

Summary

George Orwell begins with a reminiscence of his time working in a secondhand bookshop, noting that the thing that mostly struck him was how few "bookish" people visited. The shop had an interesting stock but did not attract people who were much interested in it. Instead, he relates there are two types of "pest" who "haunt" such bookshops. The first is a "decayed" person who comes by every day to attempt to sell worthless books; the other is someone who orders large numbers of books but has no intention of buying them. He describes this latter group mostly as "paranoiacs."

Orwell describes the sideline activities the bookshop engaged in, like the selling of secondhand stamps to collectors. They also sell children's books and do a roaring trade in Christmas cards in the winter. The most profitable activity is a lending library, even though book thieves regularly steal books.

Orwell describes the location of the bookshop and describes its clientele as a snapshot of London's wider reading public. He suggests that men mostly read detective stories. He says the bookshop revealed people's "real tastes" and notes that classical English novelists like Charles Dickens (1812–70) and Jane Austen (1775–1817) have fallen out of favor. People also resist short stories.

Orwell states he would not like to work as a bookseller. This is partly because of the long working hours, the coldness of bookshops, and the huge numbers of bluebottle flies. He notes the primary reason, however, is that selling books caused him to have to lie about books, and this in turn caused him to lose his love of books.

Analysis

Orwell's gift for summoning the sights, sounds, and atmosphere of places in his past is on full display in a minor essay about bookshops. Orwell has a strangely contemptuous attitude for the bookshop's regular customers, who are derided as "paranoiacs" who smell of breadcrumbs. For a man who is broadly committed to the advancement of humanity, he often comes across as someone who does not like people much. The reasoning for this is primarily that Orwell's memories of his time in the bookshop are not generally happy ones: it is cold, he worked long hours, there were flies everywhere, and he felt he was forced to compromise his principles and become a liar about books.

Orwell's impressions of the reading tastes of the shop's customers are reflected in later essays, especially "Good Bad Books." He is concerned with the decline in favor of classical writers like Austen and Dickens, who are shunned for mass-market detective novels and the like. This might be taken to reflect wider social trends (in education and in cultural preferences), or it might merely have been a fact localized to Orwell's own limited experience as a cold and unhappy bookseller.

Introduction

George Bernard Shaw is a well-known writer. He prepared and spoke on the topic 'Spoken English and Broken English' on a gramophone recording for the Lingua-phone institute. In his speech the provocative ideas are couched in a simple but sparkling rhetorical style.

Advantages in learning to speak well

Bernard Shaw says that when we travel in the British Commonwealth or in America or when we meet a native of these countries, we have to speak English well for enough understanding. If we speak in a provincial or cockney dialect it may prevent us from obtaining some employment which is open to those only speak what is 'correct English'.

No such thing ideally correct English

No two British subjects speak exactly alike. Even educated persons, the Poet Laureate and trained speakers do not pronounce of some of the simplest commonest words in the English language exactly alike. Members of the committee who are selected as models of correct speech speak differently. They differ according to the country in which they were born.

Confession of Bernard Shaw

Bernard Shaw confesses that he himself does not speak English in the same way. When he speaks to audience, he speaks carefully. If he were to speak carefully to his wife at home, she would think he was going mad. As a public speaker he has to take care that every word he says is heard distinctly at far end of large halls containing thousands of people. At home he speaks to his wife like mumbling. His wife also a little careless and so he sometimes has to say "What?"

Advice to foreign students of English

Do not try to speak English perfectly because native speakers of English won't understand. In London nine hundred and ninety-nine out of thousand people not only speak bad English but speak even that very badly. No foreigner can ever stress the syllables and make the voice rise and fall in questions and answer, assertion and denial, in refusal and consent, in enquiry or information, exactly as a native does. Therefore, the first thing they have to do is to speak with a strong foreign accent, and speak broken English.

Conclusion

Bernard Shaw criticizes that it is an insult to the native speaker of English who cannot understand his own language when it is too well spoken.

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