

UNIT 51 SO ! NOW ! WHAT IS POETRY ? ONCE AGAIN: A SYMPOSIUM

Structure

51.0	Objectives
51.1	Introduction
51.2	The Symposium
	51.2.1 Pleasure and truth, imagination and reason in poetry
	51.2.2 A poet as a critic
	51.2.3 Subject and its treatment in poetry
	51.2.4 Literature and literary standards
	51.2.5 Beauty and distortion in poetry
	51.2.6 Poetry as a holistic activity
	51.2.7 Poetry and music
	51.2.8 The poet and his/her poem
	51.2.9 Poetry as emotive activity
51.3	Let's sum up
51.4	Further reading

51.0 OBJECTIVES

There are mainly three results that we wish to achieve through this unit. They are given below :

- having completed this course on British poetry we wish to understand : What is this thing called a poem ? How does it influence us ? Why do we need it ? in an abstract manner.
- record the proceedings of a students symposium on the subject 'What is Poetry ?'
- induce you to arrange such symposia on your own at the study centers or elsewhere and if possible prepare a collection of your articles.

51.1 INTRODUCTION

Some students like you assembled at a private study circle and having arranged it before hand decided to exchange ideas on the subject of poetry. This unit is a collection of their presentations, i.e. articles, in which each student had taken a definition of poetry and examined it in detail. If *you* feel interested in reading their essays you may read them in this unit. I have made very few changes in their texts. For instance a student had written. '... the beat of a trumpet' which I changed to 'the blowing of a trumpet. the beat of a drum ...'

My reasons for collecting them here are twofold : In the first place learning is not always handed down by a teacher to his/her student. A teacher learns nearly as much as s/he teaches. This method of learning through discussions goes back to the hoary past, to Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. Probably what was later codified in our country as the Upanishads were also discussions between teachers and students. In our units also, you must have found us talking to you rather than preparing a written record.

Some of you may read part of this unit soon after the receipt of the study material. In that case I wonder if it would be desirable and possible for you to arrange a discussion session on each block. If you did that once a month you could exchange

predominant in romantic and naturalistic production' as the Spanish philosopher and writer José Ortega Y Gasset (1883-1955) pointed out.

Postmodernism has been looked at by different critics in different ways. Irving Howe and Harry Levin looked at postmodernism, rather disappointedly as a descent from the great modernist experiments. The Modernists had been profoundly influenced by Freud. You may recall Yeats's bold image in 'Crazy Jane talks with the Bishop':

'A woman can be proud and stiff
When on love intent;
But love has pitched his mansion in
The place of excrement;
For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent.'

How psychologically felicitous and yet how loud and clinical! No less bold were the images of Dylan Thomas in his first book of poems published in 1934 (*Eighteen Poems*). However, if Thomas's images are Freudian they speak also of eyes that still remembered the Garden of Eden:

Light breaks where no sun shines;
Where no sea runs the waters of the heart
Push in their tides...
A candle in the thighs
Warns youth and seed and burns the seed of age.

While the 'place of excrement' is pathological, 'A candle in the thighs' is passionately human.

Unlike Howe and Levin, Leslie Fiedler and Ihab Hassan treated postmodernism with approbation, even a touch of bravado. While Fiedler found a concession to popular culture in postmodernism Hassan discovered in it 'that impulse of self-unmaking which is part of the literary tradition of silence.' According to Hassan while modernism insists on purpose postmodernism emphasizes play; while the former values design, the latter chance; the former asserts totalization, the latter deconstruction; the former genre and boundary the latter text and intertext; the former determinacy and transcendence the latter indeterminacy and immanence. In order to characterize postmodernism Hassan has coined the word 'indeterminance'. You will have to make up your mind, as you read Thomas, a poet of the *New Apocalypse* which flourished in the forties and Larkin a poet of *The Movement* that dominated the fifties and Plath the witty and at the same time disturbing poet of the early sixties, you should decide for yourself whether you would call them Modernists or Postmodernists. Postmodernism is now a well-established term that describes not only literature but the second half of the twentieth century culture as a whole. However, there has been in France a swing away from it also towards what is described as **Neo-modernism**. We will have to wait for sometime before we begin to recognize the contours of this new cultural terrain.

The frontispieces of this block are from Henry Moore (1898-1986) the British sculptor and artist from Leeds. Moore said that *The King and Queen* was done when Mary, his daughter, was six years old and he used to tell her stories of kings and queens and princesses. However, it now sits on a hill at Glenkiln in Scotland overlooking the Scottish border towards England. The sculpture fits in with the landscape: bleak and impressive, lacking in frills, monumental. 'I'd sooner' said Moore, 'have my sculpture surrounded by natural landscape if I could choose, rather than with man-made architecture. Moore went on, 'The open air dwarfs everything because you relate it to the sky which is fathomless, endless and to distance which can be enormous.' The fathomlessness that he perceived in the firmament was Moore's discovery also in the reclining figures, the family and the stare of a sheep. Don't we, as the French say, the more we change the more we remain the same?

views and clarify your ideas on each important age in a systematic fashion in about ten months.

