



ON THE ESSENCE OF ART AND THE CREATIVE DUTY OF THE ARTIST

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However differently one defines man's artistic nature and assigns or determines her ends and problems, for some time now it has not been at all doubtful that art is not a holiday amusement, a pretty, but empty spiritual flower or an **ennobling deceit**, in the same way as it has not been doubtful that art is not merely the embodiment of beauty nor its entrenchment in the world nor any other selfish serving of what is called beauty. Thus art occurs in life not to relax or please us but because of our ability and immense spiritual labor, not to make us forget ourselves nor tempt us with motherly caresses, but to awaken us out of ourselves and for the sake of the way of the cross from ourselves, from our narrow garrets and pitiful human glory to divine spaces and divine distances. One who differs here may be called myopic and even blind, for he has concluded from isolated features and the so-called external structure. Such a view implies that one has not seen or even conceived that our art is one of the most powerful of life-forces and mysterious of the miracles of being. And being such a force, such a miracle, it can only be valued in the closest relation to the common life-force and world harmony. For if the northern moss or the cedar of Lebanon are, as they obviously are, not merely for the sake of being the northern moss or the cedar of Lebanon, but if, they occur and live as a link in the chain of being, inseparably connected with the totality, the embodiment of the common worldview and universal destiny, then even art is not separable from the world, from its manifestation and activity, and thereby the situation of art, similarly to that of all irreducible phenomenon, can be visualized and defined only in terms of the essence and totality of the world, while the measure of art must lie not in art itself, but beyond it.

What then is our art and our creativity? And how are they related to our passing hours and to the whole of human life?

Let us consult the sages.

"It flies to us from heaven —
Heavenly — to sons of the earth
With azure purity in its glance."

So sings Tiutchev about poetry.

"The soul of the bard, cast out harmoniously,
Is freed from all of one's own woes."

This is what Boratinsky says about art.

Pushkin in his "The Poet" compares the artist's activity to a **sacred offering**; the artist's lyre is sacred, and his soul, when it is summoned for the sacerdotal offering, yearns in the world-play. Before his priestly vocation, before the summoning to the rites, the state of the artist is described as a **cold sleep**.

Here, as nowhere else, it is fitting and important to recall the mystical lines from Pushkin's "The Prophet".

"Tormented by the spiritual thirst
I dragged myself through gloomy desert.
And a six-winged seraph appeared
To me at the crossing of the roads.
He touched my eyes with his fingers,
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And my prophetic eyes opened.

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He touched my ears:

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And I heard the thundering of the heavens,
And the movement of the beasts of the sea under the water,
And the sound of the vine growing in the valley.
And he bent down to my mouth,
And ripped out my sinful, deceitful, wagging tongue."

As we can see, Tiutchev, Boratinsky and Pushkin place art in the very forefront of our everyday lives and personal manifestations, of the whole of human reality. For the artist to become a true creator, it is necessary that he awaken and deny himself, he must be transformed; he needs a catharsis, the intense fire of despair. Thus, he will not become a creator before he has completely denied his individual will and conquered his so-called consciousness and feeling of individuality. But the artist can deny his personal will and forget his individuality only to the extent that his awakened soul flows into the world and becomes completely filled with the universal will. For the structure of the world lacks an intermediary element. And on the contrary, to the extent that the artist fails to seek the universal will but seeks his own, he ceases to be an artist. Omnipotent, he becomes powerless and fruitless. Having seen, he again becomes blind. This is not because of a punitive moral law, but simply because such is the internal structure of creativity, because such is the organic essence of creativity; it rejects the incomplete and conceives completeness only when the creative soul coincides with the mysterious world order. It follows from the above that the content of art, to the extent that it is real creativity, can consist only of the universal and the eternal, only of an infinite vision of the totality and the unexpressed mystery of that vision, as it reveals itself to the eyes of the awakened artist. But is this what Pushkin meant in saying "the beautiful must be grand"? It does not follow that the objects of our art can only be great events, eternal ideas and profound movements of the soul, as majestic as the sun of the midnight of stars; even the smallest flower and dew-drop belong to artistic expression as long as they are treated not in their isolation but as threads of a majestic and universally interrelated fabric, as links of an infinite universe, only if the breathing of the world-will in them is manifested in the expression. For only an artistic vision so structured can truly testify to the mystery of the universe. And only art so structured will testify to the truth and in testifying to the truth — testify to God, and only in meeting this condition can art attain its liberating powers and the totality of its vital forces.

