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On Sartre's Aesthetic Pleasure in Engaged Literature

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Abstract: This paper starts from objects and symbols to introduce what is engaged literature. In Sartre's view, music, painting, and poetry, are objects themselves and do not engage with reality. However, words in prose are symbols that must be engaged with reality. Prose is engaged literature where the author's call and the freedom of the reader and the author are all included. In the process of engagement, the true face of the world is revealed and retrieved. The freedom within this process is also vividly manifested throughout the engagement, rather than being a fixed freedom in eternal forms. Aesthetic pleasure is based on freedom, is creation, imagination, and also has its universality.

Keywords: Engagement; Summoning; Freedom; Aesthetic Joy

1. Looking at Engagement from Objects and Symbols

When explaining what engaged literature is, Sartre first distinguishes between objects and symbols in works of art. Symbols have symbolic meanings and are abstract in themselves, while objects have richness and ambiguity, and are existences in themselves. In the arts of music and painting, notes and colors do not lead to anything beyond themselves and are not symbols. The collection of colors is a kind of embodiment of a soul, but the emotions that the painter pours into it make the colors imbued with emotions become blurred and unclear. "The yellow crack in the air of Golgotha is not to arouse anxiety, it is anxiety itself, and also the yellow sky."^[1] In music, emotions and notes are also transformed in essence when they are combined. A song of suffering, this suffering has already obtained its essence, and is no longer an indeterminate existence. Painters and musicians do not engage; the emotions they pour out will fall into the objects created by emotions and cannot extricate themselves, losing their names and existing as objects possessed by ghosts: infinite and impenetrable. These arts express meaning, but are not used to express meaning, nor are they used as means. Because the meaning is the true world shown by art, not abstract concepts.

Writers deal with meaning, but it is necessary to distinguish between prose and poetry. Prose is in the kingdom of symbols, and poetry belongs to the side of painting and music. Poets do not name the world, the names faced with things with essential nature show their own inessentiality, and naming means that the name has made sacrifices for the object named. For the speaker, words are useful regulations and are also worn-out tools that are discarded when they can no longer be used; for the poet, words are as natural as trees growing on the ground. Words also have meaning for the poet, and only meaning can give language consistency, but this meaning for the poet has become something natural. It is an attribute of each word, and no longer a purpose that humanity always transcends but cannot reach. Poetic words are a miniature universe, the black core of the object. In Sartre's understanding, the words and emotions of poetry are objects, and meaning is poured into words and absorbed by them. They do not point to the external world and do not engage with reality.

Prose writers are different from poets; they are people who use words, and prose is essentially utilitarian. Prose does not take the simple examination of words as the purpose, the purpose of language is different from the silent intuition, it is communication. The sentences composed by words striving for clarity are to provide the results obtained to others.

In prose, language is a particular moment of action. Anything that is called by its name will no longer be the original thing. Just like revealing a person's behavior, you show him his behavior, and he sees himself. Afterwards, he will not act in the same way, unless he stubbornly commits the crime knowingly. When speaking, it is like this to expose the situation, touch the core of the situation, penetrate the core, and fix it in the public eye, allowing the speaker to manipulate it. In the language of prose, every word said means deeper engagement with the world, and the speaker also emerges from the world more and further, transcending the world, and tending towards the future. Speaking is an action, and through this action, the function of the writer is to let everyone know the world, and no one will think that they can be separated from the world, and have nothing to do with the world. Prose is engaged with reality.

2. Summoning and Freedom in Interventionist Literature

Sartre's "literature of commitment" advocated for prose writers to undertake social responsibilities: "Since we believe that the writer

should devote his entire being to his work, not to be in a state of corrupt passivity, displaying his vices, misfortunes, and weaknesses, but to regard himself as a tenacious will, a choice, as an overall undertaking of existence. . . .”^[2], the labor of this endeavor is embodied in the artwork. Speaking of the artwork itself, Sartre believes that artworks contain a two-way interaction between the author and the reader. The author calls upon and guides the reader through the text, setting empty signposts for the reader. The invoking significance of literary works lies in the negative structure within the literature, that is, the blanks and uncertainties in the meaning of the literary works, and the psychological blank caused by the negation of the reader’s accustomed horizon. These negative structures stimulate the reader’s own creation, he continually fills the void, reaching the landmarks set by the author.

In Sartre’s view, the object of literature is a top that only exists in motion, requiring an act of reading to realize this dialectical relationship. The process of reading is a process of expectation and prediction. The author himself cannot read what he has written because this undermines the expectation and future required by the objectivity of the literary work. What the author can reach is only his own subjectivity; he cannot touch the object created by himself, he cannot surpass the edge of his own subjectivity. That concrete spiritual product imagined appears in the joint efforts of the author and the reader: art is for others and can only be through others. For the reader, he is aware that his revelation and creation are synchronized. It is the reader’s emotions that illuminate everything in the book, and the literary object has no entity outside of the reader’s subjectivity. The inattentive reader cannot make the object “stand” up because the meaning is not included in the sentences from the beginning. On the contrary, it is the meaning that enables each word to be understood, and the meaning is the organic whole behind the sum of the sentences, not just a simple sum of words.