The sections that follow record the definitions in the italics. At the end of the paper the paper presenter's name is given. These presentations were made at Hehal and were privately arranged by the students themselves some of whom did not present a paper but took part in the discussions. Their questions and the answers given by the presenters of papers are, however, not recorded here.

52.2 THE SYMPOSIUM

Does the title ring a bell in your mind? One of Plato's books is called *The Symposium* (A symposium in Ancient Greece was a drinking party or a convivial meeting for drinking, conversation and entertainment. Today it means a meeting or conference on a special subject. It also means a collection of articles delivered at a meeting on a special topic.) In Plato's *Symposium* Socrates, Aristophanes and others meet and propound their views on three forms of emotion: the sensual, the altruistic and true wisdom. Aristophanes holds that originally everyone was a hermaphrodite and a man looks for a woman and a woman for man because each seeks its own lost half. You must read the book some day. In the meantime let's proceed with our symposium.

51.2.1 Pleasure and truth, imagination and reason in poetry

'Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help reason.'

This definition of Dr. Johnson may be examined in the light of his own interpretation. Pleasure and truth are the two elements, or better say two standards to which good poetry must come up to. 'Pleasure' is the artistic pleasure peculiar to literature and 'truth' is the message that the work of art should give. Virgil's *Georgics* are a work of art and they tell us something about agriculture. A work of art must at least give a message. It may try to elevate mankind. In Matthew Arnold's words it should try to give a 'criticism of life'. T. S. Eliot approves of this fact. All good poetry cannot be just a pleasurable mixture of sounds. It will have a message.

But to say this is to leave the issue undecided. Eliot's *The Waste Land* may have different meanings for different persons. For some it may carry a message for sacrifice and demand from the present generation a greater degree of participation in nature rather than be led by the artificiality of modern life which only aims at a prolongation of life. Besides, it may also recommend for its readers a life of faith, shunning of passions and inculcation of greater meaning in the daily monotony of our routine.

Unreal city,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

Here the pleasure comes from a reminder from Dante's Limbo which is connected powerfully with the traffic of human beings in vehicles or otherwise for the daily work in a factory or office. The 'truth' or the message is that we must live closer to nature and treat it as our friend rather than enemy.

We cannot say whether Dr. Johnson the Great Cham, would have approved of such a message. He found Shakespeare deficient in morality. His *Vanity of Human Wishes* he must have written on his own standard and there various types of objects of vanity are taken and in various verse paragraphs are shown as futile. For instance

The needy Traveller, serene and gay,
Walks the wild Heath, and sings his Toil away.

As against that a rich traveller has to fear both light and darkness since 'One shows the Plunder, and one hides the Thief.'

This type of moralizing has been found uncongenial for a work of art.

But 'pleasure' and 'truth' need not necessarily be interpreted in Dr. Johnson's way. The definition may mean that the pleasure may be evoked through a combination of pleasure with some sort of truth not necessarily mundane or logical. In the following lines from 'Dover Beach',

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain:
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Truths of feeling, of armies clashing wantonly, of loss of certainty are experiences which cannot be meaningful in the mundane and strictly prosaic sense. Still they are 'truths'. We find something in our own hearts to echo those feelings.

But then, this has to be achieved by tethering imagination with reason. Dr. Johnson found this lacking in Milton's 'Lycidas' where Christian and pagan images were mixed. Ben Jonson found Shakespeare missing this point in *Julius Caesar* and said of him as Augustus said of Haterius 'sufflaminandus erat.' Shakespeare according to him '... had an excellent Phantasie brave notions gentle expression wherein hee flowed with that facility that sometime it was necessary he should he stop'd.'

We in our times, however, have found Johnson's opinion narrow and parochial. Still the statement holds its validity and we do approve of artistic pieces in which the elements do not go against the central spirit of the work of art. Modern poetry brings not only Christian and Pagan traditions but also traditions of different cultures and races together and knowledge and wisdom of the past are all also strained through a sieve of relevance and this relevance we may call reason.

Ram Rahim
Thethaitangar

51.2.2 A Poet as a Critic

'The peculiar qualifications and peculiar limitations of a poet when he is a critic of other men's poetry.'

