

Social Factors Influencing the Structural and Content Variation of Literary Works

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Abstract. The investigation of art relationships, specially literature and society is not a new area, but during the 19th and 20th centuries, coinciding with the development of social sciences it has changed to a specific field. Literacy sociology and the sociology of literature as branches of sociology have fundamental differences and they are processes related to the science of literature which is better known as the historical science of the sociology of literature. Is literature the result of a social process or is it as the appearance shows a totally personal matter which has no relationship with the society in which the artist lives in? The present paper seeks to define literacy sociology and also answer the above-mentioned question. Thus, it seeks to review the important social factors which affect the formation process and the presentation of literature methods.

Keywords: Sociology, Literature, Art, Society, Religion, Politics, Literary works.

1. Introduction

The investigation of art relationships, specially literature and society is not a new area, but during the 19th and 20th centuries, coinciding with the development of social sciences it has changed to a specific field. However, the question “Is literature the result of a social process or is it as the appearance shows a totally personal matter which has no relationship with the society in which the artist lives in?” has led to several discussions. Answering this question has also led to the rise of various investigations and views in the realm of art specifically literature the result of which is the appearance of a new field called “literacy sociology”. However, literacy sociology and the sociology of literature as branches of sociology have fundamental differences and it is a process related to the science of literature which is better known as the historical science of the sociology of literature.

2. Sociology of Literature vs. the Literacy Sociology

The field of sociology of literature is included among the fields which are considered half way between literature and sociology sharing these two fields. Literacy sociology aims at dealing with literature as a branch of art from one hand and investigating and criticizing literary works against sociological features from the other hand. Thus, it could be argued that in fact this field is a branch of literal criticism based on the concepts of sociology in which the objective of the critic is to specify the literary work, the social backgrounds of its appearance, and finally the effects the literary work has taken from its environment as a social phenomenon.

Literal criticism could either be theoretical or practical. Although there exists a very delicate relationship between these two; it is still possible to consider these two as separate fields. The work of theoretical literal critic deals with major theories such as: What is beauty? What is a poem? What are the elements found in a literal work based on theory to call it a successful literary work? The practical literal critic does not seek to determine the theory about Aristotle or Platonic beauty theories, but he seeks to find out whether a literary work has the features of a successful one or not? The literary sociology not only considers these two criticism processes but it also seeks to investigate the role of society in the genesis of a literary work.

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3. Influential Factors

3.1. Society

Concerning society, it is believed that the literary work is a product of a society in which it is created while it naturally inherits some of its features from its producer and the society at the same time. These inherited features initiate some changes both in content and in the structure of the literary work which come from within the society. So, society as an effective factor can have its impact on all existence aspects of a poet, his/her preferences, as well as the poet's thoughts, tastes and ideas. Accordingly, all patterns of society including politics and religion, and all society groups such as ordinary people, leaders, scientists, and better be called all audience of the literature can impose their views, preferences, and tastes on the form as well as the content of any literary work. They also impose linguistic, thought, imagination, and also specific frameworks on the poet and his literary work.

However, to propose his work a poet, as an important member of the society in which he/she lives needs approval from his like-minded groups. Naturally, a society will support a poet who writes in coordination with the views and opinions of that group. Moreover, a society reads and appreciates a poem only if it bears not only the art aspects but also has its nature in accordance with the thoughts of its followers. The aim of a critic who seeks to criticize a literary work based on a social view is to determine these effects and the way they have been imposed on the literary work. Moreover, this kind of criticism tries to express how the society could cause changes, revolutions, and variations through imposing.

Based on this attitude, the creator of a literary work belongs to a specific country, a specific social level, a specific social group, and all in all to a specific kind of society which has its own traditions which put the burden on the artist's shoulders. That is why a Muslim painter is not allowed to paint body parts of a human and his imagination is only allowed to show aesthetic patterns. Nevertheless, not only the social environment which builds on the artist's personality is founded in the literary work created by him, but also his inner inspiration which outbursts as an outer form is also flowing in that social environment. Goldmann (1964) is also in the belief that the creation of a true culture is not possible, unless the mental structure of it matches the mental structure of a group whose efforts are exerted to organize social life towards development.

