

The Art That Pays

Literature

Chairman: Mr. Fineman

Introduction - Mr. Fineman

Various members of the literature division will read papers they have written on different aspects of the field of literature in connection with "The Art That Pays". After this is done there will be a discussion period in which it is hoped that questions will be asked concerning these papers. The program of papers to be read is the following:

1. Popular Drama in Elizabethan Times - Mr. Gray
2. Ivory Tower Literature - Mr. Troy
3. The Best Seller - Miss Osgood, E. Flesheim and Elizabeth Mills
4. The Sub-Best Seller - Mr. Fineman

Part I - Popular Drama in Elizabethan Times

In regard to the question of popular drama today, to the question which so many serious playwrights are asking, Is a self-respecting dramatist unfitted in the present world of popular arts?--it is pertinent that we should turn to the drama of Shakespeare's time from which that of the present day has evolved, and see for ourselves how the popular arts of the 17th century differed from those of today.

Upon examining the drama of the 17th century in England, one finds it divided into two groups:

1. Popular
2. Esoteric

The popular drama existed, as today, for the enjoyment of the majority. Traveling groups performed throughout England, attracting the masses to roar with laughter or shed a bitter tear over the presentations which in substance resembled the vaudeville of the present day. Upon examining typical popular plays of the age, one finds the traces of elaborate legends, rough and tumble force, murder, excitement, the appeal to cruelty, fear, and especially the characteristics which seem to exist in popular literature-- lively action, simple romance, and speeches for the purpose of emotional appeal.

While this was going on, there grew up among the more select members of the population, a disgust for this popular form of entertainment, and a strong desire to prove its illegitimacy by writing a higher type of play which would appeal only to the educated few. These playwrights broke away completely from the popular drama form and returned to the early Greek plays for their material.

In contrast to this extreme reactionary group there appeared a small number of university men such as Greene, Peele and Marlow, who chose not to ignore the popular drama, but to improve and modify it--to give it order, ideals, and better speaking qualities, to raise its standard, but at the same time to keep it popular. It was through the efforts of these intelligent men that Shakespeare's plays were able to reach the population of England for it was they who paved the way to his success, and had it not been for the existence of popular drama in the 17th century, we might never have had Shakespeare's plays today.

Ivory Tower Literature - Mr. Troy

The term "ivory tower" is by no means a recent one. It was first thought of by Alfred de Vigny and it existed as far back as 1804. It may be

described as an elegant defense on the part of certain writers against the social and cultural forces of the world in which they lived. It is a defense against the hard in society, the enemy, whether it consisted of industrial democracy or the rule of the aristocracy. Out of this tendency to escape society, grew the French Symbolist Movement. Baudelaire and Gethié were members of this group. The writers of the 19th and 20th centuries have been, in one way or another, fundamentally opposed to the society in which they belong. This has been a common tendency although different writers have reacted in different ways. There is, for instance, the contempt of Ezra Pound, the mockery of T. S. Elliot and the indifference of Gertrude Stein. Marcel Proust and Thomas Mann differ from this attitude of escape in that they have not run away from society, but have submitted it to analysis. There is a strong sense of exile in most modern literature which exists because the modern writer is unable to adjust himself to his environment and therefore turns from an objective relationship to society to a subjective one. Examples of this type of literature are Joyce's Ulysses and Mann's The Magic Mountain. This re-orientation of focus from the impersonal to the personal, has demanded its own techniques and forms which are found in the novels of Joyce and Stein. These writers seek material in their own consciousness.

There may be two reasons for this introverted tendency among writers:

1. The change which occurred at the time of the Renaissance when man took a larger view of himself in his relationship to society.
2. Or it may be man's reaction to modern society, such as we find in Edmund Wilson's Axel's Castle and The New Masses. In other words, it may be man's recognition of his importance in society or it may be his reaction against a society which he feels tends to ignore him. One is a positive and

one a negative reaction--and the choice lies between the philosophical interpretation and the economic one.

In conclusion, the so-called ivory tower is not a new thing. Its equivalent has existed at the close of every cultural period in society. The ivory tower writer is usually proud of his obscurity and he wants to appeal to the few; but it is a mistake to think it always a bad thing, for every great writer has been a part of the ivory tower at one time. For serious literature addresses itself to the mind of the race and not to one kind of society.

Part II - The Present "Art That Pays"

Introduction - Miss Osgood

The second half of the program deals directly with the "Art That Pays" today. This consists of three types of literature: 1. The Best Seller, 2. The Popular Magazines, 3. The Sub-Best Seller. There are four principal questions which we shall try to answer concerning the first two:

1. What is bought and when
2. Reasons bought
3. Aims and attitudes

4. Analysis of a magazine story in relation to the "Principles of Literary Criticism" and "The Meaning of Meaning" by Richards. In answer to question 1, Middletown by Lynd and Leisure by Landberg were consulted. (Examples of question 1 were illustrated and posted in the theatre).

The Best Seller - Emily Fleisher

The Bennington Book Shop and a book shop near Cleveland were consulted for information on the best sellers in their respective communities. Although any best seller rents well, there seems to be a certain type of book that sells

better than others--for example, Zane Grey's novels. Certain books are read almost entirely by women and others, almost entirely by men. Kathleen Norris is a popular women writer, although not a best seller, and authors of detective stories and western stories are more popular with men. Various best sellers include: Hurricane by Nordhoff and Hall, It Can't Happen Here by Sinclair Lewis and The Last Puritan by George Santayana. The Hurricane is read for the purpose of escape. It Can't Happen Here is read because it is a courageous treatment of a modern theme and is an articulation of political opinions which most of us feel but have not been able to express. The Last Puritan is a contemplative, philosophical kind of book. This, as far as we can judge, is popular for the following reasons:

1. It supplies a short-cut to philosophy, and thus the individual feels that his own life problems are being considered and that he is being helped in this way.
2. It satisfies the curiosity most of us have of finding out more about ourselves.
3. It looks well on the guest room table.
4. It provides suitable discussion at women's clubs. In other words it is an impressive book which makes us feel important when we read it.