Sir Philip Sidney, Dryden, Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot have all been poets who have also exercised their critical faculties over other men's poetry. Generally, their criticism is written from the stand-point of their own standards which goes into the making of their poetry. Dr. Johnson's disapproval of the metaphysicals, 'Lycidas' or Gray was because his ear was so attuned to the music of the poetry of his own time and critical faculties so sharply oriented to the standards of the taste of the Augustans that he found in the Metaphysicals a 'yoking' by 'violence' of disparate and far fetched sentiments: in 'Lycidas' an unhappy mixture

of imagery from two irreconcilable traditions, or in Gray an unworthy successor to an age of great poets. Similarly Arnold, who wished to load his poetry with a 'criticism of life' found Shelley an 'ineffectual angel beating his luminous wings in void.' Eliot was so much of a classicist, a conscious and dedicated artist that he seems to pass by Shakespeare, paying him little more than a lip service and praises Ben Jonson for his portrayal of the superfluities, the facade. In his characters of humour – Volpone, Mosca, Epicoene – are presented a particular humour or type in essence and his characters are more well fitted in the life of the play than those of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's characters may give pleasure even out of their context but Jonson's characters' words are fitted in the corpus of the play so well that they do not carry much meaning outside the context. Thus in Eliot's estimate Jonson has an edge over Shakespeare as an artist.

When a writer is not outside the range of his sympathies the poet-critic turns out to be of the first rank. Then he shows his acumen, his critical sense, his incisiveness of observation and his penetrating judgment in a measure that a critic who is not a poet cannot show.

But, if a poet falls out of his sympathy then such critics fail to make just observations. Eliot held Milton to be responsible for the 'dissociation of sensibility' that took place in the seventeenth century and Dryden and Pope falling unfortunately in the train that resulted from this unhappy event. Here it may be relevant to state that Milton incurred Eliot's ire because he had a bad influence on later poets who attempted to follow his style. The same was observed by Keats – 'What is life to Milton is death to me.' But this, in no way hindered Milton's greatness as a poet or reduces the amount of pleasure that Milton gives through his sublimity, his ornate, even artificial style. These, Eliot could not appreciate. But as a poet he was better able to see, the absence of the visual images in Milton's *Paradise Lost* which were there in *Comus*.

Thus, a poet when he is a critic of other men's poetry is better able to examine the artistic process from conception to creation and is better able to see the artist's pursuit and aim which he tries to achieve than a critic who is not a poet.

But if a poet falls out of the range of the poet-critic's interest he may suffer at his hands. Besides this, sometimes poets are so conditioned in their own world that they can approve of little that is outside their ken. Sophocles said of Aeschylus: 'Even if he does the right thing, he does it without knowing it.' Greene called Shakespeare 'an upstart crow beautified with our feathers.' Milton must have had poets like Herrick and Suckling in mind when he spoke of those 'libidinous and ignorant poetasters.' Byron made fun of Keats as 'spoilt by cockneyfying and suburbaning' and Keats called *Don Juan* 'Lord Byron's last flash poem.' So in the interest of art it is better to have both types of criticism i.e. of the poet-critics and the scholar-critics.

Surinder Singh Sandhu
Piska Mor

"And this most important qualification which I have been able to find, which accounts for the peculiar importance of the criticism of practitioners is that a critic must have a very highly developed sense of fact."

Criticism has been described as a 'soul's adventure among masterpieces'. As such it tells us about this adventure and for the account to be an honest and sensitive one, there can be no denying the fact that first of all there must be an adventure and in the second place, the adventurer must be sensitive, intelligent and wide awake to be able to record all facts in the course of his journey. In short, the critic must have a sense of fact.

A reader of *Tom Jones*, in the first place must go through the book and thus be aware of the work of art and in the second he must have a knowledge of the literary development preceding Fielding, the peculiar importance of his use of a new medium for a new type of work, the social condition and the political events, the Jacobite

uprising of Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745 (coming within a hundred thirty miles from London), etc. may add a dimension to his piece of criticism on the book. Why after all, did Dickens write those lengthy passages in *Pickwick Papers*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Dombey and Sons*. Perhaps because he was writing for the periodicals.

Hence, we can definitely say with confidence that a critic must have a sense of fact but there is something more which he must have and that is inspiration and insight. No matter how much is written about Shakespeare and the statements and observation well explained with the help of quotations they will not replace Shakespeare's plays, sonnets and long poems. Much of what Shakespeare did, was done also by his contemporaries. But why was he unique. All stood before this cedar like viburnum bushes –

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.

This is because he had that creative imagination which has been called by different names by different people. The concept of the Muses or Saraswati shows the awareness by our ancestors of this element of art. The learned critic must be conscious of the element of inspiration in art.

