

## THE POETIC PROCESS

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### **Abstract**

While defining poetry Leigh Hunt affords an important insight into the process of poetic creation. He first defines poetry as the utterance of passion for truth, beauty and power and then highlights its expression part bringing out that the passion can be articulated through proper images created by imagination and fancy and appropriate diction. By passion Hunt means an intense longing for the object which combines in it three elements viz. truth, beauty and power, hailed by the philosophers as the Ultimate Reality, the realization of which they think should be the main aim of poetry. Thus Hunt in his definition of poetry adequately hints at the process of poetic creation particularly through his ideas on passion.

The passion for the object as conceived by Hunt presupposes an earlier stage in the poetic process that can be described as the stage of the first encounter with the object. This per se means that unless one beholds an object one cannot develop a passion for it. But the object arousing a passion as such has some peculiarities about it capable of catching the attention of the onlooker as all the objects which we encounter cannot serve as a stimulus and cannot be the cause of arousing passion. Similarly, everybody looking at the same object cannot have a similar reaction. In other words, everybody cannot be capable of appreciating the beauty of an object and less so to store the impressions gathered as such that can be recalled at a later stage. In fact, only the artists, poets and philosophers are capable of apprehending the hidden beauty of an object through their extraordinary sense of perception, which more appropriately can be described as the poetic vision. The poetic vision is an individual attribute which one gets in a natural course and which cannot be acquired, created or generated at will. The best one can do is to harness the same by experience and proper exposure to knowledge. In view of this an object can be dismissed by an ordinary individual as insignificant while one endowed with poetic vision can find in it the manifestation of Ultimate Reality.

A.C. Bradley (1955), in his fine attempt to expose the real import of poetic vision and the difference it makes in individual perceptions, seeks to illustrate by citing the example of three spectators of the Falls of Clyde whose reactions to it widely differed. Interestingly Coleridge, one of the spectators, thought that it was sublime. The second one, treading in the footsteps of Coleridge, also called it sublime. The third spectator, the wife of the second fellow, described it as the prettiest with an

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affirmative nod. Thus all the reactions, even if being positive, are not quite identical as “sublimity and prettiness are qualities separated by so great a distance” (37). What Bradley wants to impress by way of this illustration is that Coleridge and his friend possess a poetic vision and are, therefore, capable of seeing into the real beauty of the object. But, to the contrary, the lady appears to be an ordinary individual and capable of appreciating the beauty of the object in her own limited way, whose description of the object is somewhat superficial. William Blake brings out the difference between a man in possession of poetic vision and the one devoid of it by saying “a fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees” (Gokak, 1975:21). In yet another illustration of the above sort, cited by Daiches (1960), a man seeing the rising sun asks the other fellow present there, doesn’t he see “a round disc of fire- somewhat like a guinea”. But the man, to his amazement, responding promptly says that he sees “an innumerable company of the heavenly horse crying Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty” (873). This shows that our thought is governed by personal feelings and, therefore, we look at the object in accordance with our own whims and obsessions. This is why a hungry man dreams of bread and a child being surrounded by his toys. Obviously, the vision is vitiated by individual perception leading to the views of two persons on a subject to become different.

Now the question is as to whether the vision is shaped only by one’s instinct and the past experiences or also by something else. In this regard we find that intuition also has a role in shaping the vision. Intuition is, in fact, the power of the mind to know something without conscious reasoning or study. Thus intuition, unlike experience, is not an acquired trait. There is another word instinct which means the inborn or natural tendency or impulse to do something or behave in a certain way without conscious thought, experience or teaching. Thus both instinct and intuition are quite closer. Keats, says Gokak (1975), “had his moment of intuitive perception as if it was no better than the instinctive experience” (13). Thus instinct and intuition are quite identical but still there is a slight difference between the two. Instinct is, in fact, an element which is reflected in our behaviour, whereas intuition is a virtue that enables us to know the truth piercing into the veil of ignorance and obscurity. In other words, intuition reveals the reality that lies hidden behind and helps remove the veil bringing us face to face with the object. Thus instinct and intuition are two complementary elements. While the former is demonstrated by our behaviour, the latter governs the behaviour by the proper exposure of the object.

