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Art as the Commentary of Life

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Abstract

Literature has always been a mighty weapon in bringing reality to surface. It is the reflection of mirror in the form of print that actually ushers to forefront the reality of life. The main aim of art is to revolutionize the world in general and society in particular. “Art for the Sake of Life” generally refers to the notion that art makes us understand the conduct of everyday life. Although art encompasses literature yet it is more than that because it deals with every aspect of our life. It is the way to justify the grim realities of life while beautifying them. As a famous writer James Baldwin accords that “one can’t write a line without a message”. Art is a way of expressing oneself. Many people use it to express boundless emotions and thoughts, from turbulence to euphoria to bewilderment that everyone has within the heart, mind and soul. The authors have discovered an escape through art to seek meaning via truth, not just for the sake of art, but for the sake of life. Writers tweak the image of specific challenges so that a reader can see them through the same lens. George Bernard Shaw also avows that “For art’s sake alone I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence”. So, an artist should be moralist encumbered with a reforming zeal. Thus “Art for the sake of life” is a maxim that should be applied to all art; art with style, sophistication, pathos, and psychological resonance. It is not thus for the art’s sake rather it is for the life’s sake or social sake. Art is a medicine or elixir of pain which makes life bearable. The main aim of this paper is to showcase how art in general as well as in particular is only for life’s sake and not for art’s sake. Art thus has a cosmic phenomenon with a universal impact.

Keywords: Literature, Art, Art’s sake, Life’s sake, Reality, Cosmic Phenomenon.

Introduction

Throughout history, people have held the idea that art’s primary purpose is to teach life lessons. It appears to have had a foothold in Greece during Plato's period. Plato was the first Greek thinker to advocate for the use of art to promote morality. He was opposed to art that tainted human morality. Poetry was prized in Greek education because it was thought that children learned about gods from it. Their model was the poetical characters, and they were worthy of imitation. Plato rejects poetry largely on moral and metaphysical grounds. He criticizes all of the poetical figures, starting with Homer, on moral grounds. Plato claims that poetry has the ability to hurt even the gods. It appeals to their primitive impulses and demoralizes them. Plato claims that the primary goal of art is

to shape human character. Individuals should be encouraged to develop ethical values through art. As rightly is put by Roy Adzak; “Good art is not what it looks like, but what it does to us”

Another well-known Greek scholar, Horace, is a strong supporter of the Art for Morality theory. In his book “Ars Poetics”, he claims that the poet’s job is to teach, please, or do both. So, it’s obvious that Horace is thinking about moral guidance out of art. Aside from Greek authors, there are a number of English writers who are heavy proponents of the Art for Life theory. The real champions of it are Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser and Mathew Arnold. Sidney has described poetry (a genre of literature) as a speaking picture with the end to teach and delight. To him poetry was superior as it is filled with universal truth. So, poetry has dual function; it can give us the pleasure while imparting the lessons of life. According to Spenser, One of the foundations of the humanities is poetry, like every other type of creative development. The poem transmits awareness and human values by following the paths of feeling, sensitivity, and creativity. Even better, it moulds the human being, both body and soul. Mathew Arnold said that any art should have the message for life unlike Walter Pater who believed that art is like a wine as it only gives pleasure after having it. He believed that any art is useless. The role of poetry, according to Mathew Arnold, is to interpret life for us, comfort us, and sustain us.

Art, Literature and Criticism were seen as manifestations of ideas and values that canonised, exalted, and enriched life and culture during the Victorian period. The aim of the art was to better people’s lives. On questioning the role of literature, Victorian creators and critiques were divided into two main categories. Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, who believe in “Art for the sake of Life”, embodied one faction. The moral point of view, according to Carlyle and Ruskin, should be the norm on which literature should be judged. Art should be used to improve people’s lives. Pater and Oscar Wilde, who presumed in “Art for Art’s Sake”, embodied another group. They were of the opinion that the standard by which the world of literature should be judged on aesthetic and artistic pleasure. Art should be for the pleasure and delight of mankind. Ruskin and Carlyle made every effort to delve into the moral and ethical principles that underpins artistic expression. Both were conscious of the risks that science and industrial revolution presented to religion and morality, and desired to address this with art, literature and criticism. They saw art and morality as inextricably linked, and they desired art to serve morality. They believed that art could not be effective unless it communicates a moral message. The grandest art, according to Ruskin, is that which exemplifies and evokes to the readers “the greatest number of greatest ideas”. The other faction, led by Pater and Wilde, aimed to free art from moral responsibilities. Matthew Arnold's perspective on the work of literature seems to be somewhere amid these two extremes.

