

Date: 16.06.21 Picaresque Novels

Picaresque narrative originated in Spain with the publication of 'Gil Blas' in 1775 written by a Frenchman named Le Sage. The word 'picaresque', Spanish word, means a rogue. The subject of a Picaresque story is the escapade of a rascal who lives by his wits and shows very little alteration of character. The rascal undergoes variety of experiences while going through his adventures. It is this narration of a rascal of the experiences while undergoing his adventures that has been labelled as Picaresque narration. According to Moody and Lovett "The spirit of burlesque, aroused by the contrast between the ideals of chivalry and the affairs of ~~actual~~ actual life, led in Spain to the production of a form of story known as the picaresque romance." The typical Italian 'novella' and the Spanish rogue story are the sources of realistic novels of today. These two narratives have three things in

common - (i) realistic spirit, (ii) emphasis on natural human motives and (iii) emphasis on the manners of actual life. Two good modern examples of picaresque novel are Mark Twain's 'Huckleberry Finn' and Saul Bellow's 'The Adventures of Augie March'. The first English as picaresque novel is Haste's 'The Unfortunate Traveller' or 'The Life of Jack Walton'. The tradition was kept alive by Richard Head and Francis Kickman in 'The English Rogue'. The real beginning of English novel took place in eighteenth century with Daniel Defoe whose novels are picaresque novels. Defoe served as a secret agent, a spy under different ministry. As was his life, he came into contact with ~~now~~ many adventurers, heard their stories and then wrote them out. When his materials failed, he used his own imagination and tried his best to make them look

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real because he knew that he was writing for the people who wanted facts.

Defoe's novels namely 'Robinson Crusoe', 'Captain Singleton', 'Moll Flanders', 'Colonel Jack' and 'Roxana' all are picaresque in matter and form. The first novel is the story of a sailor wrecked on an unknown uninhabited island. The second novel is the tale of piracy and Moll Flanders is the life of a thief. 'Robinson Crusoe' and 'Moll Flanders' are picaresque in the sense that they are a ~~seq~~ sequence of episodes held together. Henry Fielding, the contemporary of Samuel Richardson, is another writer of this strain. He was a man of high birth but had to struggle hard to find a place in literature. His three novels 'Joseph Andrews', 'Jonathan Wild' and ~~Tom~~ 'Tom Jones' are picaresque in character. Joseph Andrews is a burlesque upon Richardson's Pamela. Andrews

is the brother of Pamela who is subjected to temptation from his mistress which he resists. Unlike Pamela he is turned out of doors and is forced to journey homeward in the country on his own. Fielding soon leaves the narrow satirical purpose and attempted to present the picture of rough English life of postroad inns and country houses. He writes about real men and women with precision.

Jonathan Wild is another novel in some vein suggested by the life of the famous rascal whom Defoe had celebrated. Tom Jones is his third novel which describes the adventures of Tom who is turned out of doors by his benefactor Mr. Allworthy due to the villainy of his nephew Mr. Blifil. Tom passed through many adventures on his way to London but finally the secret of his birth and Blifil's villainy are exposed and he regains the favour of Allworthy and gets Sophia as wife.

Picaresque element is quite an important element in the novels of Dickens. 'Great Expectations', 'David Copperfield', 'Pickwick Papers' and 'Oliver Twist' are in a way picaresque novels. The adventures of Pip in 'Great Expectations' are picaresque adventures. Emile Legouis says that 'Pickwick Papers' has been written in picaresque manner. In modern times too some novels have been written which bear more resemblance to the original conception of picaresque novels. Some of them are 'The Invisible Man' by Ralph Ellison, 'Confessions of Felix Krull' by Thomas Mann, 'The Ginger Man' by J.P. Donleavy and 'The Horse's Mouth' by Joyce Cary.

The end.

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