

Assignment 19

Please watch Lesson 19 before attempting this assignment.

Read the given passage and **answer** the following questions.

We live in an age in which the autonomous individual is ceasing to exist — or perhaps one ought to say, in which the individual is ceasing to have the illusion of being autonomous. Now, in all that we say about literature, and (above all) in all that we say about criticism, we instinctively take the autonomous individual for granted. The whole of modern European literature is built on the concept of intellectual honesty, or, if you like to put it that way, on Shakespeare's maxim, 'To thine own self be true'. The first thing that we ask of a writer is that he shall not tell lies, that he shall say what he really thinks, what he really feels. The worst thing we can say about a work of art is that it is insincere. And this is even truer of criticism than of creative literature, in which a certain amount of posing and mannerism, and even a certain amount of downright humbug, doesn't matter, so long as the writer is fundamentally sincere. Modern literature is essentially an

individual thing. It is either the truthful expression of what one man thinks and feels, or it is nothing.

However, this is the age of the totalitarian state, which does not and probably cannot allow the individual any freedom whatever. There are several vital differences between totalitarianism and all the orthodoxies of the past, either in Europe or in the East. The most important is that the orthodoxies of the past did not change, or at least did not change rapidly. In medieval Europe, the Church dictated what you should believe, but at least it allowed you to retain the same beliefs from birth to death. It did not tell you to believe one thing on Monday and another on Tuesday. And the same is more or less true of any orthodox Christian, Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim today. In a sense his thoughts are circumscribed, but he passed his whole life within the same framework of thought. His emotions are not tampered with.

Now, with totalitarianism, exactly the opposite is true. The peculiarity of the totalitarian state is that though it controls thought, it does not fix it. It sets up unquestionable dogmas, and it alters them from day to day. It needs the dogmas, because it needs absolute obedience from its subjects, but cannot avoid the changes, which are dictated by the needs of power politics. It declared itself

infallible, and at the same time it attacks the very concept of objective truth. To take a crude, obvious example, every German up to September 1939 had to regard Russian Bolshevism with horror and aversion, and since September 1939 he had to regard it with admiration and affection. If Russia and Germany go to war, as they may well do within the next few years, another equally violent change will have to take place. The German's emotional life, his loves and hatreds, are expected, when necessary, to reverse themselves overnight. I hardly need to point out the effect of this kind of thing upon literature. For writing is largely a matter of feeling, which cannot always be controlled from outside. It is easy to pay lip-service to the orthodoxy of the moment, but writing of any consequence can only be produced when a man feels the truth of what he is saying; without that, the creative impulse is lacking.

-from *Literature and Totalitarianism*

George Orwell

Questions:

(i) Elaborate on the position of the author — "literature is built on the concept of intellectual honesty". Do you agree?

(ii) What are the vital differences between totalitarianism and the orthodoxies of the past?

(iii) How does the mercurial nature of the dogmas of totalitarianism hamper literature?

(iv) Do you think that a constant change in beliefs tampers with an individual's emotions? Support or refute this statement made by the author.

(v) Do you agree that “writing of any consequence can only be produced when a man feels the truth of what he is saying”?

(vi) Write a summary of the passage in not more than *hundred* words and suggest a suitable title.