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Realism

By Samir K. Dash

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Realism

I

In William Dean Howells words, Realism is the truthful treatment of material. But to the question what is truth, philosophy gives not only different answers, but also different kinds of answers, representing different approaches to the same question. Thats why Realism is also a term which cant be defined with merely few words. In fact Realism is a notoriously treacherous concept. Vladimir Nobokov, comments on this in his post script to Lolita, as it is one of the few words which can mean nothing without quotes. Many critics agree that when asking about the definition of Realism, it is reality itself which they bring into question. Reality is seen as something which has to be attained and this attainment is a continuous process that never allows the concept to stabilize or the word to offer a convenient mould of meaning.

In 18th century the words were considered to be the images of things. For example, Melville in his Moby Dick gathers together every possible definitions and descriptions of a whale and what he shows is that you can never catch a live whale ----- You can only have a dead whale ----- from the images of whale, as Tony Tanner comments in his book Realism, Reality and the Novel, published in 1969. Later this concept was modified in present language as the image of reality. But it should be remembered that this concept also makes it clear that language is the instrument to achieve reality, not just to create images, carrying with in its own material of truth.

As mentioned before, a truth can be reached through various ways. Philosophy gives mainly two methods: one Scientific and other Poetic. In Scientific method Truth is discovered where as in Poetic method Truth is created by a process of making. The first method is called Correspondence Theory, while the second one is called Coherence Theory. Hence Realism can be defined differently with the help of these two theories.

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In the Correspondence Theory, the Reality is as it were arrested by truth, while in Coherence Theory, Reality is in a sense created in the very act of perception. According to Bertrand Russell, the first case is Semantic while the second case is Syntactic concept of truth.

Balzac, who made realism fashionable as a modern doctrine says:

The mission of art is not to copy nature, but to express her. We have to seize the spirit, and the soul of beings and things.

Robert Lynd has aptly remarked that art is not only an escape from life, but an escape into life, and the first escape is of importance if it leads to the second. While doing this, an artist can't transcribe things as they are, but he can only convey his sense of things.

D.H. Lawrence, in his *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, found a logical conclusion that Reality is present, where the word reaches its most fluid condition as it is used to qualify the shifting states of his characters' consciousness. There is a scene in *The Rainbow* where reality for Ursula [One of the central characters] exists in her own stimulated consciousness. So, when she is obsessed by the thoughts of her future career as a teacher, her father sitting at the table, becomes less real than her fancies. According to this, reality can again be defined as the mood of the mind that dilates and contracts with the degree of activity of the consciousness.

In general realism can be described as the representation of things as the expression of plain, unvarnished truth without regard to ideals or romance.

II

The root of realism can be traced in the Chaucer's days in 14th century. The fourteenth century ballad writers took nothing as un-poetical and hence realism was found in ballads [such as *The London Lick Penny*, *The Nut Brown maid*]. Meanwhile Langland wrote his *Piers the Plowman* which was to present the existing sins done in the society and thus this created a sense of realism in medieval poetry. This medieval tradition died in 16th century as it was mixed with Platonic and Petrarchan idealism. All sonnets writers of 16th century, except Shakespeare, used this mixed concept. But some of Shakespeare used this mixed concept. But some of Shakespeare's sonnets such as *Song of Autolycus*, the touch of realism kept itself fresh. In the similar manner in Ben Jonson's *Pen thrust* found a reaction against roses and lilies.

It is Ben Jonson, who has the credit to introduce Realism into drama for the first time. Though he was classical dramatist, he created his comedies which are intensely realistic, presenting men and women of the time exactly as they were. His *Every Man in His Humor*, *Volpone* reflect this fact. His *Volpone* stands for his merciless analysis of a man governed by an over-whelming love of money for its own sake.

The Courtier Poets of the Restoration period were responsible for the second great achievement in the history of Realism, which was linked to Medieval Realism through Dryden's admiration of Chaucer.

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In the 17th century philosophers and scientists like Descartes, Hobbes and Newton, provided the mechanical concept of universe. This provided food for realism in Augustan period. The study of nature of human mind was done in Essay concerning the human understanding by John Locke in 1690. In it Locke related language to sense-impressions and this made the concept of realism more fleshy in the eyes of other poets and essayists. The poets invented a new weapon to face the challenge of the times. And it was called Satiric Humor.