Besides instinct and intuition, attitude also plays a vital role in shaping the vision. Attitude means the way of looking at life, and the way of thinking, feeling or behaving and “...is almost a part of the words and rhythms through which the vision incarnates in poetry” (ibid). In this way, the difference between vision and attitude is only that of the theory and practice which can be expressed better saying that unmanifest attitude is vision, and manifest vision is attitude. Vision, it is said, is “the characteristic gift of the poet,” (11) which helps in understanding things in their proper perspective. In other words, vision gives the poet a power to appreciate beauty and to see straight into the reality piercing the mist of ignorance. Besides, vision also helps to understand the past, which in fact is a necessary condition of writing a good poetry and constitutes “the *raison d’etre* of poetry” (11).

In the same way, inspiration i.e. impetus to do a thing also plays a crucial role in performing a creative

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feat. Inspiration means the instinctive urge which compels one to create. It is, in fact, a god-gift and is also not an acquired trait like instinct and intuition. The word inspiration has been derived from the Latin word 'inspirare' which means 'to breathe into' and which implies "the infusion of divine power" (Beckson and Ganz, 1991:126). The role of inspiration in writing poetry can well be illustrated by the fact that in older literature the help of a god or a muse was solicited. Homer while writing his poetry is found repeatedly invoking the muse to give him the creative energy to tell his tale. In Indian tradition the 'mangalacharana' (prayer to gods) formed the necessary part of a literary work which was obviously meant to help complete the work unhindered. The favour invoked and obtained as such can well be described as inspiration.

We know that poets are often described as inspired or haunted souls, which per se explains the role of inspiration and particularly the divine inspiration in a very express term. Plato, therefore, says that "a poet is capable of poetry only when he is inspired by the god" (126-127). Aristotle also says that "...poetry implies either a happy gift of nature or a strain of madness" (Butcher, 1985:63). In the same way Cicero also says, "no one was ever great without a certain divine afflatus" (Beckson and Ganz, 1991:127). In one of his plays Shakespeare equates a lunatic, a lover and a poet. In one of his writings Milton also expresses the same view when he says "...that the poet needs the assistance of the 'eternal spirit'...who sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar" (127). The Bible, too, it is believed, was written under the divine inspiration. In his magnum opus the *Ramacharitamansa* the poet clearly acknowledges the role of divine inspiration when he says "So shall I relate the story of Rama by the grace of Hari (the God)" (Balakanda, 31.3). The above illustrations go a long way in proving that the poets are inspired souls and work under the spell of supernatural dictates or inspiration.

To the modern mind, however, this orthodox theory of inspiration is not found much inspiring. The psychoanalysts suggest that inspiration or creativity has its source in the unconscious "...which is the well-spring of repressed emotions craving for expression" (Beckson and Ganz, 1991:127). Here too the role of supernatural in creativity has been alluded to, though obliquely and in obscure terms through words like 'unconscious' and 'repressed emotions.' Thus there is no denial to the fact that inspiration plays a vital role in creative work like poetry as it is said that "Almost no poem is completed without the poet's being aware of subconscious promptings" (Benton, 1966:91).

It is thus obvious that super-sensibility characterized by instinct and intuition and the divine favour or inspiration are the guiding principle for a poet. But the quantum of these god-gifts is not bestowed upon all the poets equally. Therefore, the same object evokes different reaction from different poets. This point is beautifully illustrated saying "If the meanest flower gave to Wordsworth thoughts too deep for tears, the London stage-coach was, for him, only an itinerant vehicle. But the stage-coach was a thing of romance to Charles Dickens" (Gokak, 1975:19). The same point also stands illustrated by the example of the Falls of Clyde as quoted earlier. In this way though all the poets are the beneficiaries of the divine favour, there individual traits and talents play a prominent role in determining their class.

