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ALL GROUPS

Lecture 1: The Enlightenment (The Age of Reason) and the Rise of the Novel

The late sixteenth to the seventeenth century in Europe witnessed the Renaissance, which is a scientific, cultural and intellectual movement, considered as the birth of sciences in Europe. The next period in Europe, and England in particular is that of the Enlightenment, often referred to as the Age of Reason (and Modernity), is a consequence of the Renaissance. The birth of sciences enhanced the intellectual life in Europe, many philosophers and thinkers started to write about reason and scientific truth. The spirit of this age centered around science as the only truth man can be sure of, thus any knowledge which is not calculable, or scientifically proven, is not reasonable. Reason thus became synonym to truth, and science becoming a definition of truth.

For Emmanuel Kant, the Enlightenment is “Man’s emergence from one’s own self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the **inability** to use one’s own understanding **without the guidance** of another. This immaturity is self imposed if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of the enlightenment is therefore: Sapere Aude! **Have courage to use your own understanding**”. (*Aufklärung* is the German translation of the word Enlightenment)

The Main Writers of the Enlightenment:

There have been many thinkers in the Enlightenment age who spoke and wrote about this movement. The literature of this period was rather rational and intellectual instead of fictional. The first thinkers to define the Enlightenment are French, German, and English philosophers and scientists, who together formed a movement they called *Philosophes*.

This movement included Jean Jacques Rousseau (French), Renée Descartes (French), John Voltaire, Denis Diderot, and others. These philosophers defined the Enlightenment starting from Descartes’ principle (I think therefore I am), thus relating man’s existence to his ability to think for himself (which leads back to Kant’s definition of the Enlightenment)

Other British thinkers like Locke, Isaac Newton, David Hume, related the Enlightenment to science and truth, having Newton’s theory of the Gravity, and his essays about science, as an inspiration leading them to conclude that natural and human laws contribute in making things happen.

Some thinkers approached the Enlightenment from a more spiritual viewpoint, thus meditating about God and creation, without being superstitious. Society was becoming less religious and

more rational. English poet Alexander Pope says: “know then thyself presume not god to scan the proper study of mankind is man”.

The Principles of the Enlightenment:

- Individualism: Man is the centre of the universe.
- Humanitarianism
- Secularism
- Human reason can discover the natural laws of the universe and determine the natural rights of mankind.
- Human reason can ensure unending progress in knowledge, technical achievement, and moral values
- There is a stable, coherent, knowable self. This self is conscious, rational, autonomous, and universal—
- This self knows itself and the world through reason, or rationality, posited as the highest form of mental functioning, and the only objective form.
- The mode of knowing produced by the objective rational self is “science.
- The knowledge produced by science is “truth,” and is eternal.
- The knowledge/truth produced by science (by the rational objective knowing self) will always lead toward progress and perfection. All human institutions and practices can be analyzed by science (reason/objectivity) and improved.
- Reason is the ultimate judge of what is true, and therefore of what is right, and what is good
- In a world governed by reason, the true will always be the same as the good and the right

The Consequences of the Age of Reason (also factors of the rise of a new literary genre: the novel)

1. The rise of a new social class, the Bourgeois class, constituted of tradesmen of the middle class, with limited education and great wealth
2. The spread of intellectual cafés which enhanced political and intellectual debates
3. The invention of the printing machine and the translation of the bible
4. Higher education rate among the commons
5. The need of a literature that represents the middle class to entertain them

References:

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The Rise of the Novel

Before eighteenth century prose was less available to people and consisted of a language that laymen could not manage to understand, since it was in Latin: In prose; there were books written in a heavy Latin style discussing religious problems, and other books dealing with education and travel. People wanted to be entertained and they found it in the drama and poetry of their period.

By the time of the invention of the printing machine, printed books became available and were in prose, since verse could not suit the written form and was considered as ‘an artificial and difficult form of communication’, thus, prose fiction became a new entertainer because this new narrative could reproduce daily life (Stevenson 1960: 5). This new form employed a language accessible to all people for ‘poets and playwrights demanded a great deal of sophistication from their audiences’ (Smith & co 1974: 1).

