CHAPTER - XI

DIDACTICISM, ART FOR ART's SAKE & EXPRESSIONISM

After a brief period of discord and anarchy, we find ourselves once again face to face with Authority. Once again we are asked to follow what Herbert Paul calls "Principles" of Criticism laid down by an austere writer who "taught others how to criticize". Mathew Arnold's position in English literary circles was, for half a century or more, comparable with Aristotle in respect of the wide influence he exercised on the critics who were either impressed by his marks of criticism or who blindly followed him out of sheer faith and trust reposed in him. Mathew Arnold having the literature of many nations and ages at his disposal, had to exercise his choice with regard to the "best that is known and thought in the world" while the world of Aristotle was far more limited. He began with the repudiation of the idea that a critic is, or should be an "abstract lawgiver".

The Critic in relation to Public

The critical principles which has most affected the public mind and has passed into currency as his distinctive doctrine is that he shows us, the critic in relation to the public instead of, as has so happened in case of Aristotle and others who have shown critic in relation to Art. Aristotle dissects a work of art
while Arnold dissects a critic. Aristotle's critic owes allegiance
to the artist, but Arnold's critic has a duty to society. Arnold's
critic is a propagandist tilling the soil so that "the best ideas"
may prevail, making "an intellectual situation of which the creative
power can profitably avail itself". He entrusted new task to the
critic, the task to prepare a social atmosphere which will stimu­
late the artist - to make the best that has been written familiar
to the public. It was for this reason perhaps that his doctrines
readily found acceptance in England.

The right Art creates the highest enjoyment

As a poet-critic, Arnold, in common company with Aris­
totle, Coleridge and Goethe, pronounced pleasure consisting in a
total impression derived from the organic Unity of the parts within
the whole essential to a great poem. This is as true for tragedy
as for comedy - and for this reason true tragedy never presents
the merely painful, never shows "a continuous state of mental distress
... unrelieved by incident, hope or resistance, in which there
is everything to be endured, nothing to be done".

Subscribing to Schiller's view that "All art is dedicated
to joy" he says that the right Art is that alone which creates
the highest enjoyment and then reverts to criticize "imitation"
theory. According to him, a mere representation howsoever accurate
it may be, is not enough. It has to be one from which men can
derive enjoyment and this is as true for tragedy as for comedy.
According to him in a work of Art, especially so in drama, the plot is the first thing. Only imagination is not everything with the artist. He can make an intrinsically inferior action equally delightful with a more excellent one by his treatment of it. His first task is to select an excellent action - plot. About the excellence of the action-plot, he says "those which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections, to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time" are the excellent ones. According to him even if the subject-matter is of a lower quality, if it is treated by a "noble nature poetically gifted" with "simplicity or with severity and seriousness" it becomes an excellent product of art. In case of a great subject, if it is treated by a gifted soul, it doubles the impressiveness of the poet.

Arnold is dissatisfied with the present age in which he discovered peculiar disqualification. Our age is an age of speed - an era of progress, an era of industrial development, an age "wanting in moral grandeur" - and hence lacking in elements which are needed for the exercise of great art. It is perhaps because of his faith in the guidance of pre-eminent models, inspiring as they may be, tended to hide from him the potential excellence of the new and untried, of the fresh material from which new art forms and adaptations of the old are for ever being evolved.
According to him, the plot or action or motive is the first thing and here he is quite right. He is also tolerable when he emphasizes unity or "total impression". He has put before him for his guidance a majestic ideal of intellectual and spiritual excellence, in accord with the best that has been known and thought in the world and hence he holds the view that literature is a "criticism of life" and consequently postponing his work as a poet, he turned to his job as a critic of art or the critic of criticism.

In his new role, Arnold conceived it to be his duty as a critic of literature to engage himself in the noble task of "A disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas". As a critic his task was threefold; first, there is the critic's duty to learn and understand - he must "see things as they are", second, to hand on his ideas to others to convey the world, "to make the best ideas prevail" and third, to prepare an atmosphere favourable for the creative genius of the future-promoting a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power". In nutshell the function of Arnold's critic is to promote culture, and as literary critic to promote that part of culture which depends upon knowledge of letters. One's fondness for culture springs from "desire after the things of the mind simply for their own sakes and for the pleasure of seeing them as they are". But this desire to see things
as they are is not enough. Culture, according to him, has a moral aspect and is a study of perfection which moves by the force not only of the passion for knowledge, but also of "the moral and social passion for doing good".