Is it proper for a critic to take inspiration under examination? One cannot at our stage of civilization leave anything aside as sacrosanct but one must have the modesty to admit that it cannot be understood fully. How it has gone in making the parts cling to the whole is of course subject of examination. And it is with this that a critic has to deal. Shakespeare is such a great writer that one cannot say the last word about him. But then a fresh effort at a right statement which may not wholly be true is still welcome. A critic must have a highly developed sense of fact but in the same breath it will have to be said that something still will be fleeting, inexplicable and puzzling and that will be the spirit of the work of art, an ally of critical imagination.

Johnson Kandulna
Gumla

51.2.3 Subject and its treatment in poetry

'Nothing depends upon the subject ; all upon the treatment of the subject.'

'Nothing' of the given statement is rather confusing. We are prompted to ask – Does the metre of a poem not depend on the subject? Does the medium – prose or verse – not matter to the subject? Does the style not matter to the subject? Perhaps an answer to these questions gives us the required answer.

The Cherry Orchard perhaps could best be conveyed in the prose medium. Shakespeare's tragedies find their full effect only in verse and a prose translation of Macbeth's 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' speech or his words after the murder of Duncan,

Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast, -

would appear childish and sentimental. Similarly, Shakespeare wrote his own comedies in prose although he was a master of metrical composition. Wit and raillery and sharp exchanges of words go better in scintillating dialogue in prose.

But when a writer wishes to examine and explore something and write a treatise or a book of history he is also always constrained to choose prose rather than verse. Herodotus or Thucydides gave better history since they had written in prose. Virgil's *Georgics* gives us some account of farming but our modern agricultural scientist

could hardly attempt the same with the amount of information they have to convey. in verse. Sir James Jeans, or Arthur Eddington, give the pleasure of music in their discussions of scientific subjects, in verse it would have been utterly prosaic and monotonous.

Similarly, when Keats wished to write an epic on some mythological subject he chose the style of Milton. These lines from *Hyperion*:

Golden his hair of short Numidian curl,
Regal his shape majestic, a vast shade
In midst of his own brightness, like the bulk
Of Memnon's image at the set of sun
To one who travels from the dusking East:
Sighs, too, as mournful as that Memnon's harp
He uttered, while his hands contemplative
He press'd together, and in silence stood.

Or

... the God of the Sea,
Sophist and sage, from no Athenian grove,
But cogitation in his watery shades,
Arose, with locks not oozy, and began,
In murmurs, which his first - endeavouring tongue
Caught infant-like from the far-foamed sands.

remind one of Milton's sublime style. These lines from Book I of *Paradise Lost* may fitly be quoted :

... he, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower : his form had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured -

The same elevated style Matthew Arnold tried to have for his 'Sohrab and Rustum'. Besides the postures all epic poets have brought in epic similes and invocation and gods and goddesses or human being raised to that standard as in 'Sohrab and Rustam'. Since the epic has its oral tradition and this is compatible with certain human longing for the grand which can be achieved through some familiar devices. Pope introduced these, may be in a mocking way, for his mock-epic *The Rape of the Lock*.

But to say all this does not mean that there is nothing like originality of inspiration and diversity of treatment. Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats all wrote on birds but their reactions were as distinct as that of any two persons can be. Shelley's is 'Bird, thou never wert that from heaven or near it.' Wordsworth's sky-lark is 'true to the kindred points of heaven and earth.' Keats's nightingale was 'not born for death, ... immortal Bird!'

No hungry generations tread thee down:
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:

The voice that Coleridge heard that 'passing night' of a raven 'belonged, they did say, to the witch Melancholy!'

As against all these Yeats imagines a bird which is

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork
More miracle than bird or handiwork,

Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
 Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
 Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
 In glory of changeless metal
 Common bird or petal
 And all complexities of mire and blood.

Thus we find that the form demands something from the content and content as well conditions the form but unconditioned to a certain extent remains inspiration.

Prabhat Sharma
 Pandra

51.2.4 Literature and literary Standards

The greatness of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards.

Literature, like all other human activities is produced by human beings and must bear the stamp of life. The impressions, however, have been of myriads of types. From the time of the Egyptian 'Book of the Dead' to the short stories coming in the periodicals today bear the mark of humanity. Art in this sense has no autonomy. It is dependent upon life. Wherever there has been an attempt to free art from the problems of life the product has been a none too happy one. Walter Pater, Lionel Johnson, Earnest Dowson and Oscar Wilde, i.e. the late nineteenth century Aesthetes and the decadants have been victims of the ideal of 'art for art's sake' movement in literature. And if 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' or 'De Profundis' have made an impact on our minds it is because they express the impact of life. Similarly, the pleasure that we derive from *Oedipus Rex*, *Macbeth* or *King Lear* is not because they conform to literary standards but because we find in them an echo of our ideals and aspirations, desires and dreams which we cannot relinquish.

