

Truth

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. -John 1:1-5

“The storyteller is concerned with what is; but if what is is what can be determined by survey, then the disciples of Dr. Kinsey and Dr. Gallup are sufficient for the day thereof.” -Flannery O’Connor *Mystery and Manners*, 31

What makes a work of art true? Or, how does a work of art convey truth?

Truth in art is revealed in two main ways:

True truth - eternal truth that aligns with what God reveals in scripture and nature

Worldly truth - truth about the world from a non-Biblical perspective - not the Truth, but true if one doesn’t look through the right lens

Worldly truth can provide insight into the world without God and generate compassion toward those separated from God or show us areas in which we need to be redeemed (sanctified might be a better way to put it)

Portrait of a Lady

AMONG the smoke and fog of a December afternoon
You have the scene arrange itself— —as it will seem to do—
With “I have saved this afternoon for you”;
And four wax candles in the darkened room,
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead, 5
An atmosphere of Juliet’s tomb
Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid.
We have been, let us say, to hear the latest Pole
Transmit the Preludes, through his hair and finger-tips.
“So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul 10
Should be resurrected only among friends
Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom
That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room.”
—And so the conversation slips
Among velleities and carefully caught regrets 15
Through attenuated tones of violins
Mingled with remote cornets
And begins.

True Truth points us to the way the world will be at the consummation of history, how the world is in its fallen state, or how God designed the world to be.

Choruses from "The Rock"

The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!
The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Brings us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.

What are some examples of worldly truth you can think of in art?

What are some examples of True truth in art that is not explicitly Christian?

What then makes a work of art false? When art extols that which is not virtuous, when art manipulates, when art lies, when art deadens us to True truth.

The first example above does not present somebody who we wish to emulate and shows the meaninglessness of the world apart from God - the lady is pitiable in the poem, not laudable. Contrast with Polonius in Hamlet. A busybody who deals in platitudes. (Is "this above all else to thine own self be true" really good advice?)

In the end, Hamlet shows us True truth - Polonius's folly causes his demise, and that of many others, but the speech itself is often taken as good advice, which is insidious. We must read & look carefully!

As another example of false art, look at Sunday school art. The sweetness and light Jesus detracts from His mission and His role as the redeemer of the lost world. He wasn't a blue-eyed, soft man dispensing platitudes and playing with lambs. He is the holy Son of God on a great and terrible mission.

We must be careful with worldly truth, too. We don't want to become relativists who see a valid understanding of the world apart from God as ultimately valid. Looking and speaking carefully opens doorways for compassionate presentation of the Gospel but we must take care not to dull our own understanding of the Truth.

Faerie Queene II.xii

59

One would haue thought, (so cunningly, the rude,
And scorned parts were mingled with the fine,)

That nature had for wantonnesse ensude
Art, and that Art at nature did repine;
So striuing each th'other to vndermine,
Each did the others worke more beautifie;
So diff'ring both in willes, agreed in fine:
So all agreed through sweete diuersitie,
This Gardin to adorne with all varietie.

83

But all those pleasant bowres and Pallace braue,
Guyon broke downe, with rigour pittillesse;
Ne ought their goodly workmanship might saue
Them from the tempest of his wrathfulnesse,
But that their blisse he turn'd to balefulnesse:
Their groues he feld, their gardins did deface,
Their arbors spoyle, their Cabinets suppressse,
Their banket houses burne, their buildings race,
And of the fairest late, now made the fowlest place.

Like *Guyon*, we need to recognize the true and false in art and tear down that which doesn't correspond with the Truth.

Christ is the Logos in John 1:1-5. The Word, reason, ordering principle: the Truth about the world is found in His creative act, and where what we see doesn't correspond with it, we must tread carefully.