

Realism and the Contemporary Novel (1961) – Raymond Williams (1921–1988)

Summary:

Raymond Williams (1921–1988) was a follower of Marxism and a dominant literary personality who made cultural inquiry in literary composition. He performed many roles to contribute to literature, criticism, fiction, movies, culture, awareness and political opposition. He was the true architect of the international discipline of cultural studies. He worked as a professor of literature at Cambridge and as a public intellectual leader of the radical cause and is the author of seven novels, a number of plays and about two dozen academic books.

The essay *Realism and the Contemporary Novel* is taken from *The Long Revolution*, where he talked about the three revolutions in European society. 1. The Democratic Revolution 2. The Industrial Revolution. 3. The Cultural Revolution

Further, he mentions these revolutions as incomplete and continuous happenings in the history of Europe. As a Marxist, he initiates his essay with the discussion and finds on the historical aspect of English critical tradition of a century from 1859 to 1956 he reveals his aims to write the essay as

1. The first aim of writing the essay was to discuss the existing variations in realism.
2. His own views of the ways in which the modern novel has developed.
3. To discuss the possible new smashing realism.

In the essay *Realism and the Contemporary Novel*, he illustrates many terms of realism. He stresses “an ordinary, contemporary, everyday reality opposed to romantic or legendary subjects.” He considers novels as “the product of middle class, bourgeoisie and mainly developed in early the 18th century the period of realistic novels” He quotes the Daily News in 1881, which says the novel is an “unnecessarily faithful portrayal of offensive incidents.”

He mentions from sociological reality to psychological reality during the span of the 20th century. By using Russian terms like Narodnost, Tipichnost and Partisanost, he illustrates the social realism in a novel. According to him, the novelist presents realism as narodnost, the technical effect as an expression of spirit opposite to formalist. It rejects an ordinary technical meaning of realism, whereas the terms Tipichnost and Partisanost refer to the ideological content and Partisan affiliations to such realism. Thus, they suggested the development of the ideological or revolutionary attitudes already described. Finally, he uses

the term's "Tipichimost' as typical characters in a typical situation. Through Marxist thought, this idea of realism is developed.

Various types of novels:

Raymond Williams intended to present his ideas on or about realism in a novel. So, he had to discuss the different kinds of novels. He says a novel is not only a form of literature but also of one place; it includes most of the form of writing. He says, "Now the novel is not so much a literary form as a whole literature in itself, with its wide boundaries, there is room for almost every kind of contemporary writing. So, his novel is potential literature. It is such a form that can include all the forms of literature. Further. He gives examples to prove his argument, like Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and *Middle Master*.

Social novel:

There are two divisions of the social novel. 1. The Descriptive Novel 2. The Formula Novel.

The descriptive social novel or documentary deals with a particular social or community. He says, "If we want to know about life in a town, or in a university or on a merchant-ship, or in a patrol in Burma this is the book." Further he adds, "Of all current kinds of novels, this kind at its best is apparently nearest to what I am calling the realist novel."

Formula novel About this type of novel, Raymond William says, "A particular pattern, is abstracted from the sum of social experience and a society is created from this pattern." As we find, novels like "A Brave New World' and 'Nineteen Eight Four' are powerful social fiction in which a pattern taken from contemporary society is materialised in another time or place.

Personal novel:

Like the social novel, we have two divisions of novel: (1) Personal documentary novel (2) Personal formula novel.

Personal documentary novel: This type of novel deals with a certain kind of personal relationship. To clarify this idea, William says, "There are often very like parts of the realist novels as described and there is a certain continuity of method and substance." E.g., E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. In order to distinguish personal documentary novel from social

documentary novel, he says in the social documentary novel there is a lack of dimension but in a different direction.”

But in the novel personal Documentary, “characters were not of aspects society; here the society is an aspect of the characters. Here the society is an aspect of the character. He emphasises society and the people of that society through the discussion of novels—realist novel.

Personal formula novel: William calls it “the fiction of special pleading”. He illustrates James Joyce’s’ *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to exemplify this kind of novel where the vision of the world is seen through one character. Human individuals are created from the sum of experiences.