Literary values and norms are established and followed because they are made on the basis of literary works produced and not *vice versa*. Aristotle or Plato started discussing art because the great age of literature had passed. Dryden wrote his *An Essay of Drammatick Poesy* during his days of retirement from London that had been stricken by fire and plague. But he took this pastime because a great age had passed and he could survey from a vantage point all that had passed, in the light of contemporary opinion. The two following passages from *An Essay* show the subtle demands of 'Nature' and art in Shakespeare :

Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learn'd ; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature ; he look'd inwards, and found her there.

Shakespeare was the *Homer*, or Father of our Dramatick Poets ;
Johnson was the *Virgil*, the pattern of elaborate writing : I admire him, but I love *Shakespeare*.

This opinion Dryden kept on repeating all his life in his various prefaces to his plays. In the prologue to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* he compared Jonson with Shakespeare. While Jonson was praised for art, Shakespeare for 'Nature' or life.

In imitation *Johnsons* wit was shown,
 Heaven made his men but Shakespeare made his own.

* * * * *

But *Shakespeare* like a master did design
Johnson with skill dissected humane kind,

The same appeal to life was made by Dr. Johnson in setting aside the charge against Shakespeare for having not observed the Aristotelian unities of time and place or for mixing up comedy and tragedy as in the drunken porter scene in *Macbeth*. Johnson opined,

There is always an appeal open from criticism to nature.

Dr. Johnson praised Shakespeare for being able to read 'human sentiments in human language ; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passion.' 'This therefore', he continues, 'is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life' As against these examples, if we take the case of *Jerusalemme Liberata* by Tasso and the adverse effect that critics had on the poet, in the failure of *Jerusalemme Conquistata* would confirm the belief that art requires not only literary standards but a certain degree of experience of life in the critic who aims at evaluating or judging works of art.

However, to say all this is not to deny the existence of purely literary values. We may speak against Aristotle's three unities but some of the great plays of seventeenth century France – of Racine, Corneille and Moliere – were written in observance of these Aristotelian unities. Pope's dictum:

Those Rules of old discovered, not devis'd,
Are Nature still but Nature methodiz'd;
Nature, like liberty, is but restrain'd
By the same law which first herself ordain'd.

holds ample validity since rules of art are or were formed on the experience of art itself. So, to quote Pope again,

Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem ;
To copy nature is to copy them.

To create works of art of true greatness, hence, may depend on the mastering of a craft, accomplishing oneself by hard work and perpetual application.

Hence, true greatness in literature can be achieved through reconciling art with Nature, inspiration with rules and imagination with craft. An adequate evaluation or appreciation would depend on a more catholic and tolerant taste and a judgment of the whole rather than parts, and an application of not only literary standards, since every great and new work of art is not repetition but a new thing.

Arun Thakur
Morabadi

51.2.5 Beauty and distortion in poetry

'A story of particular facts is a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful ; poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.'

Stories and poems are different forms of literary expressions. Literature always gives a distinct type of pleasure. Hence it would be incorrect to say that stories obscure and distort and poetry does not. In any artistic expression rearrangement is involved and thus comes in a measure of distortion, because art inflicts order on things that run away from the unity the artist tries to impose on disparate facts. What could be more satisfying than the pleasure of 'The Diamond Necklace' by the French short story writer Maupassant, 'The Doll's House' by Katherine Mansfield, 'The Voice' by H. E. Bates and 'Maria' by Elizabeth Bowen. A reading of those stories or some of the personal essays of Lamb, viz. 'Dream Children' or 'The Superannuated Man' give us the pleasure of passing into eternity as do the plays of Shakespeare.

And yet, to times in hope, my verse shall stand
Praising Thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

But the stuff of poetry and of stories while being life itself is in essence different. While a story sums up the experience of a longer period, a lyric or a sonnet sets to art the experience of a moment, it is a moment's monument. Perhaps Richard Lovelace's feelings in *Lucasta* cannot be expressed through a short-story.

Stone Walls doe not a Prison make
Nor Iron bars a Cage;
Mindes innocent and quiet take
That for an Hermitage;
If I have freedome in my Love
And in my soul; am free;
Angels alone that soar above,
Injoy such Liberty.

And again :

I could not love thee Deare so much,
Love'd I not Honour more.

The same spirit of valour mixed with love could not be achieved through Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d' Arthur*. Launcelot's love takes a more deep and more profound and rather more profane sublimity in the character of the devotee and the debauchee that Launcelot is. In Lovelace it is a pining for the lady love in the confines of a prison cell.

It is said, the Anglo-saxons heard poems after the day's tempestuous routine. Their poetry was thus more rugged than ours. Our poetry is more polished, more closely knit and the parts are more closely fitted into the general scheme. A poet sacrifices more in the interest of his art than a story-teller does. In this sense a harmony is created out of the disturbed life and complicated goings on of life. A prose writer moves up and down the peaks and abysses of life and may be more comprehensive but not more balanced and reconciled to the central symbol of the work of art. In this way perhaps the statement is correct.