Based on this theory, an artist is not a separate part of his society and in reality this is the society which helps him flourish and become well-known through supporting him and providing bases for his growth. In fact being an artist is nothing if there is no society. Scholars and poets are surely inclined to take the effects of the society in which they live and they are certainly affected by various aspects of the social life such as social taste, religion, politics, and other affairs. So it is possible to say that: "the basis of the most individualistic art is always its most social form and it is never created unless it has the origin of a group or society." (Adorno, 1998).

Although a poem is the expression of thoughts and emotional excitements of human beings, this excitement cannot be anything other than the excitement of an organized group or society. Poems and songs are social in basis and it should always be remembered that when a poet says he writes for his own, or for enjoyment he always has some audience in his mind. Thus, he expresses himself for the thought of an appraisal and confirmation, for fame and pride, and for improvement in the views of a selected group or even for eternity. Thus, a poem is an achievement out of having a social life. Of course it is not the product of an unshaped and unstable group, but the product of a congruous and an organized society whose people are linked to one another because of shared beliefs and whose people are excited with similar senses. So as Durkheim maintains there exists an "Inevitable correlation" among them (cited in Bastide, 1977).

The question that might raise here is that "if a poet is always at his society service, then where are those poems which are against the society views originated from? To respond to this question it needs to be mentioned that art is not always obliged to follow its general audiences' thoughts. The artist may even fight with the social thoughts of his own time and may refuse to take their interests, but it needs to be noted that even this opposition is not possible through taking an individualistic approach. Thus, the artist has to count on different literature groupings and in fact friends who have the same specific interests and are interested in similar social values to be able to face this conflict. Concerning the same issue Lanson in Bastide(1977) states that: the artist cannot escape the dictatorship of his society unless he seeks help from the public who

are supportive of him.” Thus, it is observable that the creator of no literary work can do his job individually and the society is always present in his mind and supervises him.

3.2. Social Control

In addition, a community can provide the destruction or appraisal of a literary work by accepting or rejecting it (if it is in conflict with its values). Every generation or every social community has a “Collective conscience” which puts pressure on people. This conscience could be called “social control”. Social control includes the factors which are employed by a group or a community to affect its members who are by themselves independent elements in order to force them to conform to the norms. This is applicable for those institutions that adapt personal behaviors with the needs of the group (Assam, 1974).

It is important to note here that it is not the whole community of art which directly affects a literary work. The most important impact is exerted through a group of professionals. Thus, the artist usually obeys these forces or massive confirmations. There are things which are forbidden to write about and there are topics which are imposed on the artist and he/she has to take them into consideration while creating his/her literary work. But there may be times when the artist stands against these forces and fights against them. This is when the “art in conflict or opponent art” is created. According to Lalo art may be:

- The description of a community
- A technical way of forgetting the community
- Often the reactive matters against community
- A kind of game played on the margin of a society. (Bastide, 1977)

As is clear from Lalo’s classification, in fact there are two kinds of art: one is the “compromiser art” which deals with the description of the society and joins the whole society and collective thinking. The other is the “art in conflict” whose objective is to destroy community and collective thinking or advertising a different thinking or a new one based on the collective community’s views. The “art in conflict” is not thoroughly looking for the elimination of values but it sometimes seeks to criticize the society and its objective is not elimination but it is the reforming and restructuring of a corrupt society.

In contrast, as we said earlier, “compromiser art” is the art which is at the community’s service and its duty is to strengthen the intellectual foundations of the society in which the artist or the poet is nourished and the society which supports him. One such poet or artist can no longer reside in his dreams land, and he is actually the citizen of the reality land of his own times. The community looks at him not as an entertainer but as a representative for a spiritual and an ideal life.

3.3. Social Artistry Taste

Another important factor affecting the structure and style of art which is dictated by the community and which causes fundamental changes in the way art is created is "social artistry taste". So, it is possible to highlight that "in any given period of time there is a certain taste and this is clearly shown in the varied styles of fine arts (Schuking, 1994).

That is the reason why in every period a specific style is popularized. It is clear that a poet or writer’s style is not welcomed and finds no opportunity for growth and excellence, unless the community accepts the art presentation method, writing style of its writer, or the poet’s poetry. Styles flaunt through the acceptance of the artistic taste of their own times. Goldmann (1964) believes this is so influential that many of the structural and content variations of artistic styles are influenced by the tastes which are dominant during a time period. He writes: When a new social class replaces an old one and when the elite movement is possible, there appear variations in tastes and interests and evolutions of art. That is why there was the shift from classicism to realism following the revolutions of the Greek society resulting from wars of “Peloponnese”. That is also the reason why romanticism appeared through the domination of a group of people who were closer to nature and who were more social compared to the old aristocratic courtiers.