Here, it is important to note that if the essence of art is unconditionally bound to the world-will itself and its infinite manifestations, so do the external elements of art flow out of them. For what are the artistic rhythm of music and poetry, what are the symmetry and gracefulness of ornaments and buildings, if not the artistic repetition of the common world rhythm and gracefulness, if not the submission of art to the total order and harmony? And the feeling of beauty, the whole aesthetic experience, is it not possessed by us only because in experiencing the artistic rhythm and harmony we gladly join ourselves to the primeval gracefulness of will itself, which called us into life?

From the view developed above it is completely clear that every truly artistic work is liturgical in its deepest roots and religious in its highest peaks. And he who posits the good as a condition of our art, does not threaten its liberty, does not prostitute it, but only for he sake of liberating art demands that art return to its eternal roots and its primeval essence.

And if so, it is completely certain that without submission to the world will true art is impossible. And all that is outside these boundaries is false art, art which follows external features, a fruitless game, deceit and dabbling, for, I repeat, it has lost its internal creative structure. But such a demand is at first sight exaggerated, over ascetical and can we not reduce it by dividing our art into degrees: great art and small art, higher art and lower art? No, art is a whole and is unconditionally indivisible. In true art there are only two degrees: the art of those seeking victory and insight into the mystery of the world and the art of the victorious and the enlightened. Art as a sacerdotal offering and art as a weak surrender to a cold sleep are irreconcilable. For our art is the crowing of the cock before dawn, which must, lonely and uncompromising, be raised in the land of night until we, after numerous rejections, acknowledge our God.

The significance of the artist is by far not limited to the achievements of his art. The same internal experience which is the basis of the beauty and significance of his works inseparably binds the creative work of the artist to the common spiritual experience of the times. And because no age can avoid the battle for a new consciousness and a new will in man, the artist, because of his calling and duty, reveals himself to us as a very vital participant in the search and institution of the universal significance of life. And if in our life we have reached any more stable levels, the further possibility of penetration and liberty, a stability of feeling and clearness of the understanding, and if in it we have defined new human spiritual rights, then a large, if not the most important, part of this achievement must be credited to the artist. But having asserted his rights, because of his mission to the spiritual ordering of the world, the artist takes upon himself an immense duty. The priest and first victim, the source and mediator of the creative miracle, he must also become a perfect instrument of his art. In other words, the gift of creativity must be followed unconditionally by the most profound sensitivity and an unceasing restlessness of heart and mind, a sharpness of vision and of feeling, the eternal denial of man in himself, — in a word, a whole complex and difficult campaign which must be unavoidably called a gift from life. The duty of the artist primarily lies in being always prepared for creativity, to the extent that this is within human power. It is said about the artist, he is an idle scatterbrain, but he should better become an anchorite. In all cases, the submitting to the eternal divine will in man must be especially emphasized and encouraged in our times, when not even the whole of art knows where to go... Where

should it go? An empty question, for it is a question already answered. Frequently it has been asserted and even proved that art, at least in some of its forms, arose at the side of the priest, that is, originated in the temple. But it eternally moves toward the altar and sooner or later will again force its way to the sacred fires and will again enter the promised temple to minister to the profound mystery of the world. It is necessary that all men remember this and particularly the artists, because, being our eternal voice, they must answer for us to eternity, and most important, because, only in having fulfilled this internal duty will "their prophetic speech be true and free".

"Apie meno esmę ir menininko kūrybinę paskirtį", *Aidai*, No. 2, 1954, Kennebunkport, Maine; translated by Bronius B. Vaškelis.