The critic will be disinterested in the sense that he will pursue only the ends of cultural perfection, and will be uninfluenced by the coarser appeals of the philistine.

What is the duty of a critic to literature and to himself? Arnold's answer to this question is "Critics give themselves great labour to draw out what in the abstract constitutes the characteristics of a high quality of poetry". The high qualities lie both in the matter and substance of poetry and in the manner and style and these have "a mark, an accent, of high beauty, worth and power". The most useful method of discovering the worth of poetry, according to him, was "to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry".

Arnold has been charged as a propagandist for criticism than a critic. This is directed against his thesis that poetry is a "criticism of life" which set in motion a spectacular involvement in some of the difficulties that have always appeared for his didactive theory. The motive behind this theory is described by him as the promotion of a lively circulation of the best ideas
yet available to humanity\textsuperscript{6} and hence the production of a climate in which poetry can thrive. One recent authority on Arnold's thought has interpreted his whole career as a tension between the impulse of detachment and that of practical application, between the Professor of Poetry and the Inspector of Schools\textsuperscript{7}.

**Arnold's Profecy**

His didacticism reaches its mature and accurate formulation in the following passage so often quoted from the opening of his 1880 Essay:

"More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete, and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by Poetry".

This profecy of Arnold was, in a way, an indication as to where the wind was blowing. Though it is not our purpose, if we view the entire literary flow, we should note, with a view to understand these literary currents in their continuity, that the revolutionary vindication of poetry by German Romantists and their followers resulted during the 1915 Century, in at least three main currents of poetic theory which made claims upon ethics and politics. They were the Shelleyan and Carlylean rhapsodic retort to Scientism, the Arnoldian neo-classic idealism, and socio-realistic propagandism.
generated in Germany, Russia and France. But the reassertion of poetic rights could take yet another turn antithetic to the didacticism inherent in all those other three.

Art for Art's sake

Poetry or Art in general - might draw off itself and be content with an emphatic assertion of autonomy - its own kind of intrinsic worth, to be understood and savoured by its own devotees.

This notion of art as a terminal value had appeared even during antiquity but had not gained sufficient importance. It had gained a gradual and subtle emphasis in all those Renaissance versions of classic theory which reversed the usual formula to say that pleasing was somehow more important than teaching or was somehow the end aimed at through teaching. And such approaches to a theory of aesthetic autonomy gained greatly during the 1815 Century as literary theory first retreated from classical didacticism and then, after following Leibnitzian and Lockean psychological lines, reacted against these two, shifting an emphasis on sensory and emotive pleasure towards various conceptions of 'taste', inner sense, the absolute beauty of order and harmony, and pleasure without desire.  

The transcendental synthesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment summarized all such trends and first lent weighty metaphysical
authority to the pure aesthetic claim. The mythopoeic and symbolist doctrines of German idealist critics, by general strengthening the position of art, provided an area of mobilization not only for the didactic claims but for characteristical reaction to didacticism, which is known under the banner of Art for Art's Sake.

The epithet "Art for Art's Sake" has important ideas to convey and accordingly, primafacie, it means art without purpose, motive or interest - because all purpose perverts art. Art attains the purpose that it does not have. Art is not instrumental to something, it is an end in and by itself. The idea found fuller expression in the writings of American story-teller and poet Edgar Allan Poe who imbibed within himself Kantian and Coleridgean aesthetic, later on to be followed by Baudelaire, a critical essayist and a journalist, who alternates between the two opposite claims of pure art advocated by above maxim and, the claim that it is a moral statement. Later on he came out openly against the current formulations of pure-art theory calling it "The Childish Utopianism" and "doomed to sterility". According to him "Art for art's sake was a flagrant defiance of human nature".

