that you do not meet my artistic standards. You are dull and rigid and unresponsive to so much of human experience which arouses me with its living imaginative appeal."

This counterblast from the artist at the moralistic judge of art is not altogether astray, but it also misses the mark. The artist may rightly resist moralistic censorship, but can he proceed as if his work had no bearing on the other values of life? Artist and moralist alike must recognize that there is a court of value judgments. It is the court of the ideal integrity of our higher life, and upon its true verdicts depend our fulfillment and our perfection as human beings. Before that court all values—morality and art and intellectual activity and religion—have to be appraised in their bearing and mutual influence on each other and in their right or wrong contribution to the true fruition of our character.

The resistance to subjecting a literary work to a moral or rather to a moralizing judgment does not warrant the dismissal of any moral considerations in our appraisal of literature. For good or for ill, literature itself is a great moral force. It affects morality, and our appraisal of it naturally includes moral considerations. The recognition of these moral bearings of art, without unwarranted moralizing, was expressed significantly by the

German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller. In his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* Schiller definitely rejected any edifying or reforming motivation of the artist. As his own poems and dramatic works turned from their early spirit of romantic revolt towards classical balance and serenity of human outlook, he was impressed by the important distinction between the right direction which great and good art may give to our thought, feeling, and action, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, any specific artistic propaganda, which he resisted as inappropriate in literature.

A poem, a drama is the play of the imagination; it is the free expression of our life and character. When that expression is not forced by extraneous motives of any sort, utilitarian or moralistic, and when it is not distorted by wayward impulses or corrupt appetites but achieves integrity of personal utterance, the aesthetic experience may and does act as a morally cultivating power, in the full sense of the term "moral." Schiller emphasized his conclusion that aesthetic refinement is essential to the attainment of moral character. Moral progress is within our reach when in our imaginative responsiveness we rise from the common sensual appetites and vulgar feelings to aesthetic perception of the beautiful. "When we find in a man the signs of a pure and disinterested esteem, we can infer that this revolution has taken place in his nature and that humanity has really begun in him."

Shelley took a similar view of the problem in his essay, *A Defence of Poetry*. There and also elsewhere in his works, as for instance in the *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley avowed his "passion for reforming the world." But he would not permit this passion to direct his creative work as a poet: "Didactic poetry is my abhorrence." He maintained a dual truth: poetry is not meant to inculcate morals, but it does advance the moral perfection of mankind. The effect of poetry is to awaken and enlarge the mind; the great poet's inspired speech can arouse our love for the beautiful in thought and in action; poetry enriches our higher life imaginatively. "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others. . . . The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause."

Let us pursue this line of thought further. A poet cannot assume the role of the moralist, the reformer, or the propagandist of any sort. But on the other hand he cannot be morally dull or corrupt. If he is really a great poet, his creative imagination will be the utterance of deep insight that reaches through the whole range of human life; it must be expression of moral organization and integrity of character. Without any explicit teaching or admonition, by his poetry itself, he will appeal to our inmost

nature, he will stir our imagination to fuller integrity of all-human response. Men that read poetry of this sort are not merely entertained, nor yet are they lured and seduced into wayward sensuality. They are deepened and expanded spiritually. With quickened spirits they can face their own lives more humanely, with a more mature imagination. How can a poem be great if it stiffens or corrupts our spirit? Truly lofty poetry redeems mankind from dull narrowness and vulgarity and corruption of sense and hardness of heart and softness of thought.

We may note that in this discussion of the moral dynamic of great poetry we are moving towards a deeper understanding of morality as well as of art. The common view of morals is apt to limit it to certain specific areas of conduct reflected in the conventional virtues and vices. When we call anyone moral or immoral we are apt to be understood as speaking, in one way or the other, of that person's honesty, truthfulness, sexual uncontamination, fair dealing. Qualities of thought or taste or refinement or creative expression or spiritual vision may enter into our total evaluation of a person, but traditional judgment scarcely regards them as essentially moral in connotation. My mind may be shallow or dull; my taste may be vulgar and my manners coarse; I may be bigoted and superstitious. Your criticism of me in all these respects may not alter your esteem for me as, just the same, a good moral person. Observe now: is it not this limited view of morality which is often expressed in moralistic censure of certain types of literature and art?

More thorough ethical reflection may lead us to a deeper insight into the nature and range of morality. The process of maturing moral activity is the process of the overall organization of human values and the right grading of them according to their relative worth. Ethics has been defined concisely as the science of what matters. Morality, in the full sense of that term, should not be restricted to a certain specific province of choices and actions. It is concerned with the direction and fulfillment of personality across the entire gamut of human experience: in work and in play, in appetites and satisfactions individual and social, in cooperation and conflict, in intellectual activity, artistic creative expression, religious devotion. All of these values play their respective roles in the fulfillment or frustration of personality, and all of them concern morality.