The novel, as a genre, has developed through the centuries and matured speedily in the eighteenth century. It is connected with other literary genres such as prose fiction, drama, epic and poetry.

Novel Defined

It is difficult to give a truly intelligible definition to the novel given its fluctuating structures and goals all through its progress. *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* introduces the novel as “a fictitious prose narrative of considerable length in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity” (cited in Rees 1973, p. 106). Therefore, it is stated that a novel is a portion of prose fiction of an important length. this definition emphasizes the term ‘prose’ signifying the familiar or everyday spoken form of language lacking the occurrence of poetic rhythmic arrangement. Nevertheless, there are a small number of novels written in verse as well, such as Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate* and Alexander Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegi*.

The other side of the description is associated with the length that is displayed in all most all novels to distinguish its exclusive feature as a type in regards to the short story that is another genre. The lengths of some novels are comparable to the length of short stories and for this reason, a term such as ‘novella’ is frequently employed for shorter novels. The word novel is regarded to be derived from the Latin word *Novellus*, Italian word *novella* (which meant a small new thing), and French word *Nouvelle*.

The novel is defined as “a narrative in prose, based on a story, in which the author may portray character, and the life of an age, and analyse sentiments and passions, and the reactions of men and women to their environment” (Evans 1976: 212).

Thus, the novel is a long narrative based on the daily lives of some characters, it represents their joys and sorrows; successes and failures, and it portrays a certain period in history.

Why did the novel rise precisely at that period? Critics argue that the novel developed with the increase of the reading public, this reading public that consisted of the rising middle-class, the novel became ‘an art-form written by and for the now-powerful commercial bourgeoisie’ (Kettle 1969: 28).

The Factors that Influenced the Rise of the Novel

- **Industrial revolution**

It is one of the chief reasons that helped to the rise of the novel through the development of industries. With the new equipment the work could be achieved rapidly and people could have time for relaxation and entertainment during which people preferred reading novels.

- **Printing press**

It was obtainable to manufacture several copies at a cheaper price. Even people with low salaries could afford themselves books unlike in the past when only aristocrats were the reading community.

- **The availability of newspapers and magazines**

It increased the tendency of reading which finally led people to read novels. The publication of some novels in magazines increased the access to novels in addition to the book form. Hasan confirms that the industrial revolution: “paved the way to the rise of the middle-class people” (2015, p. 2) who enhanced the claim of reading resources for, they had an abundance of leisure time. Further, they had desires to read about “their everyday experiences” (Hasan, 2015, p. 2) which encouraged authors like Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding to write prose fiction portraying real-life experiences.

- **The decline of romance and drama**

Before romances were appropriate to be read by the privileged aristocratic or noble families, it could not maintain the readership. The simple people were uninterested in romances because; they had no desire of any sort to them. In addition to that, the stories were getting older and unrealistic then they were no longer exciting to the people. The settings in which the stories in the romances took place were also unrealistic.

- **Decline of drama**

It was also one reason that helped the rise of the novel. During the rule of Cromwell in the 17th century, theatres (the most entertaining popular settings during the Elizabethan era) were forbidden and closed. Additionally, the novel could attain a larger audience, unlike theatre which could attain only a restricted audience.

- **Rise of the middle class**

It is one of the results of the industrial revolution was the rise of the middle-class. People became more progressively wealthy and even poor people of lower status were able to raise their status. The middle-class people started imitating the traditional landed gentry demanding books to read. Besides the amelioration of the living standard, many people obtained education and became able to read. Women readers increased with greater leisure time with the rise of the middle-class and it was a fashion for high-status women to remain engaged in reading literature. The middle-class people looked for literature which suited to their temper and taste.

- **Mobile libraries**

The innovation of mobile libraries made the increase in reading public easy. Reading was encouraged by providing easy access to books since books were delivered to the homes if people are members in the mobile library. It was very beneficial mostly for women. Even though the industrial revolution caused the decline in romance and drama, the rise of the middle class and mobile libraries played a paramount role in the rise of the novel. Finally, four authors precisely Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne took the novel to “the highest point of glory” (Roy, 2016, p. 8).

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