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As for the real import of the words 'traits' and 'talents' and the way they are reflected in a poetical composition, it is to be pointed out that individual talent is the quality which differentiates a man from his surroundings (Hudson, 1960:40). There are, however, theoreticians who believe that a man is the product of three great impersonal forces of his time viz. race, milieu and moment which play a vital role in shaping his personality and thought (39). Here race means the hereditary temperament and disposition, milieu means the totality of surroundings, and moment means the spirit of the period. The poets being no exceptions to it are also subject to these impersonal forces. In this context it is worthwhile to quote the views of T.S. Eliot expressed in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', wherein he opines that the personal influence of a poet upon his work is very negligible and says that "No poet, no artist of any art has complete meaning alone" and that "His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" (Enright and Chickera, 1979:294). But there are scholars who are not inclined to brush aside completely the poet's own personality from his work and feel that behind every book there lies the personality of the author (Hudson, 1960:37) and that man is not merely a 'sample of his race and epoch' (40). This, however, does not mean that all the poets reflect their individual personality in their works in equal measure as the greater the genius, the more the domination of the individual personality. In view of this it can be surmised that though a poet is greatly affected by his surroundings, the impression of his personality is reflected in his work far more vigorously. If the role of individual talent in the poetic process, vis-a-vis the various other attributes, is taken into account, it is found that the poet arrives at a luminous perception of reality which plunges him into creative excitement and "enables him to light upon the words, the rhythm and images which help to present his perception in its entirety as the crystal presents a sun-beam" (Gokak, 1975:21). This shows that the individual talent coupled with the divine inspiration is the real cause of any creative feat including the poetic composition.

Besides the above, imagination and imitation also play a vital role in the poetic process. Imagination means the power of mind to form mental images not directly from facts but from hints, suggestions, memories of the past experiences etc., whereas imitation stands for the act of following the example or taking something as a model or pattern or copying in an amusing way reproducing the actions, manners, speech etc. Thus, there is a vast difference between imagination and imitation, though the role of imagination in the act of imitation is always there as unless one is imaginative one cannot be fascinated by the object to be imitated. It is the imagination that helps to form images of the object lying beyond the ordinary perception and eventually to get impressed by the same in the process reaching the level of entertaining the idea of emulating and imitating the same. It can, however, not be misconstrued that imitation is merely an act of servile copying as it is the expression of the concrete thing under an image which answers to its true idea thereby supplying the deficiencies of nature (Butcher, 1985:154). In other words, imitation also includes the act of modification and moderation so as to enable object being presented in an impressionable way. Thus imagination and imitation play a complementary role in the process of poetic creation as to create images of the object or to reflect reality not directly known through the senses is possible only when both of them work in unison. It is in view of this that imitation is described as the idealized reconstruction of life, which can be performed by imagination which is the faculty of spiritual insight and creation (Gayley and others,

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1936:xxvi).

The word imagination can be defined from yet another angle according to which it can be regarded as an amalgam of intuition and fancy. Intuition, as pointed out above, is the faculty which enables one to know something spontaneously without any conscious effort being made. Fancy is the capacity to detect unexpected resemblance between things that are apparently unlike and when this capacity functions in conjunction with intuition, it becomes the case of imagination (Gokak, 1975:13). Thus imagination combines in itself the essence of both intuition and fancy. In short, on one hand imagination enables the poet to apprehend truth whether it has existed before or not, while on the other identifies the correlation between two divergent-looking elements. In the above two roles, the first is performed in co-operation with intuition and the second with fancy. To achieve this end, the poet takes the help of illustrations and creates images to depict the object. The images are also of two kinds, one which reproduces the real experience by copying or by memory and the other which are created by the poet's imagination (Gayley and others, 1936: xxvi). The memory images are of inferior quality as they are not purely creative while the ones created by imagination represent high type of poetry (xxvi).

