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Topic - Symbolism

Short notes on Symbolism

Symbolism is a literary movement which had its origin in France in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In fact, Edgar Allan Poe, the renowned critic, poet and short story writer of America, pioneered Symbolism in poetry. His famous poems The Raven, Ulalume, Lenore, The Haunted Palace etc. are full of abundant symbols, which he used with great artistic excellence. Famous French Symbolists - Baudelaire, Mallarme, Rimbaud, Hart Crane, Ezra Pound and others have been indebted to him. "Poe vastly influenced all modern poetry by the way he used imagery to evoke and suggest rather than to picture and photograph with words what he had to say - his method is subjective rather than objective". A symbolist uses words "to describe a mode of literary expression in which words are used to suggest states of mind rather than for their objective, representational or intellectual content." Symbolist poetry seeks to clothe the idea with a sensory form which, however, would not be its own end. Thus, in this art all concrete phenomena are mere sensory appearances destined to represent their esoteric affinities with primordial ideas. Symbolists use words for their suggestive value and for the creation of atmosphere. Poe's use of words creates atmosphere and tone in his tales and poems. In the philosophy of composition he points out that words have a great symbolic importance. It was only after careful selection that he used the word "Nevermore" as refrain to his famous poem The Raven. He selected it for its sonorous sounds symbolic of unending melancholy. Raven, a bird of ill omen, repeats "nevermore" at the conclusion of each stanza to enhance the effect of melancholy which results from the death of a beautiful woman. "The death of a beautiful woman" is the most poetical topic in the philosophy of composition Poe explains the process of employing suggestive and symbolic words in The Raven; "I made the bird alight on the bust of Pallas, also for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage - it being understood that the bust was absolutely suggested by the bird - it being understood that the bust was absolutely suggested by the bird - the bust of Pallas it being understood that the bird - the bust of Pallas was first, as well in keeping with the character of the lovers, P.T. 0