

From Technique as discovery

- Mark Schorer

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Mark Schorer believes that technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it. Thus, when we speak of technique we speak of nearly everything. Schorer is very clear from the beginning of the article that only if we apply technique to the subject matter of the novel, only then it can be called art. Otherwise it is just social experience. "The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique."

Schorer takes three novelists—H.G. Wells, D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce—as examples to prove his point.

H.G. Wells:

H.G. Wells had no great opinion about the importance of technique in fiction. Wells had enormous literary energy, but he had no respect for the techniques of his medium. "I have never taken any very great pains about writing. I am outside the hierarchy of conscious and deliberate writers altogether", Wells stated. Schorer says that this lack of respect for the medium took its revenge on the works of Wells. Wells was proud to escape from artistic preoccupations by calling himself a journalist. Schorer cryptically comments: "...he escaped—he disappeared from literature into the annals (archives) of an era".

Modern novelists like James, Conrad and Joyce pay enormous attention to the medium. For them technique is not secondary as Wells thought it to be. The novel like *Tono Bungay*, which is considered as a master-piece of Wells, flounders through a series of literary imitations—of Dickens, Shaw, Conrad, and Jules Verne—to end as a failure. He gives not a novel but a hypothesis.

D. H. Lawrence:

Lawrence had great belief in the therapeutic function of the novel. He said, "One sheds one's sickness in books, repeats and presents again one's emotions to be master of them". "Merely repeating one's emotions, merely to look into one's heart and write, is merely to repeat the round of emotional bondage", says Schorer. If a book should become an exercise in self-analysis, then technique must take the place of the absent analyst.

Lawrence's failure in his master-piece *Sons and Lovers* is because of his impatience with technical resources. The novel has two themes—the crippling effects of a mother's love on the emotional development of a son and the split between two kinds of love, physical and spiritual, which the son develops, the kind represented by two young women, Clara and Miriam. Paul is left at the end 'drifting towards death'. Yet in the last few sentences of the novel a false note is struck when Lawrence makes Paul turn towards life. This is partly because of Lawrence's confused ideas about characterization. Schorer points out that Lawrence's personal life interferes with the characterization. "Lawrence could not separate the investigating analyst, who must be objective, from Lawrence, the subject of the book; and the sickness was not healed, the emotion not mastered, the novel not perfected".

James Joyce

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is also an autobiographical novel like *Tono Bungay* and *Sons and Lovers*. The theme is a young artist's alienation from his environment. The theme is explored and evaluated in three stages as Stephen moves from childhood through boyhood into maturity. A highly self-conscious use of style and method defines the quality of experience in each of these sections. The progress of Stephen's alienation is complete at the final portion of the novel. In essence his alienation is a denial of the human environment.

Stephen in *Ulysses* is a little older. The environment of urban life finds a separate embodiment in the character of Bloom, and Bloom is lost as Stephen, though touchingly groping for moorings. Each of the two is weakened by the inability to reach out to the other. Schorer says,

...*Ulysses* is like a pattern of concentric circles, with the immediate human situation at its centre, this passing on and out to the whole dilemma of modern life, this passing on and out beyond that to a vision of the cosmos, and this to the mythical limits of our experience. If the novel is read with more satisfaction than any other novel of this century, it is because its author held an attitude towards technique and the technical scrutiny of subject matter which enabled him to order, within a single work and with superb coherence, the greatest amount of our experience.