What we are emphasizing here is the importance of recognizing the integrity and the correlative character of the higher life of values. This has been called the principle of the identity of ideals. The term may be misleading. Art is not identical with morals, nor is either of them to be equated with intelligence. While we should not separate intelligence, art, and morality, they are clearly distinguishable. Any part of our experience may become for us a matter of inquiry and understanding, an inspiration

to creative expression, or a problem of choice between alternatives in conduct. And in any one of these three ways the experience in question may proceed to great fulfillment of ourselves or else to frustration. What is really important in this or in any other experience is not what particular value engages us prevalingly, nor whether we shift our emphasis from one value to another, but whether our experience in question proceeds to consummation or to breakdown. What matters preeminently is not so much whether we are engaged in thought or in creative song or in choice of action, but rather this, how we think and sing and act.

The characteristic response of the intellectual, the poetic, or the moral side of our personality is likely to be expressed preferentially on different occasions. Galileo at his telescope observing the moons of Jupiter, and Galileo before his judges of the Inquisition: here is the same personality proceeding to different self-expressions: an intellectual adventure of the mind in the one case, a personal crisis in the other. We have been told that there is some discovery in each artist's invention and some invention in every scientific discovery. So Weierstrass wrote that "a mathematician who is not somewhat of a poet will never be a perfect mathematician." Poincaré explicitly stated that in the formulation of a theory a great scientist is moved not only by logical rigor but also by a certain alert responsiveness to order and harmony. He called it a "feeling of mathematical beauty and elegance," analogous to artistic perfection. I call your attention to these kinships where few of us would be likely to look for them, the kinship of poetic inspiration and mathematical reasoning.

In the light of this broad discussion of the distinctiveness but also of the interrelation of the principal values, the problem of literary art and moral values can be considered in a clearer perspective. We have been told: "As a man thinketh, so is he." We may add: so he feels, so he imagines, so he acts. These are all in various ways correlative. Was it Plotinus who wrote: "A great contemplation makes a great object of contemplation?" We may cite here Montaigne's appraisal of the Italian Renaissance historian Francesco Guicciardini. Montaigne pays tribute to Guicciardini's candid and forthright accounts of the men whose careers he reports in his memoirs. But Montaigne also writes: "I have noted this, that of so many souls and actions that he judges, so many motives and plans, he never refers a single one to virtue, religion, and conscience, as if these qualities were wholly extinct in the world; and of all actions, however fair in appearance they may be of themselves, he throws the cause back onto some vicious motive or some profit. It is impossible to imagine that among the infinite number of actions that he judges there was not a single one produced by the way of reason. No corruption can have seized men so universally that someone would not escape the conta-

gion. This makes me fear that his taste was a bit corrupted; and it may have happened that he judged others by himself." This passage has been chosen deliberately from Montaigne, for every reader of his *Essays* knows that he is without any prudery or conventional conformity, that he is in fact one of the "robustious" writers, not all of whose pages would bear reading aloud. And precisely he, Montaigne, notes that Guicciardini's portrayal of men often betrays his own warped outlook on life.

A poet's imaginative vision and version of human life reflects the range of his own sight and insight. We should be very clear at this point. It is true that intellectual grasp and imaginative expression may not be equally developed in a mind. You would not expect rigorous logical exposition from John Keats or beautiful poetry from Charles Darwin. But whatever view or meaning of life is expressed imaginatively by a poet must needs reflect the range and depth of his thinking, such as it is. He cannot reveal more than he sees. In the aesthetic enjoyment which we experience in reading a supreme poet, Shakespeare, we may perceive as Coleridge tells us that "the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war embrace."

Note this deeply revealing quality of great poetic expression. We may cite an instance from an early scene in *Macbeth*. In his conversation with Lady Macbeth, Macbeth tells her about his meeting with the witches and of their prophecy that he is to become king of Scotland. Then he informs her of the King's projected visit to their castle: "Duncan comes home tonight." She asks: "And when goes hence?" Macbeth replies: "Tomorrow as he purposes." With only three words, Shakespeare has disclosed Macbeth's whole soul and state of mind, what he is half planning but not yet ready to put into words. The marvel is not only the poetic one of expressing it all in three words, but the mastery of insight and thought, to realize that more than those three words could not have been truly said at that moment.

This natural interplay of thought and imagination in mental activity, of a higher or a lower rank, may be seen even more convincingly in the relation of imaginative expression and moral insight. For our moral judgments are verdicts; they have an emotional tone of advocacy or rejection; beyond formulation, they flow easily into living imaginative utterance. We need not proceed to extreme unwarranted emphasis here and deny any intellectual insight or validity to moral judgment. But surely, from the aspect of logical reflection, we can see the kindred tone of the moral and the aesthetic consciousness.

