



ARTISTIC IMAGE IN WORLD LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT: - Maxim Gorky in his report has painted in bold strokes a picture of the development of literature from the moment when mankind, not yet split up into classes, reflected its struggle for life through the medium of songs and fables down to the moment when bourgeois literature began to collapse. A history of the literature of class society is the history of how literature has become severed from the life of the masses. Needless to say, this great history contains periods of efflorescence and periods of decline, but taken as a whole, it shows us a literature severed from real life as led by the masses of the people.

KEYWORDS: Author, novel, times, literature.

INTRODUCTION

My task is to survey the final period of this literature – a period in which all tendencies of parasitism and decay in bourgeois literature have obtruded themselves in most glaring relief, in which the material collapse and decay of capitalism is being accompanied by a parallel process – the decay of world capitalist literature.

It goes without saying that just as the decay of capitalism does not represent an absolutely continuous process, inasmuch as we are confronted, even in the period of capitalism's

decay, with examples of temporary progress in certain spheres and in certain domains, so the literature of decaying capitalism is still capable, in certain spheres and in the case, of certain nations, of producing great works of art.

What we have to do is to discern and reveal the general line of this progress of development. This general line of development should be determined, first and foremost, by examining the attitude taken, by literature towards those great events which

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have moulded the history of mankind during the last twenty years and which should have found their reflection in literature.

Present-day literature is a literature which began with the World War. There is, of course, no complete rupture between it and the literature of the preceding phase; it is a continuation of what has gone before. But here, as in all fields of social life, the World War drew a sharp boundary line.

Three great historical events of the last twenty years constitute those criteria by which we judge the content and the tendency of world literature. These three events are: the World War, the October Revolution and the fascists' advent to power in a number of countries. To aesthetes, this may appear very strange. How, it may be asked, can literature be judged, not by aesthetic canons, but by the criteria of great historical events? But in such a gathering as this there is no need to prove that, since literature is a reflection of social life, the standard by which it should be gauged is precisely the attitude which it takes to such great facts of historical development as the war, the October Revolution, and fascism.

The World War of 1914 was an imperialist war. It was a war organized and waged in the interests of monopoly capital, in the interests of the ruling cliques of the bourgeoisie in the various belligerent countries. At the beginning of the war, this proposition was hailed as blasphemy by the pundits of literature. Today it is accepted as an axiom in all countries – the only difference being that the German bourgeoisie tries to represent the war of the German coalition as a war of defence, charging the former Allies with imperialism, whereas the bourgeoisie of the more western countries, who entered the war as allies, speak of an attack on France and Belgium by Germany and explain it by the imperialist policy of German capitalism. The imperialist

bourgeoisie succeeded in mobilizing not only the bourgeois but also the petty-bourgeois masses for the war, succeeded in subjecting to their will considerable sections of the proletariat, in imbuing the minds of the great mass of the people with imperialist ideas, in forcing their “cannon fodder” to think in the way desired by their masters, who were sending the masses to the slaughter. And in just the same way, world literature deserted to the side of imperialism at the first gunshot, defending and glorifying war. Not one of the leading lights of bourgeois world literature spoke out against the war. Literature proved to be what Marx in his younger days said of ideology in general:

“Division of labour ... in the ruling class takes the form of a division into brain work and manual labour; among one and the same class it very often happens that those who rank as the thinkers of the class are active creators of its ideology, who make the production of the illusions of this class about itself their principal means of subsistence, while the other part takes a more passive, a more receptive attitude towards these thinkers and illusions, since, while being in reality active members of the class, they lack sufficient time to create illusions about themselves.”

World literature busied itself with the production of illusions about the World War, and the most obscure aesthete rendered no less valuable service to the war bosses than did the woman munition worker who was forced to stand at her machine and turn out shells. The only difference being that the woman worker who made shells was forced to do so by hunger, while the pundits of literature who sang anthems to the bursting of shells did so of their own free will.

At the moment when war broke out, all the world's writers, who considered that they were above classes, above material interests,

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who considered themselves to be the representatives of pure art, proved to be on the side of imperialism, which was hurling millions of workers and peasants into the vortex of imperialist war. It would be hard to find a single well-known figure in pre-war bourgeois literature who, at the moment when the guns began to boom, did not sing anthems in praise of this war.

Even such a man as Anatole France, a profound sceptic, accustomed to seek for material causes even in the revolt of the angels, believed that the war had arisen without any economic causes, without the struggle of trusts and cartels, and “saluted this war.”

Of all the outstanding bourgeois writers in the belligerent countries, only the great humanist, Romain Rolland, did not bow down before the Moloch of imperialism, but, hiding his face from the horrors of war, endeavoured to heal its wounds by organizing aid for war prisoners.

Only two writers of world-wide reputation opposed war at this time: Maxim Gorky, who proved even at that time how right Lenin was when he called him a proletarian writer, and our old friend, Comrade Andersen Nexö. And this, of course, was no accident, for they were representatives of the working class.

Only when profound unrest had set in among the war-weary masses of the people did the first literary expression of protest against war make its appearance; and here again, as history has shown, this was no chance phenomenon. In 1916 Henri Barbusse published his book, *Under Fire*, which Lenin and all of us who were then with him in Switzerland immediately recognized as an expression of the first protest against war among the masses.

