

Art for Life's Sake

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The first half of the 20th century is one of the most turbulent eras in the history of English literature. Modern Age marks a sharp and clear departure from the self-complacency, and stability of the Victorian period. The transition from the old to the new, from blind faith to rational thinking is very interesting.

The twentieth century is called the Age of Interrogation and Anxiety because the scientific revolution and changing social, moral, political and economic conditions have shaken man's faith in the authority of religion and church. The persistent mood of skepticism and interrogation has increased disproportionately in want of a new set of values.

In the Modern Age number of writers rejected the doctrine of “art for art’s sake”. They developed the new literacy creed of “art for life’s sake” or, at least, for the sake of the community. A much stronger claim to be modern was made by Shaw with his socialism, H.G. Wells with his science fiction and Rudyard Kipling with his empire building and steam engines. The growth of a restless desire to probe and question changed the beginning of the twentieth century. Bernard Shaw vigorously attacks the “old superstition of religion” and the “new superstition of science”. The effect of his writing was to spread abroad for at least a generation “The Interrogative habit of mind”.

Concern For The Poor And The Working Classes

The year 1900 marks “The beginning of the end of the supremacy of the middle classes, and their standards of thought and writing. The sorry condition of the poor living along with the affluent sections of society aroused the desire to take collective action to improve the living conditions of the poor working classes. The poor were no more hopeless creatures. They became the raw material of realistic novel and drama with or without purpose. The mid Victorian writers Dickens, Thackeray, Kingsley, and Read Mrs. Gaskell etc were critical of the injustice done to the poor working classes. But they were not profoundly critical of the fundamental bases of human life and society as were Shaw, Galsworthy and H.G. Wells. But the early 20th century writers “put everything in every sphere of life to the question and secondly, in the light of this skepticism, to reform, to reconstruct to accept the new age as new, and attempt to mould it by conscious Purposeful effort. Bernard Shaw spread for at least a generation “The Interrogative habit of mind”.

Impact Of Socioeconomic Conditions On Literature

20th century literacy has been greatly influenced by economic and social changes. The landed aristocracy and agricultural labourer were in a great trouble. Young villagers began to migrate to industrial towns and there was complete break up of rural way of life. The disintegration of the village community and its profound human implications has been mournfully expressed in the writings of Hardy, Jefferies, Edward Thomas and Others.

Materialism and Competitive spirit began to encroach upon the placid tenor of village life. Money became the key factor in all human relationships. In such circumstances “The Poor” was regarded as the character of a group of people. The new economic theories of economists like Marshall and Keynes, raised their voice against poverty, and the changed pattern of social behavior influenced literature.

Literature became urbane. Marxism was the most powerful influence. Various manifestations of socialism-Fabian, Christian Socialism Marxist materialism etc – came to existence and influenced the authors of this period.

Psychology And Literature:

New psychological researches influenced literature of the 20th century. Intellectual convictions appeared to be rationalizations of emotional needs. The growing interest in psychology exercised considerable influence on literature. The Ordered emphasis on sex, behavior was completely changed and a rational view of sex relationship was evolved. The modern age map is termed as the age of rationalization in sexual behavior. The rightness of sexual union outside the pale of marriage was accepted. The Victorian heroines keep their virtues where as those of H.G. Wells lose their virtues. Havelock Ellis studies in the psychology of sex banished sexual obscurantism and prudish barbarism of the Victorian age. Sex was considered to be a moral. Bertrand

Russell said:” Sex is a natural human need like food and drink....love should be a tree whose roots are deep in the earth but whose branches extend in heaven”. G.B. Shaw in *Man and Superman* and *Candida* exposed the error in the conventional assessment of the relative role of the sexes. The new theories of psychology and sex gave us “the stream of consciousness novel”. D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and many others were influenced by new researches in psychology and sex.

The Influence Of Radio, Cinema And Television:

The arrival of cinema constituted a new threat to the theatre. It became the main source of entertainment. Patrick Hamilton’s *The Fourth Wall* (1928) A.A. Milne’s *The Fourth Wall* (1928) one

thrillers which show the influence of cinematographic technique. A revolutionary change came in play writing when television appeared in every home.

A number of writers such as Alan Owen, Clive Exton and Martin wrote for the small screen rather than for the public stage. The development of radio, cinema and television had an enormous impact on literature. ”At the same time it must be remembered that film techniques were the basis of a number of experiments in the novel” (Edward Albert)

Other Influences

The invention of locomotive and telegraph, rapid and cheap inter communication resulted in an intellectual revolution. Literacy was no more confined to a cultured minority. It was an era of journalism which resulted in the deterioration of literary standards. Moreover, the modern youth is preoccupied with sex. Hence, there has been a boom of pornographic literature, especially sex novels. I. A. Richards wrote as early as 1924 in his book. “The Principles of literary criticism:” At present bad literature, bad art, the cinema etc., are an

influence of the first importance of fixing immature and equally in applicable altitudes to most things.

Conclusion

This is the new milieu in which modern literature has been produced. It is the literature of challenge and of the reconstruction of new values. Scott James writes:

“The writings, expressive of many temperaments reveal the intellectual atmosphere in which G.B. Shaw, H.G. Wells G.K Chesterton were to find their essential and necessary milieu. It was an existing age for writers- an age which marked a definite break with the past, a challenge of authority, an assertion of the right to be anarchistic in thought and in form- romantic realistic, passionate- a self-conscious age when writers were intensely critical of the composition of society, and were beginning to be critical of the individual soul”.

Bibliography

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