Shakespeare, we are told, held the mirror to nature, but that mirror of imaginative utterance was not a morally neutral mirror. It did not reflect Othello and Iago and Desdemona all three in morally indifferent valuation, nor does it arouse in us a morally indifferent response. We need not

her hands and saying, 'How happy we are now!' And Alexey Vronsky was there, too; and he, too, was her husband. And she was marvelling that it had seemed impossible to her, was explaining to them, laughing, that this was ever so much simpler, and that now both of them were happy and contented. But this dream weighed upon her like a nightmare, and she awoke from it in terror."

Let us not miss the point here. I am not speaking of pornography, which is to be condemned not only as immoral but as bad art by any standard, because in it literature is used as a means to wholly inartistic and meretricious purposes. By the same token, on the opposite end of the line, we must condemn also misdirected literary work which has deliberately edifying or tractarian purposes. The intentionally goody-goody must be rejected with the designedly corrupt and licentious.

We say that imaginative vision and utterance is bound to reflect the poet's or artist's intellectual perspective, and what is more closely considered here, his moral outlook on life. The poet holds his mirror to life; and as is his mirror so will be his reflection. And the quality of the mirror, the clarity and range of the poet's moral insight, are tested more severely in certain reflections than in others. Even so you can take good pictures of twilit or misty scenes with a photographic lens of a high quality but not with others. The kind of picture you take describes the sort of subject which you are photographing but also the sort of camera that you have, and your mastery of it. Human lives have dark, cavernous, and chaotic depths and deviations where we are all apt to go astray. Even Dante in his portrayal of Hell felt quandaries for his readers as for himself:

O ye who have sound intellects, observe
The doctrine which is here, hiding itself
Beneath the veil of these unwonted verses.

The literary artist is not barred from any cavern or swamp or abyss of human lives, but precisely in these perilous regions he needs his surest footing. He may be portraying the bedlam madhouse of life, but there above all he himself needs sanity. All the way through, the quality and rank of artistic works must be evaluated by the quality and range, the clarity and depth of insight, the balanced and upright organization of moral values which have found imaginative expression in the poem or novel or drama or whatever other work of literary art we may be considering.

In objection to this sort of artistic appraisal, it may be urged that all sides of human nature and all human experiences are equally natural and equally available for artistic expression from any point of view whatever. But the very first principle of evaluation is that values are not all on a par. Some are better than others, and to recognize and respect their true

hierarchy is the essence of wisdom. The magpie may sing just as naturally as the nightingale, but the magpie is no nightingale. Grunts and hiccoughs are as natural as songs, but we rank them differently. Chiselled on one of the tablets on the court façade of our Lovett Hall at Rice are the words of Plotinus: "Love, beauty, joy, and worship are forever building, unbuilding, and rebuilding in each man's soul." These values are not the same, but in the life of spiritual fulfillment they are achieving some real harmony. So the artistic activity does not pursue the same path as the moral or the intellectual, yet these three paths do not point in opposite directions. They express three distinguishable but not alien and conflicting ways in the perfecting of our higher life.

No mind, not even the greatest, is always moving on its highest level. This is true intellectually, artistically, or morally. Aristotle was the most encyclopedic master of knowledge in classical antiquity, but his mistaken geocentric view of the world retarded the progress of astronomy for almost two thousand years. Homer is the unchallenged lord of all epic poets, yet his Roman readers observed that sometimes he also nods. There are pages in the works of some of the greatest novelists, or dramatists, which are morally dubious or quite astray. These occasional lapses of the supreme artists are simply regrettable. They provide no warrant for our approval of similarly defective writing by lesser men. Neither intellectually nor artistically nor morally is an author to be esteemed because forsooth his work can compare with the worst pages of the great masters. Our problem of evaluation can be solved only by appeal to right principle and not by a parade of impressive names. Geocentric astronomy was and is invalid despite Aristotle's authority to the contrary; the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" are often dull poetry, even though their author was Wordsworth who at his best is in the very front rank of English song; and profligacy is profligacy even when it is Baudelaire's. The Gospel test abides: "By their fruits ye shall know them"; and we have all seen rotten apples on the finest trees.

Just as in his thinking or in his moral conduct so in his art, a person may be moving towards fulfillment and perfection or towards frustration and corruption. At the height of the Italian Renaissance a young mind of genius, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, expressed a vision of human destiny in words with which we may close this discourse on Literary Art and Moral Values: "The Creator said to Adam: 'I have set thee in the midst of the world, that thou mayest the more easily behold and see all that is therein. I created thee a being neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal only, that thou mightest be free to shape and to overcome thyself. Thou mayst sink into a beast, or be born anew to the divine likeness.'"