

Chapter-I

INTRODUCTION

I

C.P.Snow presented his famous thesis about the greatest predicament of modern times - a disastrous gap between two cultures, the scientific culture and the literary culture - sometime in 1959. The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution was delivered as the Rede Lecture at Cambridge and it became, for one reason or another, a matter of persistent controversy and discussion. C.P.Snow, who is both a scientist and a novelist, offers a unique case of a thinker who has a fairly well thought-out diagnosis about the culture to which he belongs and of which he is a participant observer from the inside. With his double denizenship of the two cultural worlds - those of science and literature - Snow has placed himself in a unique position which gives him a clear view of the possibility of the disaster on the one hand and, on the other, of the possibility of remedies, educational and cultural, that might help us to stop any further breach in the two cultures. One of the primary objects of the dissertation is to see how far Snow's thesis gets reflected in his novels in terms of concrete situations and persons and also to see whether he has worked out any possible solution in terms of the synthesis or a productive awareness of the predicament.

II

It is in the nineteenth century that the poets and thinkers started getting worried about the impact of science on culture and human values. The High Romantics were the first to react strongly against the machine-culture of the cities with its gross commercial values - the values of Mammon - and to focus their attention on the Platonic world of permanent, universal and elemental forms - the forms of 'the indestructible order' of things.¹ Wordsworth, for instance, speaks of 'the beautiful and permanent forms of nature',² 'the essential passions of the heart',³ 'our elementary feelings'⁴ with which poetry is supposed to be concerned. Shelley, too, insists on the essential relationship built through Imagination, that divine faculty in man, with the Platonic world of permanent forms. He comes down heavily upon the 'unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty'⁵ of 'the mechanist' and the political economist.'⁶ Yet, both Wordsworth and Shelley thought that poetry might redeem the world, sooner or later. Wordsworth asserted: 'Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge - it is as immortal as the heart of man'. Wordsworth envisaged the future of mankind as something which would be created by the creative encounter between the Poet and the Man of Science:

"If the labours of Men of Science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of Science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself."⁷

Wordsworth fondly dreams of the poet and the Man of Science going hand in hand, with the Poet 'lending his divine spirit' to aid the 'transfiguration' that might be brought about by the Men of Science.⁸ Shelley, of course, goes a step forward and prophesies that 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'.⁹ In short, the Romantics thought in terms of a possible synthesis of Poetry and Science and not in terms of the possible gap between them.

In the Victorian period, however, the poets and thinkers do not have the optimism of the High Romantics. On the other hand, under the impact of Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species, (1859) they become extremely

anxious about the impact of Science and Technology on culture and the human values it enshrines. Matthew Arnold is agonisingly aware of the decline in religion and faith and fondly hopes that poetry would act as a religion-substitute:

"More and more mankind will discover
that we have to turn to poetry [from
religion] to interpret life for us, to
console us, to sustain us."¹⁰

He goes ahead and says that 'Science . . . will appear incomplete without it [Poetry].'¹¹ He totally agrees with Wordsworth's view that poetry is 'The impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science',¹² that poetry is 'the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge'.¹³ Arnold thinks that both Science and Poetry will help the development of culture. But he is anxious that poetry should perform a higher function of preserving the human values enshrined in the great classics. As a poet he is painfully aware that the sea of faith is receding and that there is no certainty in this world:

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

('Dover Beach')

In The Scholar Gypsy he speaks of 'the divided aims' and 'the palsied hearts' of contemporary intellectuals, who are but 'half-believers of our casual creeds'. He asks the Scholar Gypsy to fly from our kind of life:

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!
 For strong the infection of our mental strife,
 Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils our rest;
 And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
 Like, us distracted, and like us unblest!

('The Scholar Gypsy')

Arnold, Ruskin, Carlyle, Pater - all are aware of the possible break-down of traditional culture, and they all, prophets that they are, suggest various remedies to preserve the abiding human values in the context of a civilization which is being shaped increasingly by science and technology. But the suggested remedies are all, what T.S.Eliot says, 'various chimerical attempts to effect imperfect synthesis.'¹⁴

It is in the 20th century that writers and thinkers are clearly aware of the widening gap between the world of science and the world of arts and literature. E.M. Forster in his essay, 'Does Culture Matter?', voices the persistent fear of culture going down under the impact of Science and Technology. D.H.Lawrence is also

aware of how the so-called progress of civilization in terms of technology which makes human fulfilment increasingly difficult. Aldous Huxley writes a whole novel Brave New World to demonstrate, in terms of an anti-utopia, what would happen if science and technology are allowed to dominate our culture. He shows that man would be dehumanised and all the values will be transformed into anti-values, and this is symbolically presented in the burial of Shakespeare's works and in the fact that the new man cannot understand Shakespeare at all.

It is in the context of the 20th century intellectual ethos that we have to place C.P.Snow's theory of two cultures and examine its components. In this connection we have to bear in mind that the amount of discussion it provoked touched some nerve 'almost simultaneously in different intellectual societies, in different parts of the world',¹⁵ that it gave a voice to certain ideas which were already simmering in the minds of many sensitive intellectuals. We should also bear in mind the other end of the spectrum, say, what critics like F.R.Leavis say about C.P.Snow's two-culture theory and also of his fiction. Leavis, for instance, asserts that 'Snow is in fact portentously ignorant', that 'he is not a genius; he is intellectually as

undistinguished as it is possible to be!¹⁶ He further says that 'The Two Cultures exhibits an utter lack of intellectual distinction and an embarrassing vulgarity of style, and 'intellectual nullity.'¹⁷

What I am concerned with in this dissertation is primarily the relationship between his passionate, though not very original, thesis and the novels which deal with the thesis in a conspicuous way. I would like to examine whether fiction-writing, which is a way of thinking, adds any dimension to his thesis by exploring the ideas in terms of concrete life, or whether the novels embody the thesis in a mechanical way, in which case they get devalued as literature, or whether the author while writing his novels keeps his thesis at a sub-conscious level, not allowing it to intrude in a conspicuous manner. When we take the entire body of Snow's fiction, which consists of 12 novels, we find that only 3 novels of his deal with the problem of two cultures, out of which really speaking, only one i.e., The New Men is a novel directly about the thesis, the other two dealing with it more indirectly than directly.

Notes and References

1. Eds. D.G.Enright and Chickera, English Critical Texts, O.U.P. (Shelley's essay, 'A Defence of Poetry') 1962.
2. Ibid., p.164.
3. Ibid., p.164.
4. Ibid., p.164.
5. Ibid., p.248.
6. Ibid., p.247.
7. Ibid., p.175.
8. Ibid., p.175.
9. Ibid., p.255.
10. Ibid., p.260.
11. Ibid., p.260.
12. Ibid., p.260.
13. Ibid., p.261.
14. T.S.Eliot in his essay 'Arnold and Pater', included in his Selected Essays, London: Faber and Faber, 1932, p.442.
15. C.P.Snow., The Two Cultures and A Second Look, 1963, Cambridge University Press, p.54.
16. Cf. The Spectator, March 9, 1962, p.297.
17. Ibid., p.297.