Baudelaire is against the theory that art is a mimesis or imitation. He says "I am not trying to assign art the sterile function of imitating nature for according to him nature is ghastly and must be abhorred. Everything that is noble and beautiful proceeds from unreasonable reflection."
Emphasis on "Form"

In the later era of this movement, the argument sometimes became an appeal to a supposedly pure aesthetic element of "Form". "Form", said Wilde, "is everything. It is the secret of life, start with the worship of form and there is no secret in art that will not be revealed to you". The term "Form" has a close relation with the idea of craftsmanship so far as the later was conceived as a quality discoverable in the art work itself. This also means in one sense, a literal sense, the craftsmanship of verse technique.\(^{10}\)

Walter Peter also said in his essay on Wordsworth "to treat life in the spirit of art, is to make life a thing in which means and end are identified". He also adds "to encourage such treatment is the true moral significance of art and poetry". The work of the great poet is "not to teach lessons, or enforce rules, or even to stimulate us to noble ends, but to withdraw the thoughts for a little while from the mere machinery of life, to fix them, with appropriate emotions, on the spectacle of those great facts in man's existence which no machinery affects". Art is no longer to be the servant, but is to be the master.

Literature of art the whole of life

For Peter the problem of literature is the manner in which it represents an approach to life, and the whole task of
criticism is to approach literature in the same way. Literature and art to him are not merely a part of life; they are to become the whole of life in so far as it is lived in the finer way of the spirit, and in so far as it is objectively expressed. Peter looks to the life of the artist which as a greater whole out of which each poem or novel or painting or sculpture or symphony is brought to birth. In the same spirit Peter spike of making language "a serious study, weighing the precise power of every phrase and word as though it were precious metal".

As a critic Walter Peter always sought to distinguish in art, speech, feeling, manners that which is organic, animated, expressive from that which is only conventional, derivative, inexpressive. For the expressive thing is that which really expresses the essential personality of an author - the peculiar quality of power and meaning which is the gist of him, distinguishing him from everything else that ever was. It manifests itself in thought or sentiment, and in style - and in these two together as inseparably one.

Emphasis on style

Style, according to Peter and the followers of the theory of Art for Art's sake, cannot be more than a reflection of the author's personality, though it may be much less. It is good, or expressive, when the language, he uses, conveys his personality with
some exactness, or that part of his personality which is actively engaged in the task he has in hand. Style, though always external, is not to be thought of as merely external. It should be "an incarnation of thought" said DeQuincey and by Ben Jonson, "in all speech, words and sense are as the body and soul".

The emphasis was on Diction, style, form and implies the totality of all the elements that go to make a work of art. It is the shape that the whole takes when every part has fallen into its proper place according to the design which the artist had in his mind throughout.

The artist is not seeking the fact but expresses his "sense of fact". It is not photographic imitation of reality but a transcription of his vision of it. According to Peter "All beauty is in the long run only fineness of truth, or what we call expression, the finer accommodation of speech to that vision within".

In his essay on Style, he concentrates his mind upon life, upon clear shapely words which form themselves into a body for the soul as if the soul possessed no other capacity but that of being put into the perfect words that were meant for it. The other necessary element in style, he distinguishes, is the soul and by this he means the personality which communicates itself to language not by taking thought, but by attracting it into "the peculiar spirit" the writer is made of. The style is the real
man - "the man, not in his unreasoned and really uncharacteristic caprices, involuntary or affected, but in absolutely sincere apprehension of what is most real to him".

The subject matter is of no eventual consequence. Whatever the subject that an artist treats, his fidelity is to what he sees, when he has endeavoured to see to the best of his powers.

There are two respects in which these champions of aestheticism went astray:

(1) They overlooked the fact that all art, whether it be realistic or impressionistic, romantic or classical, symbolical, allegorical, expressionist, imagist, futurist, or abstract, has its roots somewhere in reality which always seeks objective expression and must always have a subject whose nature it is to be objectified; and (2) They believed that the aesthetic faculties which the artist employs are special and peculiar, and different in kind as well as in degree from those which are employed in other activities. Modern Psychology as well as common sense is against this.

