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The Function of the Writer in the Present Crisis.

The "function" of literature is, in a sense, very similar to the "function" of life itself. For, creative writing mirrors and embraces the entirety of human problems with all their facets and implications - plotical, religious, moral, aesthetic, psychological, social...

Among all human endeavours and accomplishments literature is the most comprehensive one - revealing, not only certain aspects of our metaphysic or earthly plight (as do music, architecture or painting), but the whole scope of our impulses and needs, our contradictions, hopes, triumphs and mistakes.

However, literature - being comparatively independent from the heavy rules of material life - is not (~~ought not~~ should not be) restricted to portraying the vicissitudes of the human drama - but ought to influence the course and tempo of developments. - The stimulating, clarifying, purifying effect of literature. (Basic error of the "naturalists" - to present life "as it really is": without criticizing, intensifying, transforming it...)

Literature - not only a mirror: also a weapon.
Can be used for good or evil purposes.

Literature has been instrumental in bringing about present world crisis (= present confusion of all moral values and standards.)

- The Revolution of Nihilism - :intrinsically prepared by the masters of the IXX th. Century. Not deliberately, though - as French philosophers of enlightenment prepared French Revolution -: unwittingly (in most cases.) - "Revolution of Nihilism" contains in an ugly pell-mell distorted fragments of Machiavelli, Marx, Nietzsche, Wagner, the German romanticists, the Jesuits, wild West stories, etc.

The European genius, from Rousseau to Nietzsche, attacking, undermining, "debunking" the traditional scheme of ethics (social and religious obligations) - without creating a valid pattern of new morality. Hence the terrifying abyss - the moral chaos our generation was confronted with. - Worship of brutal force - as an (almost inevitable) consequence of moral disorientation. Nineteenth Cent. masters had been too successful in destroying obsolete idols but failed to give us new code of laws.

Task of literature in the present crisis: to re-establish the intellectual and moral balance equilibrium that has been lost through the spiritual adventures of an excessive individualism.

(Danger herein involved: to become reactionary by going back - behind the standards of Voltaire and Rousseau. The task we have to solve - or whose ultimate solution we must try to prepare - : : to shape a new scheme of ~~intellectual~~ ^{moral} values ~~and possibilities~~, which is strict and dynamic enough to check the tendency toward anarchy - so frequent nowadays - , and yet does not sacrifice ~~the~~ what ~~was~~ has been creative and progressive in the period of liberalism.)

This might sound rather vague and general. However, ~~immediate~~ there are direct implications as to present crisis.

Under present conditions - no writer can, or should, remain aloof.
"Ivory Tower" - not only immoral but infeasible. (Absolute detachment tantamounts, in most cases, to acquiescence in anti-cultural, anti-progressive totalitarianism...)

The paramount question:

What can the writer do to influence developments?

"Not the poets but the pilots will decide outcome... Not the books but the guns..." (Trivial argumentation.)

Obvious nonsense - even from a strictly military point of view.
(The problem of the civil morale - now more imperative than in any former war... Italy's disaster - Britain's resistance; both due to civil morale - respect to the existence or to the lack of it...)

Brings us to problem

art and propaganda.

Many forms of propagandist effect.

Direct approach;

indirect approach.

Journalist and poet - as the two extreme types.

Sometimes mixed in one individual - sometimes even within one single literary work. *Danger of simplification X*

The complexity of the task:

to keep values alive; (purely conservative function.)

to prepare "new order" - anticipating coming problems...
(revolutionary function.)

to clarify issues at stake;
etc.

Conclusion:

The writer, most obviously depending on social and moral conditions - much more so than a dentist or an opera singer. Therefore, vitally interested in the outcome of present struggle. &

Also, he is in a position to historical process - not only as a victim but also actively. (Less directly than a pilot, to be sure - but, perhaps, not less decisively...)

Every writer who deserves this designation will find his own personal solution for dilemmas, dangers involved in present situation. Solution may be as personal as an author's style. (No rigid schemes, or rules, or postulates...)

Not necessarily direct political approach.

How could literature ignore an ordeal which concerns, and may transform, the face of civilization and for hundreds of years to come???