The various elements described above, which I.A. Richards prefers to call psychological tools, represent the following stages in the process of poetic creation. The first of them is encounter with the object, both spontaneous and deliberate. In this stage the element of creativity is nowhere discernible as such encounter can be had both by a fool and a wise man or a layman and a poet. The next stage is that of observation wherein the poet's eyes are riveted upon the object and he stares into it piercing the veil surrounding it. In such a situation an ordinary individual can have only an outward and superficial view of the object. Thus observation of a poet and an ordinary man are widely different and the observation of the latter cannot lead to creativity. In fact, creative observation or an observation leading to creativity requires a poetic vision. The poetic vision in itself is not an independent trait as it is helped by the elements like instinct, intuition, imitation and imagination. As has been already pointed out, intuition is an unconscious power of knowing a thing that lies hidden, while instinct is an inborn tendency or doing something or behaving in a certain way without any conscious thought. Thus intuition and instinct are closely related traits and deal with the theoretical and practical sides of the same act respectively. Obviously, the poetic vision is formed when instinct, intuition, imitation and imagination work in harmony. The next stage in the process of poetic creation is the stage when the poet is charmed and captivated by the beauty of the object which compels him to capture the moment of joy or the aesthetic satisfaction leading him to commit the same to his memory. Then there comes the stage of the recreation of the original moments of joy when, as Wordsworth puts it, sitting in a pensive mood one is overwhelmed by the thought of the joy experienced in the first encounter with the object. This time the spate of joy is so intense that it becomes impossible to suppress the same and one is compelled to share one's perceptions with others. This is, in fact, the beginning of the stage of expression, also called as the manifest or the explicit stage of poetry. This natural urge leading to it is also termed as the divine inspiration. In fact, great men out of humility do not want to give direct credit to their individual talent and seem to have

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purposely created the device of divine inspiration to simplify the matter. The elements as discussed above along with the individual talent leading to creativity can be described as the formation of attitude or the making of mood, which represent the preliminary or the un-manifest stage in the process of poetic creation

The manifest stage of poetry begins when the poet is overwhelmed by the emotional excitement recreated by his deep contemplation of his experience obtained through his first encounter with the object. At this stage he finds it impossible to suppress his feelings any longer and virtually starts giving a concrete shape to his feelings through words and images. While doing so the poet has to select effective medium, create powerful images and employ proper diction to convey his ideas and experience in an impressionable manner so as to make a profound appeal to the readers.

The images are created as a medium to convey the feelings characterized by vision, mood and attitude. In creating images the figures of speech are employed to make the expression forceful. Therefore, the figures of speech are considered as “the main source of poetic tension or effect” (Gokak, 1975:130). The figures of speech can mainly be divided into two classes- devices of reasoning and devices of rhetoric. In the first category hyperbole, innuendo and irony are included which indirectly suggest the conclusion the author intends to lead his reader to, whereas the devices of rhetoric are either the methods of expression such as iteration and broken utterance or effective arrangements of words within the sentence or paragraph such as antithesis, balance and climax. Besides these, litotes, pun, euphemism, metonymy, synecdoche, stichomythia, epigram, paradox, parody etc. are the other figures of speech which are used to embellish the language.

While figures of speech are used to deck the language to enable it to look grand, the figures of thought present the created images to give a form to thought. They are also known as figures of poetry or figures of meaning. Among the figures of meaning, simile, metaphor, climax, anticlimax, personification, allegory, symbolism, pathetic fallacy, irony etc. are important. In figures of meaning the poetic effect is created through meaning. It is, however, rightly remarked that there is no strict dividing line between the figures of speech and the figures of meaning “for meaning merges into speech and speech into meaning and it is difficult to define the area of transition” (130).

The significance of the images lies in the fact that “they express exactly the mood or attitude not a shade more nor less” (133), and that they also help “...to express feelings which are subtle and unusual and which would otherwise remain unexpressed” (ibid). This, however, does not mean that the use of imagery is indispensable as good poetry can be and has been written without them. But still they are considered important for the effective presentation of the thought and are, therefore, the essential condition of a good poetry.