This again implies that (3) it is no part of artist's aim to communicate his vision - he writes or paints to please only himself and is utterly indifferent to the approval or disapproval of others. This is a fallacy.
Expressionism

A somewhat earlier study of the English romantic theory of poetry had attempted to show that the concept of Creative imagination entertained by Coleridge, Shelley and other poets was the same as the "aesthetic" concept elaborated a century later by Benedetto Croce who actually did achieve something like an ultimate definition and synthesis of the expressionistic art theory which first came clearly into view with the Germans and Coleridge which was tested and matured in the writings of Croce's work. The theory is precisely an "aesthetic", a master theory of art for art's sake, a profound realization of all that might underlie and in part justify the 19th Century cry that art must be pure.

The theory precisely grows out of an initial preoccupation with the historico-social thinking which was, we have seen, intrinsic to one sort of didacticism and it is a partial resolution of the conflict between such theory and the starker versions of the theory art for art's sake.

The philosophic background of Expressionism

The theory has its base in the philosophy of Hegelian Idealism in which there was something, a world or nature, on which spirit worked in a dialectical process. Marxism reduced this to
a very thoroughly monistic working of material nature in and through itself. Croce arrived at an opposite but equally thoroughgoing monism of spirit.

In his Autobiography\textsuperscript{13} he says "on the point at which 'nature' the product of man's own spirit is introduced into the pure spiritual world of art" he denied the reality of nature in art and was led to deny it everywhere and to discover everywhere its true character, not as reality but as the product of abstracting thought. "Spirit" in the Crocean philosophy is the "absolute reality" which "generates the contents of experience".

According to Croce, there are only four basic, essentially different activities or "moments" of spirit, four kinds of reality: two theoretical or knowing activities; two practical or volitional. They occur in the following order, each one supposing or needing all those that precede it: (1) Intuition-expression (the primary imaginative act of individual characterisation or forming); (2) Conceptualisation (the intellective and scientific knowledge of relations between individual intuitions); (3) Volition in general (economic activity) and (4) Volition of the rationally and Universally conceived end - willing the true self of spirit ethical activity-absolute freedom. Only these four have abstract, absolute, conceptual, dialectical validity. The four sciences corresponding to the four cardinal activities of spirit are: aesthetic, logic, economics and ethics.
The aesthetician, focuses on the first of the spiritual activities, intuition-expression. It is bounded at two levels, above by the abstracted concept, below by an "obscure region of the soul" unconscious or subconscious, something which Croce most often calls "impression", "sensation", or "matter". It is not spiritual activity but inchoate passivity, a formless nothing, a mere urge of some individual character, it is form, and nothing but form.

The system banishes all notions of art as illusion or as mechanical reproduction of, or substitute for, external beauty. It assets that the notion of external physical beauty (either natural or artistic) is a "verbal paradox". The natural world, according to this system, exists only at the conceptual and abstract level.

It is of first importance to the system to insist that intuition-expression is both intuition and expression and that no intuition can occur without expression. Knowing a thing is simply expressing it to oneself.

The physical work of art, the statue, painting, or a verbal sound is an external stimulus which for the qualified recipient will produce the same intuition-impression (aesthetic experience) as prompted the artist to externalize. Artistic technique is no more than a complex of prior knowledge at the service of the artist in his volitional activity of externalizing.
The "aesthetic" of Croce is after all not a philosophy of Art, but a philosophy of all intuitive knowing but the steady trend and rhetorical aim of Croce's Aesthetic is to suggest that the spiritual act of intuition-expression, as first broadly defined, is in fact the central and necessary conception for a theory of Art.

**Beauty, an absolute, perfect**

The notion of fullness, completeness, success in the achievement of intuition-expression plays an important role in the system. The "probable" in art is the same as the coherent. When we succeed in objectifying the confusion of passive sensation which we strive to master with our intuitive power and form it in the clear knowledge of spiritual dominion, completely, only then beauty appears. Beauty is thus absolute, formal unified perfect whole. An anti-aesthetic fact or ugliness is simply lack of intuitional form; a hole in coherence, an embarrassment of intuitive activity, a multiplicity, failure of knowledge and reality.