Amongst the most tumultuous, tempestuous and turbulent periods in the narrative of English literature is the year between 1900 to 1945 i.e. first half of the twentieth century. The Modern Age emblemizes a noteworthy egress from the Victorian era’s dilemma, cynicism, revolt, individuality, humanity and conflict between science and religion to the age of globalisation, technology, warfare, literature, art, discovery, politics and science. It’s fascinating to observe the transition from ancient to modern, from wilful ignorance to critical thought, from Nature to human beings. Since the scientific revolution and changing economic, political, social, and, moral circumstances have broken man's faith in the legitimacy of religion and church, so the twentieth century is regarded as the era of questioning, anxieties, preoccupations and panic. In the absence of a new collection of principles, the recurrent mood of cynicism and interrogation has intensified significantly. Different authors in the modern era dismissed the dogma of the aestheticism or “art for the sake of art”. They invented the term “art for the sake of life”. Rudyard Kipling's steam engine and empire building, Dickens’s reformism, Shaw's

socialism and H.G. Wells' science fiction, all made far stronger claims to being new. The emergence of a restless appetite to probe and challenge shifted the course of history at the turn of the twentieth century. Bernard Shaw takes a strong stance against both the “modern delusion of science”. and “the ancient delusion of religion”. His penmanship had the effect of unfurling “The Interrogative habit of mind” across the lengths and breadths of world for at least a century. Carl Andre, an American artist also remarks that art for art’s sake is ridiculous. He remarks that “I mean art for art’s sake is ridiculous. Art is for the sake of one’s need”.

Marxists and Social Democrats have proposed that art should be politicized in order to express the socialist message. L'art I'art was an empty word, an idle sentence, wrote socialist George Sand in 1872. She said that artists had a "duty to find an appropriate expression to communicate it to as many souls as possible," ensuring that the works were understandable.

Former Senegalese president and leader of the Senegalese socialist party Leopold Senghor, as well as anti-colonial Africanise author Chinua Achebe, have slammed the doctrine as having a distorted and Racialist view of creation and art. Senghor believes that art in “black African Aesthetics” is “functional”, and that “art for the sake of art” does not exist in “black Africans”. *Morning Yet on Creation Day* is a compilation of essays and criticism by Achebe, in which he argues that “art for art’s sake is yet another piece of deodorised dog shit”.

Mao Zedong, the former head of the Chinese communist party, stated that there is no such phenomenon as art for the sake of art, art that transcends social groups, or art that is unaffected by politics. Lenin remarks that Proletarian literature and art are cogs and gears in the entire revolutionary machine.

Diego Rivera, a prominent member of the MCP (Mexican Communist Party) and a revolutionary figure holds the belief that the “art for art's sake” ideology would further widen the void between the rich and the poor. Rivera further believes that since one of the primary features of so-called “Pure art” was that it could only be acknowledged and appreciated by a few superior beings, the art revolution would denigrate art as a social apparatus and ultimately transforms it into a monetary system available only to the upper class and the wealthier ones.

In his seminal essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin, one of the founders of Marxist hermeneutics, addresses the slogan. He first mentions it in the context of traditional art's reaction to advances in reproduction, especially photography. In bracketing off social elements, he also calls the slogan “Art for the sake of art” as part of a “theology of art”. Benjamin explores the connections between fascism and art in the epilogue to his article. Futurism is his primary example. One trademark of the futurists is “Let art be made, even if the world perishes”. Benjamin argues, confidently, that as far as fascism wishes war to “supply the creative pleasure of a sense of understanding that has been transformed by technology”, this is the “consummation”, or revelation of art for art’s sake (L'art pour L'art).

Conclusion

As a doctrine, art for the sake of life has a broader range of applications than art in the traditional context. It is self-evident that paintings, statues, and poetry can be created for a number of purposes other than artistic ones. Art is something more than its physical representation. Artwork, sculpture, painting, handicrafts, graphics, dance, drama, poetry, and music are examples of visual or aural aspects. Art has continued to improve people's quality of life by not only creating and developing essential needs like shelter, utensils, and clothes, but also by making them more appealing in appearance and use. Human civilisation as we know it today is the product of the artist's works instilling in man a strong artistic consciousness. The most critical aspect of art is how the artist has

succeeded in converting ordinary materials into something of greater worth. Besides this, the conventional paradigms of morally instructive literature, fables and morals, are not among the works we care for or find most profound. As a consequence, it is important to realize that art and literature can serve an ethical purpose while being didactic or moralistic in nature. One way of expressing this is to suggest that we should benefit from fiction without being taught by it. So, there is no wrong to say that Art is only for life's sake and life is for Art's sake as Nicholason Baker remarks: "You need the art in order to love the life".

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