3.4. Support Groups

A situation might happen in which a social group does not take the role of the leader anymore and it is replaced by another social group. What happens is that all conflicting groups have to adjoin each other. In

this case there will be the coexistence of different arts and styles. So there will be folk art in contrast with educated art, or there will be religious art in contrast with non-religious (Bastide, 1977).

It is the change of interests and tastes which leads to variations in poetic styles of different times and in the authors' opinion it is the supportive community who selects art forms. So the fact that Qaside becomes popular among people during a time period or is forgotten and is replaced by another form during another time period is certainly influenced by the tastes and interests of the people of those times. Even in the industrial application of poetic imagination and different forms of literary the social literary taste cannot be ignored. Certainly in the first period of Samanids and Ghaznavis, the simplicity of prose and poetry was the criteria of the public acceptance while during Safavids era, poems were not welcomed and favored because they had less or no images and included no complexity or innovation.

The point that has to be emphasized here is that during every specific time, there is a specific community supporting poets and poetry that is called "support groups". Particular groups at the community are the main policy makers for art and literature in each period and it is through their specific support that genres of literature and art and the related issues of them are brought about. Accordingly, it is possible to claim that one of the influential factors that affect art and literature in every period of time is the leading power and power means the ability to supervise others' behaviors and ask them to act in accordance with ones' own will (Assam, 1974). And this also varies from time to time. In the new world social institutions are replaced with some of the most ancient structures which had sporadic distribution of power and domination (Wolf, 1987).

3.5. Religion

Religion and the power originated from it is one other factor influencing the formation of art and literature. Religion as a holy social institution and which is respected by people has long had undeniable importance for all members of collective life, especially in art and literature. As Bastide (1977) maintains religious groups have had great influences on art extension. And as it was mentioned earlier, religion has always played the role of a fundamental tool in seeking confirmation and collective enforcement in the creation style of art. Religion is a set of dogmatic principles, myths, feelings, and those all mass movements which deeply transform an individual.

Religion has two applications regarding artistic creation. Firstly, by determining prohibitions and limits it specifies the boundaries of art performance. Secondly, through the dogmatic principles of its own it specifies the genres, styles, and methods of art presentation. In other words religion is against imaging and destroys non-religious arts. It also draws new policies and determines dos and don'ts. Although it blocks some ways, it opens other ways for the manifestations of art. However, religion can never destroy art. What it can do is to redirect it to another world. Prohibitions in the Quran stopped Arabs from their growth-oriented nature of all arts, this is a reality, but instead, created a metaphysic art in which figures of speech are by themselves a very strong language full of secrets. Thus, religion with its prohibitions and orders and with its quiescence principles and mysticism influences art and if we do not consider these sociological elements and don't emphasize their importance we will most probably, understand nothing from the art history.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Although community plays a significant role in the formation and creation of art, this does not mean that the social nature of art and literature is the only characteristic which gives art its character. Art in whatever form is firstly art and must conform to the artistic criteria and can only express the direction and spirit of the society in a later stage. Howsoever beautiful the existing thoughts in every poem or piece of writing are or howsoever deep is the attention to everyday matters of a poem, if they have no poetic delicacy, no beautiful thoughts or considerable point may be found. The only thing which may be found is good intentions and that is all (Adorno, 1998).

It is at this point that the boundaries of poem and motto are determined. Literary works which used to be at the service of bitter and sweet matters of a community have been poems that had an expiry date and could never stay any further. This is especially true about many literary works at the constitutional period. Artists and scholars should be noted that the mere consideration of the social and political ideas and beliefs, regardless of the value of art, is a terrible whirlpool that can bring every work into the abyss of nothingness.

It is then wrong to conclude that in every literary work political spirit should permeate. Such a view will lead us to edify works which are expressing “a specific opinion or a certain ideal”. Of course the major weakness of this is that due to low quality such works cannot benefit the task for which they are meant. The reason why some literary works gain special value is that they are about some things other than mottos or political demands. What these kinds of works offer to people are: ways of sensing, self understanding, loving, and becoming enthusiastic which are driven from the society by the artist (Adorno, 1998).

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