The artist, through the reader, sees his own primary position in the work he has created. Thus, the writer calls upon the reader’s freedom, and through the pure freedom of the reader, he realizes the transition from language revelation to objective existence, which is the absolute beginning of creation. When people see the artwork, it exists. Sartre agrees with Kant that art has no purpose, but this is because art itself is the purpose, and it is a transcendent purpose that is born of freedom.

In Sartre’s view, there is only one method of appealing to freedom: the first step is to acknowledge, and on the basis of acknowledgment, the reader gives his trust. The aesthetic consciousness continues on the basis of its own trust and loyalty to the author through its intervention. Reading is a free dream. All emotions in this trust against the backdrop of imagination are the manifestation of freedom to itself, and they do not conceal their own freedom. In external reality, there is nothing that can suppress this kind of emotional magnanimity originating from the reader’s freedom. Trust itself is a kind of magnanimity. The reader uses this magnanimity in the process of reading, and at the same time, the writer also asks the reader to give all he has. This free process runs through the reader from beginning to end and changes the darkest part of the reader’s emotions. The writer’s freedom is reflected in the trust he asks from the reader to be returned, returned to his creation, and to acknowledge his creative freedom. This is a symmetrical, reversible process, calling for his freedom through the opposite direction. In short, both the author’s creative freedom and the reader’s aesthetic freedom are absolute freedom.

Every book provides the reader’s freedom through the whole existence, and this freedom also redeems the whole existence, which is also the ultimate purpose of art. The writer re-grasps the world through the limited object he creates. But this freedom is not a dry eternal form, like a lifeless withered tree trunk, its essence should be closer to the sea that repeats the tides and rises, it must be realized in the dynamic liberation of continuously breaking away from oneself. Freedom itself is indefinite.

3. Aesthetic Pleasure

Sartre established the essence of aesthetic pleasure on the basis of freedom, considering its emergence as a sign of the success of a work. The author gains this pleasure through creation, which merges with the aesthetic consciousness produced by the reader when seeing the author’s creative results. The emotions produced in this process are very complex, with the author and reader constraining each other, forever inseparable. Initially, it is a fusion of a call and recognition of value, that is, the recognition of absolute freedom. This transcendent absolute freedom halts the endless cycle of utilitarianism. “And my positional consciousness towards this value [As Sartre once learned from Husserl, any consciousness is consciousness of something, and no consciousness occupies a position transcending the object. If we are aware of a table, the table itself is not in consciousness, but in space. Therefore, consciousness is a ‘positional consciousness’ of the world.] is inevitably accompanied by my non-positional consciousness of my freedom [Consciousness itself does not occupy a position, so the consciousness of consciousness, that is, ‘pre-reflective consciousness, ‘ is a ‘non-positional consciousness’]. Since freedom manifests itself through a transcendent claim. Recognizing itself as freedom is joy.”^[3]

Aesthetic pleasure is also a creation of the reader. The emergence of creation means that the reader is not subject to the constraints of the rules, even if these rules are self-made. The reader enjoys this creation, and a main structure of the aesthetic structure is the enjoyment that arises in the reader’s positional consciousness when reading the work. Moreover, the reader’s awareness that their grasp of the work is

the main non-positional consciousness is also interwoven with the positional enjoyment. Objectivity, due to its strict harmony, constitutes the sense of security of aesthetic pleasure, which supports intense aesthetic emotions.

Secondly, in the world that the aesthetic object wants to achieve, freedom in imagination is indispensable. In general, the world appears as an undifferentiated unity of obstacles and tools [According to existentialist philosophy, “being-in-itself” (things) for “being-for-itself” (consciousness, people) either helps the latter to complete his “project” or hinders him. In the first case, things are tools, and in the second case, things are obstacles.], separating us from ourselves. In such a distance of separation, no freedom of individuals is appealed to. Aesthetic awareness, facing such a world, grows into joy through the support of imagination in the consciousness that this world is a value of position. This value lies in the task of proposing freedom to people. Through human freedom, change that alien, non-self world.

Finally, aesthetic pleasure has its universality and effectiveness, which includes an agreement between people’s freedoms. Because reading is a confident and demanding recognition of the author’s freedom, and aesthetic pleasure is itself perceived in the form of a value, it includes an absolute requirement for others: to require anyone, insofar as he is free, to produce the same pleasure when reading the same work. Therefore, all of humanity supports the existence of this world with the highest degree of freedom.

Sartre “highly affirms the leading role of human and human freedom in aesthetics. This also forms the distinct ethical characteristics of Sartre’s aesthetic theory”^[4], he believes that the foundation of the supreme command of aesthetics is the supreme command of morality, although literature is one thing and morality is another, but moral commands can still be perceived in the depths of literature. Authors and readers jointly bear the responsibility of this world. The author gives the world and the injustice of this world to the reader, not to let the reader indifferently contemplate these injustices, but to let the reader use their anger to make them alive, to expose and create them. The writer’s world only shows all its depth when the reader does so.

References

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