Like imagery, diction also serves as a means of poetic expression. Diction means the choice of words in speaking and writing, style of writing or the choice and arrangement of words in a literary work. There is, in fact, hardly any difference between vocabulary of poetry and prose and any ordinary word can form the part of both poetry and prose. The difference, however, is that in poetry even simple words are artistically arranged so as to produce a musical effect. Besides, the choice of words

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is also made in accordance with the mood and norms at the time. As for example, in the Classical age the gaudy and inane phraseology was considered ideal, whereas in Romantic period it altogether fell from favour and was replaced by the language really used by ordinary people. Besides, the nature of diction is also determined by the purpose of the author, his manner, his subject, his characters- their customs and their times- and by the kind of audience to which he appeals. That is to say, if the poet has to depict a noisy situation, he will pick up words and arrange them in a way which while reading produce a corresponding sound. In the 'Ancient Mariner' Coleridge captures thus the sound of breaking ice in the icy sea: "It cracked and growled and roared and howled/ Like noises in a swound" (lines 61-62). In the same poem the sound produced by persons falling down is depicted as such: "With a heavy thump, a lifeless lump/ They dropped down one by one."

The language of the poem is also arranged in view of the mental level of the audience. Therefore, while writing for children, the diction has to be plain and simple. R.L. Stevenson in one such poem thus writes: "When I was sick and lay a-bed/I had two pillows at my head/ And all my toys beside me lay/To keep me happy all the day" (Gayley, 1936:475).

Sometimes to create a visual effect the words are used and spelt in a peculiar way, as can be seen in the following lines of William Blake's poem 'Tyger': "Tyger Tyger burning bright/ In the forest of the night/ What immortal hand or eye/ Could frame thy fearful symmetry" (Heyward, 1960:241-242). Herein while depicting the dreadful appearance of the tiger he not only used words like 'immortal hand or eye' and 'fearful symmetry' but also spells the word 'tiger' as 'tyger' as if to depict the fearful physique and figure of the animal.

As indicated above, the language of poetry is also selected in accordance with the situation. Thus, while depicting the village-life, the language spoken by the common man is to be preferred. It is, probably, on account of this that Wordsworth favours the use of the rustic language in his poetry as he finds it highly emotional and passionate, and, therefore, most appropriate to the farmers and shepherd, whose life form the core of his subject matter. Milton also prefers using native language so as "to bring out the richest dresses from its store" and "Not those new-fangled toys and triming slight/ Which takes out late fantasticks with delight" (Tillyard, 1951:31).

As for the order of words in a poem, Coleridge feels that the best order "is an order based on choice, choice that is guided by strangeness, evocativeness, the commonness or the freshness of words" (Gokak, 1975:139). Coleridge also thinks since the main function of poetry is to render natural things into supernatural, the vocabulary of the poetry has to be such which enables the poetry to fulfil this function (139). It is in this context that Coleridge makes a reference of "five-fold wealth of vocabulary" which, apart from fulfilling the above functions of poetry, imparts strangeness and freshness to a poet's utterance, makes poetry worth-rejoicing, makes poetry richly and deeply evocative, and becomes luminous centre of transfigured and of imaginative association-quintessential words (139).

Generally speaking, the language of poetry should be perspicuous even if the thought be profound, the words vivid, that stir the senses, that are picturesque, that make sounds, sights, colours, tastes,

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touch and mental experiences live for the imagination and go home for the feelings (Gayley, 1936:29). In view of this, the words of a poem even though familiar are charged with unexpected meaning. Sometimes in order to create an appropriate atmosphere even old-fashioned, archaic and unusual words, which are unfit to be used in a prose, are used in a poem (ibid). In a nutshell, the language of poetry has to be simple but impressive which is capable of communicating the feeling in an effective way in order to arouse the emotions of the readers to the fullest extent.