Surendra Prasad Singh
Dhanbad

51.2.6 Poetry as a holistic activity

'The poet described in ideal perfection brings the whole soul of man into activity with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity.'

The given statement means that great poetry has concentration, which is achieved by a master artist by subordination of some of our faculties to others. An examination of a few pieces would allow us a better understanding of this fact.

In the following lyric of some fourteenth century poet the simple grandeur of summer is conveyed :

Sumer is icumen in.
Lhude sing cuccu.
Groweth sed and bloweth med,
And springth the wde nu.
Sing cuccu.

There is no suggestion of disturbance or any threat that may be imminent. This same feeling is conveyed by the opening of *The Canterbury Tales*:

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred in the flour:
Whan Jephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen all the night with open ye:

Against the background of melody and fowles asleep with open eyes is introduced the merry pilgrimage to Canbterbury from Southark inn.

But then the month of April need not always be a sign of happiness. The opening of *The Waste Land* suggests uneasiness at the advent of the very season which had brought Chaucer and his pilgrims to life :

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Here a glimmer of joy is given but it is suppressed by man's desire to maintain his immobility despite the change of season which suggests a change in our life as well. This spirit is maintained throughout the poem. Allusions of happy association are taken from different periods and are shown getting corrupted by the modern man's greed and ambition, fears and frustrations.

Hopkins brings the whole soul into activity just like Eliot and invites the entire range of human desires but subordinates them to the love and glory, grandeur and terror of God:

With an anvil-ding
And with fire in him forge thy will
Or rather, rather then, stealing as Spring
Through him, melt him but master him still :
Whether at once, as once at a crash Paul,
Or as Austin, a lingering-out sweet skill,
Make mercy in all of us, out of us all
Mastery, but be adored, but he adored King.

God is here like an eastern monarch mercilessly securing his subject's submission. Hopkins wants Him to secure his submission either in the manner of St Paul, abruptly or like the gradual conversion of St. Augustine.

W. B. Yeats secures a concentration of effect by bringing our impulses of pictorial art, magic, devotion and love into harmony. These lines from 'Sailing to Byzantium' demonstrate this fact :

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing - masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away : sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is ; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

And this 'artifice of eternity' is a work of art, a golden bird :

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Yeats brings into play a multitude of impulses and all these are used to heighten one impulse of his which is his love of a work of art.

Love of human beings has fired human works of art no less. From Yeats's aspiration for the 'Cloths of Heaven' –

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet :
But I being poor have only my dreams ;
I have spread my dreams under your feet ;
Tread softly because your tread on my dreams.

to the simple feelings of a Lovelace from prison :

Stone Walls doe not a Prison make,
Nor Iron bars a Cage;
Mindes innocent and quiet take
That for an Hermitage ;
If I have freedome in my Love,
And in my soule am free;
Angels alone, that soar above,
Injoy such Liberty.

Or a Herrick on the *carpe diem* theme :

Then be not coy, but use your time ;
And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry.