Pope in his Rape of the Lock presented a realistic picture with this new branch of realism. This spread out into prose writings of this time. In Swifts Gullivers Travels , Battle of Books, Daniel Defoes Robinson Crusoe reflected this. While Swift gave reality to pygmies, giants and the most impossible situations (as easily as if he were writing facts), Defoe at that period was known for recreating natural real adventure in readers mind.

Swift, whose verse has been greatly understood by the idealistic critics, made poetry out of the refuse of the London gutters:

Now from all parts of swelling kennels flow

And bear their trophies with them as they go;

Filths of all hues and odours seem to tell

What street they saild from by sight and smell.

This is the poetry of ugly common place and yet having a civilized tone. This was possible only due to use of his realism.

In 18th century another kind of realistic poetry developed. It dealt with the realistic description of realistic description of landscape and country life. Its exponents were Thompson and Dyre and their successors up to Cowpeares notable achievement in The Task. In this there is description of homely scenes, woods, brooks, of plowmen and teamsters, all in blank verse. But later, this realism has to fight against Romanticism (in mid 19th century). Towards the end of this period we can find a touch of realism in some poetry of Burns and Crabbe. Crabbe in his preface to his Tales of 1812, defended realism in poetry, though the word Realism was unknown to him.

After French revolution in 1789, a new kind of realism concerning the lives of common men started in both poetry and prose. Only common place events find its place in such type. Wordsworth, the fore-runner of the Romantic movement was fundamentally a realist ----- perhaps the greatest after Langland. In The Prelude, there is some common-place scene which is significant in this fact. The Victorian Age was marked by a spirit of enquiry, criticism, Scepticism, religious unrest and spiritual struggle. The development of science and the analytical and critical state of mind leading to development of Realism.

Tennyson was the explorer of his age. He provided Scientific Realism, which can be noticed in his poems like Memorium or Idyles of the King . Robert Browning introduced Psychological Realism

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during later part of 19th century. In it the motive rather than the the study of thought or emotions was given priority. Other poets like Swinbrune, Rossetti, William Morris kept themselves busy with Rationalistic and scientific tendencies of the time.

But Coventry Patmore provided the Social Realism to his readers. This can be noticed in his following poem lines:

I hope youre well, I write to say

Fredrick has got, beside his pay

A good appointment in the Docks

Also thank you for the frocks

And shoes for baby&&&&..

Victorian poetic realism ends with Hardy and Houseman, most of whose belongs to 20th century category chronology. Hardy owed much to Crabbe for his Tragic Realism. Even in his novels like *The Mayor of Casterbridge* this vision is fresh.

In 20th century, WW-I killed the gentlemanly sort of realism and created more rough reality in poetry

and prose, which can be seen in the works of Siegfried Sasoon. T.S.Eliot experimented on the boredom and frustration on modern life. Masfield was the first to sing about the underdogs of lower classes of the society. His realism sometimes resembles to that of Zola with its ugliness and horror. This noisy violence kind of realism can be seen in his *Everlasting Mercy*, *The Window in the Bye Street* and *Dauber*.

Rupert Brooke whole heartedly believed in modern mans attitude in coming to close grips with life. He saw the world with greater clarity. In his *The Greater Lover* he wrote of the hundred and one everyday objects that gave him joy ---- plants, cups, dust, wet roofs, wood smoke, the cool kinliness of sheets and rough male kiss of blankets. He invests this domestic catalogue with significance and Beauty turns the common place into the strangely new.

From the mid 17th century up to this day, realism has a permanent place in the prose writings. While realism was found in the poetry of Burns and Cowpeare, in the novels of William Goldsmith like *The Vicar of Wakefield*; Boswells prose biography *Life of Johnson* and dairies of Pepys and Evelyn were flooded with reality-concept. In *Life of Johnson*, Boswell presented the minute record of Johnsons greatness, prejudices, superstitions and even detail of his personal appearance. Peppys diary records all the common gossips from 1660 to 1669.

In age of Romanticism, the realism was alive in Lambs Essays of Elia. These famous essays began in 1820 with appearance of the new *London Magazine*. Among these essays were *Dissertation on Roast pig*, *Old China*, *Praise of chimney sweepers* ----- all these were the interpretation of London

life.