Women's Magazines - Elizabeth Mills

Women's magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Ladies Home Journal and McCall's are among the most popular forms of reading matter which exist today. Let us see what makes them so. The following are consistent characteristics found in all stories which appear in these magazines.

1. Happy ending
2. Attractive characters
3. Easy reading, no effort demanded on the part of the reader.

4. Story always most important. No consideration of style except that it be simple.

The contents consists always of either love or adventure. Love consists of a girl getting her man after passing through a series of complications known as the plot. A magazine writer must always keep in mind the fact that the reader wants to be pleased, and seeks relaxation, therefore he must never give opinions on controversial subjects.

The reasons for the appeal of this literature is again that of escape from the hum-drum details of modern life. Also, habit formation such as occurs with the serial stories.

Aims and Attitudes of a Magazine Editor - Prudence Holmes

An interview with the editor of Love Story, a pulp magazine, indicates the aims and attitudes of the producers of such literature.

When asked what types of readers her magazine appealed to, the editor replied that they consisted mostly of school girls, teachers, and sailors "because of their temperament". She said that she considered pulp magazines the pulse of the people. When asked what requirements were necessary for a good story, she replied that intense emotion, a happy ending, and the necessity for the story to be "up to date", were essential requirements. The aims of successful pulp magazine authors are not in conveying meanings but in emotions and action, she said. As to formulas for story writing, they do not exist as such, although there are certain patterns of plot development which the author has to follow. Because of the primary requirement for a happy ending, the authors often have a difficult time in resolving all their characters to successful conclusions, and often the editors are called in to help them out.

Miss Osgood attempted to analyze a typical popular magazine story, Lover Be Bold, whose moral was that of courage and fear, and whose outgrowth was that of sympathetic magic. After reading out some ten or fifteen definitions of Beauty taken from Richard's Principles of Literary Criticism and The Meaning of Meaning she concluded that according to certain definitions, Lover Be Bold could be called a beautiful story, thus proving the inconsistency of these definitions. (Even the highest type of literary criticism can be too vague to mean very much). Examples of definitions read include "Beauty is a work of genius", "Beauty is that which produces an illusion", "Beauty is that which is beautiful", "Beauty is an expression", "Beauty is that which causes pleasure".

The Sub-Best Seller - Mr. Fineman

Three sub-best sellers were chosen to illustrate the varieties of this type of fiction, and a short review of general characteristics of each is given. The following books were chosen: The Shining Cloud by Margaret Pedler, Trusman Rock by Zane Grey, and The Return of Tarzan by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

The Shining Cloud

The substance of this novel consists entirely of plot entanglements and endless love complications. Parts of the story were read to illustrate this.

Trusman Rock

Zane Grey's novel also consists entirely of plot interest, but instead of love complications there are numerous action complications. Fighting, rescuing and loving are the chief themes throughout the book--and all this adventurous blood and thunder is supposed to keep the reader in quick suspense. Even a dash of illegitimacy is thrown in as a reason for killing the guilty one. This novel is a perfect example of escape literature.

The Return of Tarzan

This story is a strange mixture of uncivilized jungle life and the kind of sophistication usually found on private American yachts. Tarzan, the he-man of the jungle, dumb and bestial, falls in love with a rich man's daughter. The plot is a series of heroic battles on the part of Tarzan for his mate. Tarzan travels, goes to London and there confuses civilization with jungle cries, makes apologies, and finally marries the girl. When Burroughs was asked to explain the secret of his success he answered:

"The continued success of my books may lie in the fact that I write them primarily to please myself, upon the theory that I am a normal man and therefore that that which entertains me will entertain millions of others similar to me. My mind being slightly impatient as I conceive the modern mind to be, tires of long description, of minute character delineations, of lengthy moralising and of tiresome descriptions of scenery; therefore, in fiction, I desire action and so, in my novels, I subordinate all else to action.

"My success may be also partially attributable to the fact that I make no conscious effort to write down to one class or up to another, but to use English, whether good or bad, that is easily understandable, and to draw action pictures which permit my reader to visualize scenes without great effort."

The conclusion arrived at concerning these sub-best sellers is that they are written for escape. The difference between the audience of such literature and that of a more intellectual nature, such as representative of Bennington College, is that the latter use literature for illumination rather than escape. That the mass of the population has to resort to Tarzan as a means of making his daily life a bearable one, is a shocking reflection on our whole civilization.

Question Period

The discussion at the question period consisted mostly in explaining the universality of Shakespeare's literature. It was pointed out that the best parts of Shakespeare (his soliloquies) are really ivory tower art but that the plot action is completely popular. Shakespeare is able to express his ideas in the popular form and still appeal to the intellectual because events in his plays are subject to various interpretations. The greatest literature ever written exists in Shakespeare's works and yet there is hardly a crudity in his plays which is not found in the popular drama of his time. This may be an explanation of his universality. Another interesting point that was brought out in the discussion was the fact that the various components of Shakespeare's plays have split up today and have become specific types of drama, such as the vaudeville, pure tragedy, propaganda and the drawing room comedy.