In this book Barbusse drew a pitiless picture of how the toiling people were being annihilated

in the interests of bourgeois monopoly. He set out with ideas of the most commonplace bourgeois kind, but war opened his eyes. While truthfully depicting war, and thereby laying the foundations of anti-war literature, Barbusse was still in a state of complete coma; he could not yet wring from his stifled bosom a cry to rouse the masses for the war against war, he could not yet sound the call for socialist revolution, as the sole way out of those contradictions which have been created by capitalism and deepened by imperialism.

“How will they regard this slaughter, they who’ll live after us, to whom progress – which comes as sure as fate – will at last restore the poise of their conscience? How will they regard these exploits, which even we who perform them don’t know whether to compare with these of Plutarch’s and Corneille’s heroes, or with those of hooligans and apaches?”

“‘And for all that, mind you,’ Bertrand went on, ‘there is one figure that has risen above the war and will blaze with the beauty and strength of his courage – ‘

‘I listened, leaning on a stick and towards him, drinking in the voice that came in the twilight silence from the lips that so rarely spoke. He cried with a clear voice – ‘Liebknecht!’

“He stood up with his arms still crossed. His face, as profoundly serious as a statue’s, drooped upon his chest. But he emerged once again from his muteness to repeat: ‘The future, the future! The work of the future will be to wipe out the present, to wipe it out more than we can imagine, to wipe it out like something abominable and shameful.’”

But the name of Liebknecht, which cut through the gloom of war like a flash of lightning, was not yet a call to battle for Corporal Bertrand; it was a remote star, which would one day draw

closer to lacerated, bloodstained humanity. For Corporal Bertrand went on to say:

“And yet this present – it had to be, it had to be! Shame on military glory, shame on armies, shame on the soldier’s calling, that changes men by turns into stupid victims or ignoble brutes. Yes, shame. That’s the true word, but it’s too true; it’s true in eternity, but it’s not yet true for us. It will be true ... when it is found written among the other truths that a purified mind will let us understand. We are still lost, still exiled far from that time. In our time of today, in these moments, this truth is hardly more than a fallacy, this sacred saying is only blasphemy!” And brave Corporal Bertrand led his men into battle, where he himself was killed. And millions of others were killed too on all the battlefields of the war.

Meanwhile world literature sang songs in praise of war. Only in a tiny segment of world literature, on the extreme Left flank of the petty-bourgeois writers, did the complaining whine of the human being, crushed in the millstones of war, make itself heard. The first shoots of pacifist literature, protesting against war, were beginning to spring up.

The lightnings of the February Revolution presaging the thunderclaps of October, and the thunder of October itself, the spectacle of a great country rising up under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, under the banner of Lenin, for a fight to the death against the war monster, were unavailing to turn world literature against the war. Up to the very end of the war it remained in the service of imperialism, helping to recruit the last energies of the masses to serve the interests of the war Moloch.

And only when the war was over, leaving millions of corpses to rot upon the battlefields, leaving behind it tens of millions of cripples and orphans and a world reduced to smoking ruins – only then did bourgeois literature

commence its pacifist propaganda. This pacifist propaganda was like an echo – repeating the slogans of President Wilson, like an echo repeating the Pacifist legends about the “war to end war” – legends created by the world bourgeoisie in order to keep back the rising masses of the people from a real struggle for socialism, which was the sole means of making war impossible in the future. This literature showed up the fun horror of the World War. Writers in all countries who had lived through this horror communicated it to the masses of the people. But even the best of these writers, who not only did not seek in their works to deceive the masses but who, like Zweig, wanted to warn them, were only able to show the world through tear-stained eyes, only able to show the fate of the human atoms, caught up in the vortex of the war events, as impotent and helpless. Not one of these writers was able to show the spirit of mutiny generated among these masses. And just as the French bourgeoisie tried to conceal in its archives the documents relating to the menacing events of May 1917, when the French army was swept by a wave of mutinies, just as the German bourgeoisie tried to wrap in a veil of legend the story of the uprising in the German fleet. so bourgeois and Left-bourgeois literature did not touch upon these scenes; which made the bourgeois world feel that it was standing on the edge of a precipice and which made the masses feel that they were not powerless atoms in the face of dread forces conjured up by the war, if only they chose to act unitedly, if only they told themselves. “If we are to die, let us die fighting for our freedom!” Even Dos Passos, the outstanding American revolutionary writer, lost as he was in contemplation of the bubbles of protest rising up in the souls of petty-bourgeois intellectuals disillusioned by the war, overlooked the hurricane which swept through the French army.

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Remarque in his first book gave a masterly portrayal of the destruction of the peoples by the forces of war, but he was unable to portray the rising revolt against war; and his subsequent book, *The Road Back*, was a most striking expression not only of the impotence of bourgeois literature in the face of war (impotence, that is to say, if we speak of that part of bourgeois literature which did not consciously take the side of imperialist war), but also of unwillingness to fight against war. The hero of this book, returning home to a country in the first throes of a proletarian revolution, finds himself a place as school teacher in a secluded village with a view to disseminating ideas on the brotherhood of the peoples, on peaceful labour, and, turning his back on revolution, soothes himself with the thought that not everyone need be a pioneer.

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