Jane Austein, as a first female novelist started writing with the blending of Social Realism with Romanticism, which can be noticeable in *Pride and Prejudice*. Victorian age novelists like Charles Dickens, W.M.Thakery and some female novelists like George Eliot used Realism as their best weapon. Dickens highlighted the condition of lower class, specially children in his novels like *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickelby* with a touch of realism. He in fact correlated his childhood experiences into fiction. Thackerys *Henery Esmond* presents the pride and pomp of war, which are largely delusions, but its brutality and barbarism, which are too real. George Eliot did in novels, what Browning did in his poetry by using Psychological Realism. George Eliot like Browning put stress on motive rather than emotion. This can be noticed in the character Tito of her novel *Romala*.

Again Thomas hardy provided the tragic Realism in his novels like *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. But his vision was not always tragic. In his pastoral comedy *Far from the Madding Crowd*, there is the point of realism on love.

In 20th century the world war provided another chance to create realism in different works of art. The same happened in case of novels by H.G.Wells, Galsworthy, James M. Barie etc. H.G.Wells *Mr.Britling* sees it *Through* (1916) is a realistic portrayal of English society in the dark days of WW-I. Galasworthys *The Man of Property* is a reflection on Victorian society. *Pride and Prejudice* of Austein, *The heart of Midlothian* of Scott, *The beloved Vegabond* of W.J. Locke, Joseph Vance (1906) of De Morgan were in fact the examples of Romantic Realism. This realism developed more and grew stronger than the Crass-Realism of Zola. From the wide field of romantic realism there are three most important names of novels which are: *The Divine Fire* (1904) by May Sinclair, Joanna Godden (1921) by Sheila kye Smith and *The Good Companions* (1929) by J.B.Pristley. Thus realism has proved its essence in every field of literary works.

III

The nature of language is such that there can be no such thing as a neutral transcription of an object into words. In fact the representation is not not only a technical, but also a philosophical impossibility. Hence the idea of expression or recreation of truth through Realism is not a perfect one though a good one. To its imperfectness Rene wellek comments that realism inspite of its claim to penetrate directly to life and reality [&] in practice has its set conventions, devices, and exclusions&

Date of Birth: 5 July 2003

Currently doing PG in English Literature at Ravenshaw College , Cuutack, INDIA

Contact Address: A-144, Sec-2, Rourkela -769006, INDIA

samirk_dash@yahoo.com

Positive Law

By Terry Dashner

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"Positive Law"

Based upon Nietzsche's foundation of atheism, the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, and a Darwinian view of the development of human life, legal scholars started to formulate new theories of law. Eventually, positive law became known as legal realism. Legal realism is `theory in philosophy of law or jurisprudence broadly characterized by the claim that the nature of law is better understood by observing what courts and citizens actually do than by analyzing stated legal rule and legal concepts. Legal realism in the United States, in its contemporary form, is known as critical legal studies.'

This movement has recently given rise to postmodern legal theory. Advocates of this theory believe that law is created and interpreted in such a way as to benefit the people in power and exclude the poor and minorities. This legal theory has the potential to elevate the will of the human legislators over the will of the masses. Let's not leave out judges and their self-imposed sovereignty. Aren't we seeing this kind of arrogance today? Item: Recently the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, California, struck down the ban on partial birth abortion—saying it invaded a woman's right to privacy. Item: A municipal judge in New York threw out the government's case against the mayor who disregarded state law and issued marriage licenses to gay couples. The judge said that he didn't like the law. (Keep in mind, though, the judge was appointed by the same mayor he let off the hook.)

This brings me back to where I started. The argument today is whether or not national law (and interpreters of the law—judges) is higher or superior to God's Law. Most of today's intellectuals would tell you that Western law is not based on God's moral law. And they do this with a straight face. It's against the law of the state to murder. God's Law says that murder is proscribed, and the one who premeditates the murder of another person shall pay with one's own life. It's against the state law to shoplift. God's law also says it's wrong to steal. The state says it's criminal to slander someone. God's Law says that no man may bear false witness against his neighbor. If that isn't a reflection of state law emulating God's Law, then I'm missing something.

The challenge before us is great. It is to reverse a mindset that has been honed on the secular teaching of atheism and relativism by godless philosophers and scientists for the past 300 years. When man began to elevate human reasoning over faith in the 17th century, events soon followed that threw traditional beliefs into a tailspin. These were proven and established doctrines of the church that had held true, most of them since the time of the Holy Roman Empire. Our task is to call America back to her heritage. It is to call her back to God. This, my friend, is our challenge—to save America from godless deception.

Terry Dashner

Writes articles on America's early history. 918–451–0270

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