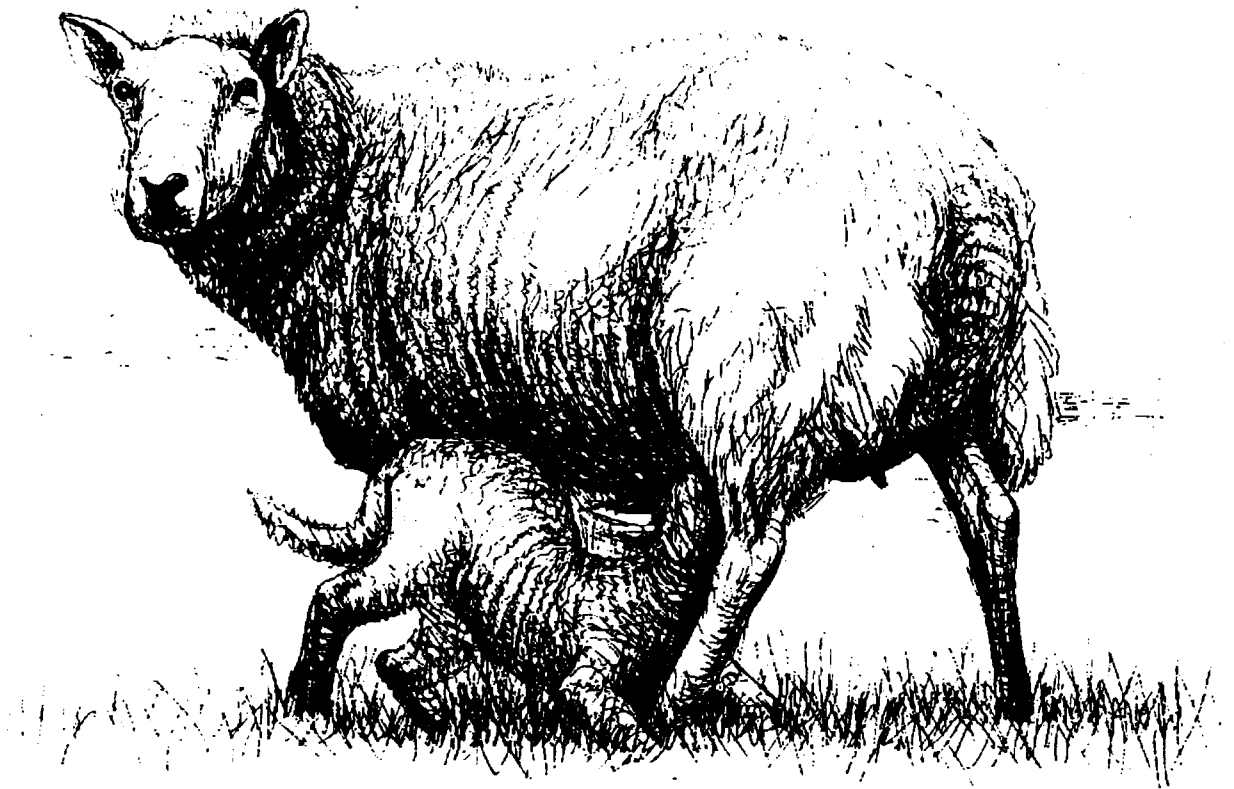
can be presented a range of feelings and emotions which have been brought to express the feeling of love. Hence the statement observes a fact and is an important comment on the nature of poetic creation.

Jaiprakash
Harmu

Moderator's Comment: The last sentence is too long and may confuse the listener/reader.

51.2.7 Poetry and music

'Poetry is 'speech framed' ... to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning.'



Sheep with Lamb I 1972
etching and dry point
14.9 x 20.6 cm
Henry Moore Foundation
CGM196

Our interest in poetry has much to do with the effect of sound. Poetry without its sound appeal loses much of its charm. The sound suggests the passion that has gone into the making of the poem. The opening of *Paradise Lost*:

Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us and regain the blissful seat,

sounds like the rolling of the sea, the blowing of trumpet, the beat of a drum and the clap of thunder in the sky. It is the sound that suggests the force of imagination of Milton. A prose rendering of *Paradise Lost* would make an insipid reading if we do not have behind our mind that that is what *Paradise Lost* has to say in plain words.

By no means this sound is meant only to suggest force. Sheer helplessness in the face of death and destruction can equally admirably be conveyed with the help of appropriate rhythm and the sound effects of well chosen words. Macbeth's cry in anguish :

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps on this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools,
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon stage,
And then is heard no more;

'Heard no more' coming, as it does, at the end of a speech which started with the endless stretch of time suggested by the repetition of 'tomorrow' makes us think about the hopes of Macbeth, his hope against all odds also to head a line of kings and his ultimate failure in this effort is made palpable not with the words that are said but with their arrangement which is a product of powerful imagination. No wonder life appears 'full of sound and fury signifying nothing.'

Much of the force of the verse of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century poets comes from their use of the heroic couplet. How well has Atticus been laughed upon with the help of music :

Like *Cato*, give his little Senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause;

The same thing if said of so many persons in simple prose would appear offensive. A Lytton Strachey may compare Pope with a monkey pouring down hot oil from an arch on all those who are going below but to his most other readers he appears sublime even in his anger.

The attraction of the psalms or other books of the Bible is not only of the content but also of the style. The style, of course, is not an attraction in itself, as in Swinburne, but a necessary concomitant of meaning which gets the message conveyed even before we understand the word.

The attraction of the nonsense verse of Lear, lies not in seriousness but in the casualness, the impression of light heartedness that one gets while mocking at seriousness. Children are taught nursery rhymes because the sound makes itself felt by the children so powerfully that they can learn the letters and words after they have memorized the poem with the help of their teacher.

The effect of sound is so powerful that when eras in literature change the music of poetry also changes. The music of the poetry of the Elizabethans is different from that of the neo-classical poets and of the neo-classicals different from the Romantic poets and of the Romantics from that of the Victorians and of the Victorians from that of the Modernists. The more mature the poet, the better he understands his tradition and his times and the more sensitive his ears are to the expression of his impression. In this respect his task is more difficult, if more interesting and rewarding as well than that of a writer of prose. The appeal of poetry can be for many things – for the expression of grandeur, oddity, humour, light heartedness, sorrow, frustration, futility, faith and a change of time - but this appeal is conveyed in a far more sensitive way through the medium of verse than of prose.