Croce's theory is in a sense the most resolutely cognitive of all modern art theories. To account for the fact that in the presence of works of art, one experiences not just aesthetic knowledge but aesthetic pleasure, Croce proposes in his Aesthetic that each of the four radical spiritual activities, as it succeeds or fails, is accompanied by a "special activity of non-cognitive
nature, having its two poles, positive and negative, in pleasure and pain\(^14\). Aesthetic pleasure is simply the feeling of pleasure which accompanies our successful acts of intuition-expression.

The pleasure of art is Expression

The pleasure of art, according to him, is the thrill which accompanies the self-liberation of successful expression. We call a thing ugly when we wish to designate "embarrassed activity, the product of what is a failure". Beauty is "successful expression, or better, expression and nothing more, because expression, when it is successful is beauty, when it is not, it is not expression. Aesthetic act is altogether completed in the expressive elaboration of the impressions. When he is thus speaking, he is speaking of an activity that is wholly within the mind of an artist and has nothing to do with the uttering or writing of words, or the fixing of lines and colours on canvas.

This second activity of uttering or writing of words or putting lines and colours on the canvas is a production of things, a practical fact, or a fact of will .... The work of art or aesthetic work is always internal., and that which is called external is no longer a work of art.

Croce experiences here some difficulty for, if art is an intuition-expression, unless it finds appropriate expression through
uttering or writing of words or putting lines and colour on canvass, it is very difficult to judge. How any other than the artist himself or the appreciator of his work himself is able to gain a beautiful intuition without regarding the physically beautiful object? He himself has insisted in this regard, that art is an Intuition, and intuition is individuality and individuality is never repeated. He should have added, if we understand him properly, the absoluteness of the imagination, such that the same images serve to stimulate the production of the same intuitions in different minds. And again, how can this absoluteness of the imagination in all men be reconciled with his doctrine that an intuition as individual, unique and never to be repeated?

If Croce's theory is accepted, then, any intuition-expression would be an unique, absolute, individual and therefore, must be a good art and then, any caprice, any perversity, any ugliness, any abortion of a depraved or maddened mind would be, if this were really Croce's meaning, justifiable provided it were a clear intuition, a faithful expression of an impression.

But this is not the case. When Croce condescends to consider the externalized work of art, he gives no countenance to the view that the producer or the maker of the work of art is free. He says, in turning to his practical task, the artist has put aside his artistry, and has lost the freedom of the artist.
We do not externalize all our impressions, rather, we do select from the crowd of intuitions. And hence, agreeing with Arnold, he says that the choice of the subject is of supreme importance. The artist in making an external object, is leaving his proper sphere, and is entering the practical social world where economics, ethics and other considerations do matter and his selection will be governed by economic and moral conditions of life. In this inferior domain, he has no claim to the liberty of the artist. When he begins to create, his liberty is gone and it is right that he should submit to the censor.

Croce, we might remark, has neglected completely the communicative aspect of art. The business of the artist is to communicate and Croce has neglected communication as he has almost forgotten beauty. No body has denied the fact that he is one who has something to deliver to the world - may be pleasure, instruction or exaltation or a message. A creative artist, again, is submitting his work for the judgement of the world. Croce's intuition-expression, simply remains internal, something within and strictly personal or individual and hence is not exposed to any judgement whatsoever. How can, then, it be called expression? The artist about whom he is philosophizing exists nowhere but in his own mind. His artist is interested in nothing but his intuition and it is only when he puts away his aesthetic nature, and submits
to the practical or non-aesthetic, that he designs to externalize his vision. His artist does not, as artist, communicate, his poet speaks, as poet, no language.

Miss Powel\(^1\) has put her finger on a difficulty which seems to be insuperable in Croce's account of aesthetic communication. She points out that in Croce's theory, the artist's intuition is elaborated out of his own experience, but the appreciator is required to elaborate just the same intuition out of something quite different i.e. the physical work of art. Croce has missed the fundamental fact of life itself for his "impressions", like Plato's ideal forms roam about, without physical content awaiting his artist to pounce upon them and by synthesizing them to create out of them an elaborate work of art. The reality of life is very much missing. All art, we may say, is expression, but it is the expression of life, as the artist sees it, in a language which other men can understand.
References

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