Besides diction and syntax, the arrangement of language is also very important, which determines the form of poetry. There are two forms in which language can be arranged viz. verse and prose. Ordinarily, the most appropriate form of the language of poetry is verse because it is better capable of affording pleasure and also for arousing emotion. This, however, does not mean that poetry can be written only in verse as, according to Coleridge, "Poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre" (*Biographia Literaria*, Chap. XIV). In this regard Philip Sidney, Bacon and Leigh Hunt also share the same perceptions (Hudson, 1960:68). But, in spite of this, verse constituted by regularly rhythmical language or metre is more suitable for poetry, in the absence of which "We may have the spirit of poetry without its externals and externals of poetry without its spirit" (67).

As for the metres, they are of many kinds adopted by poets not always as a matter of choice but somewhat as a natural urge insofar as metre finds its origin in a state of excitement peculiar to poetry and compatible with volition (Gokak, 1975:4). The significance of rhythm in poetry is eloquently expressed saying that "the ordered measure of verse would still hold its ground as an important accessory of poetry because it adds greatly to the aesthetic pleasure which is the chief function of poetry to afford" (Hudson, 1960:71). In this context to highlight the importance of metre in poetry, it would be worthwhile to recall the observations of James Montgomery who says that if the finest passages of Milton and Shakespeare are rendered into prose, they would be reduced into water from jewels and pearls.

As discussed above, the process of poetic creation is very subtle and complex, which can be understood by placing the same into two major stages viz. the unmanifest or implicit stage and manifest or explicit stage. At the first stage, the ideas lie deep into the heart and mind of the poet and remain somewhat as his personal acquisition. In this stage the poet encounters the object, observes minutely and is captivated by its beauty. Here beauty does not mean only worldly beauty but also the real beauty that is the truth and the Ultimate Reality. Making a distinction between an ordinary man and a poet, it is said that an ordinary man is not capable of identifying the truth lying hidden in the object. But a poet is able to see the truth piercing the veil of ignorance. The power that enables the poet to see the truth is known as poetic vision. The poetic vision itself is formed by supporting attributes like instinct, intuition, imitation and imagination.

After getting captivated by the beauty of the object in the above process, the poet plunges into a state of excitement. He finds himself filled with joy in full measure. Then in due course the joyous emotions are subsided leaving deep impressions in the heart of the poet. Wordsworth describes it as the first stage of excitement. It does not lead to creativity, but since the impressions of the object lie rooted

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deep in the heart of the poet, in some such moments when the poet finds the subsided emotions overpowering him, he is overtaken by the same feelings which he has experienced on the first occasion. But this time the force of the emotion is so powerful and strong that it refuses to get subsided. Now the poet fails to contain his emotions and is compelled to give the same a concrete shape in the form of poetry. Wordsworth, therefore, says that poetry is the overflow of intense feelings. While saying so, Wordsworth obviously refers to this second occasion of excitement when the poet, finding him not capable of holding his emotions any longer, embarks upon the work of composition i.e. giving shape to his emotions by way of poetic creation. This is the stage which can be regarded as the manifest stage or the stage of expression.

It is at this point that the poet endeavours to choose effective medium characterized by imagery, syntax and diction as also the rhythmic form to make the composition best communicable. But this does not mean that all the poets and critics have similar views on the process of poetic creation as they, according to their own whims and notions, prefer to stress on some or the other elements. For example, if someone finds the role of imagination and individual talent powerful and dominating, the other may, out of humility, give credit to the influence of tradition or to the divine inspiration.

In a nutshell, the process of poetic creation is a complex exercise wherein various elements and attributes interact in a purposeful manner eventually leading to the emergence of poetry. As for the unmanifest stage in the process of poetry, wherein beginning from the first encounter of the object till the suppression of the first spate of emotions the entire experience is confined in the memory chamber, the perception of all the poets does not widely differ. It is, however, the manifest stage, where the difference between the individual poets comes to surface and they are clearly identified by their peculiar style, metre, language etc. This is, however, not proper to hold that the process of thought and emotion in every poet is exactly the same because in this unmanifest stage too the different elements act upon different poets differently. It is in this backdrop that in the following chapter an attempt will be made to understand the views of Wordsworth on poetry and poetic process particularly with reference to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

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