Henry Barla
Torpa

51.2.8 The poet and his poem

'Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry.'

Modern Criticism, - Cambridge or Chicago school or whatever we may call it has directed our attention very profoundly to a close observation of objects on which a statement has to be made. Criticism has been seen as a report on a piece of art just as a doctor's report on a disease, an engineer's statements about a particular machine or its working or a psychiatrist's report on a man are statements of facts.

It must be said that this attitude has given a particular orientation to literary criticism. The choice of words, the auditory effect of their combination, their repetition, are all studied nearly as precisely as scientists observe and record the progress of an experiment in a laboratory. Seen from this point of view, Hamlet becomes an 'artistic failure' because it does not provide us with the 'objective or relative' of the idea. Similarly Ben Jonson is a greater playwright from the point of view that his words derive haunting force from their context. The speeches in *The Alchemist*, *Volpone* or *Every Man in his Humor* derive from their proper context. As against this, the speeches in Shakespeare's plays appear profound even if they are read in an anthology of English poetry. The poorer poetry of eighteenth century is so, because Milton subjected the language to a deprivation by not allowing the 'unified sensibility' to remain in operation. All such comments of Eliot do wake us up to a greater understanding of the works of art. He says, 'Each generation must bring to the contemplation of past its own categories of appreciation, make its own demands upon art and has its uses of art.' Eliot's criticism no doubt helps us in seeing our poetry from the point of view of a scientific age. But is it the whole truth? Are we not made to overlook a few things, the understanding of which, would have heightened our appreciation of poetry?

How are we to feel the force of 'O mistress mine where are you roaming?' 'Youth's a stuff shall not endure' is an eternal problem but the simple information about the age of Shakespeare, its social condition, its fears and certainties, fears of disease and death and invasion and certainties of exploration and wealth and the breaking of the bonds of religion and traditions do heighten our understanding of the lines :

In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me, sweet-and-twenty
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

Most of the force of these lines is derived from the permanent problems of our existence. They gain an added meaning by an understanding of the writer's milieu.

Perhaps a far better understanding and appreciation of a work of art will result from an understanding of the man, the milieu and the moment. Morris's prologue to *The*

Earthly Paradise will be better understood by an understanding of Victorian ugliness, its smugness and industrialism :

Forget six counties overhung with smoke
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke
Forget the spreading of the hideous town
Think rather of the packhorse on the down
And dream of London, small and white and clean
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.

A foreigner's understanding and appreciation of these lines becomes more powerful when he knows the age, the society, the past and even other works of art of the same literature. Even if criticism is treated as a 'report' we must say that it must tell us not only about the work of art in isolation but about other facts not only about the poet's life and times but about his tradition. Such a criticism will be no less honest and far more sensitive than the other type of criticism for which the given lines speak.

Kamal Kumar Singh
Itki

51.2.9 Poetry as emotive activity

Poetry is language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said otherwise.

Emotion and passion find genuine vent in metre. Pope's response to his father's stick, if the legend is true, brought out an immortal couplet of English poetry :

Father, father, pity take;
No more verses shall I make.

Pope was a poet who 'lisp[ed] in numbers' as they came to him. Pope's was an instantaneous response to a hard fact. Wordsworth conveyed in his poetry, if his criticism is to be taken as the most authentic account of his own poetry, 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' Perhaps poets sit down in loneliness, think about a past powerful experience and try to be emotional once again and then write poetry. A memory of an unending line of daffodils seen in Scotland comes back to his mind when he is all alone or in pain and then 'his heart with pleasure fills and dances with the daffodils.' 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality' is a nostalgic account of the joys of Childhood – 'the land of sleep.' In the following lines, Wordsworth communicates his sense of grief and his spirit of revolt typical of the first generation of the romantics, over the lot of the poor and the depressed :

Beneath the hills, along the flowery vales
The generations are prepared;
The pangs, the internal pangs are ready
The dread – strife of poor humanity's afflicted will
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.

But if we read the prose of Cobbett in *Rural Ride* or his *Political Register*, an account of his journeys on horse back in rural England, we do get the emotional flavour that we find here. Wordsworth's poetry is known far more widely than Cobbett's prose because the former is more terse, more concentrated than the prose which is a long drawn affair. Similarly the *Age of Bronze* of Byron can be compared with Byron's speech in the House of Lords in support of the frame breakers and so far as the emotional content of the two goes it is not far different.

Hence, it will not be very apt to say that emotion can be conveyed only in poetry. It can be conveyed not less powerfully in prose.