



Literature – “A Painting of an Inward Eye”

Dr. Manisha Joshi

Professor in English

Govt. M.L.B. Girls P.G., College, Fort, Indore (M.P.)



After fine arts, literature has been another oldest form of the most creative and powerful means of expression. A writer is the most gifted artist, he is not only a juggler of words, but also a painter who with the same dexterity, portrays life in its most realistic and varied forms. Hence, literature whether poetry, drama, prose or fiction can be considered as the finest of arts. Newman has rightly defined literature as, ‘thought expressed in language’ but certainly this thought needs to be subjective for, all other fine-arts like literature are personal in expression, even though they differ in their media. Hence whether a novelist, poet, painter or sculptor, when create their art it is basically their personal vision which they present or communicate through their chosen medium. The close inter-relation between literature and fine-arts can never be denied, that is why it is said that, ‘a poem is a talking picture, while a painting is mute poetry’. A poet in his creative moments is an inspired being, participating in the eternal and infinite and the one. He tries to arrest the divine moments and tries to redeem them from decay. These inspired moments are transitory for from them arises quick succession of thoughts and feelings. Imagination fades yet it illuminates and paints the composition which bears a reflection to the imagination.

Poetry like painting or any other fine-arts makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world and turn all things to loveliness. The poets of the Romantic age like Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and many more not only looked at flowers, mountains, meadows, human beings or God’s creation in all its abundance, simply with wondor or marvelled at their intricacy and depth but even succeeded in portraying them vividly in the form of words for their readers, As Wordsworth makes his readers a witness to the lovely daffodil flowers in their exuberance and profusion when he says,

“When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.”¹

Similarly, John Keats had been a master in portraying and painting images. Hence in ‘Ode to Psyche’ he displays his marvellous power of observation and he with such mastery records:

“Mid hush’d cool-rooted flowers, fragrant eyed
Blue, silver-white, and budded tyrian,
They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass :
Their arms embraced, and their pinions too :
Their lips touch’d not but had not bade adieu.....”²

He observes nature with a painter’s eye and then weaves them into words when in ‘Ode to Autumn’ he describes the spring season :

“While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day
And touch the stubble-plains with ray hue.”³



The skill with which he handles and paints the picture in its variegated, multifarious hues is absolutely remarkable P.B. Shelley too, in his ‘The Sensitive Plant’ first describes in detail, a summer garden in all its profuse glory, he creates a visionary and dream-like atmosphere through rich, concrete details, when he says –

“And the hyacinth purple, and white and blue
Which flung from its bells a sweet peal a new”⁴

Or who can forget Keats amazing personification of Autumn when he describes :

“Sometimes Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind :
Or on a half-reap’d furrow sound asleep,
Drows’d with the fume of poppies.....”⁵

Alfred Tennyson seemed to handle paint, brush and aisle with such an expertise and deft handling of words that the scenes in their entirety seem to float before the reader’s mind, transporting him to the very sight, described by the poet. ‘The Lotos-Eaters’ is full of such awe-striking imagery and each description is so meticulously handled, that it can be a rich source of motivation for any skilled painter, to sketch it, in all its exuberance on his canvas, when in ‘Lotos Eaters’ he describes the land of ‘Lotos Eaters’ –

“A Land of streams ! some like a down ward smoke,
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
And some throw wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumberous sheet of foam below.”

or

“Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro’ the moss the ivies creep,
And in the dream the long-leaved flowers weep
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.”⁶

If the poets painted the softer and beautiful aspect of nature, many poets portray the fearful and realistic aspect of nature too. William Blake in one of his poems ‘The Tiger’ wonders at the creator, who created the ferocious tiger and gives a very vivid description of the tiger and its burning eyes. The tiger is seen in real forests:

‘Tiger ! Tiger ! burning bright
In the forests of the night
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry.”⁷

Now to further analyse this, we take the example of the Pre-Raphaelite movement which basically started in connection with painting but it is recorded in literary history, for it exercised its subtle influence on literature. The movement was inaugurated by Helman Hunt and its champions were Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Watts Dunton and William Morris. The pre-Raphaelite paintings were to be detailed, rich, glowing and fraught with a symbolic significance. Rossetti and Denton were painters while William Morris applied pre-Raphaelite to interior decoration. In literature too, the principles of pre-Raphaelite painters came to be followed. Rossetti wrote rich and colourful poems that are like embroidered tapestries. Rossetti’s sonnets are lovely pictures enriched by many



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL of RESEARCH –GRANTHAALAYAH

A knowledge Repository



glowing images in fine words and he makes use of symbolism. One of the finest poems is ‘The Blessed Domozel’ the very word Damozel’ is italian and has medieval associations. As the poem says :

“The blessed domozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven ;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth of waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her land,
And the stars in her were seven.”⁸

The first four stanzas of the poem are inscribed on the frame of the painting. His sister Christina Rossetti wrote simple poems but in them uses a great many symbols. In one of her poems, a winding road stands for life, the hill over which it passes, denotes the difficulties in human existence and the INN on the top of the hill stands for the heavenly abode where all the souls – have their rest. Rossetti influences a great many poets of his time and they began to write their poems with lovely images and exotic symbols. Like Coventry Patmore’s best poem ‘Toys’, Willion Morris’s, ‘Earthly Paradise’ tell us in verse, many medieval stories in the true pre-Raphaelite spirit. A.C. Swinburne is also a pre-Raphaelite poet and two of his well known poems are ‘Infulus’ and ‘Atlanta in Calydon’ However by 1890, the pre-Raphaelite movement had subsided, but it paved the way to the 20th Century symbolism and imagism.

Thus poets, immaterial of age have exquisite devotion to felicity of language, and their passion for viewing nature with the eye of the scientist, and hence succeed in painting anything under the sky whether savage grandeur, ferocity or quiet landscapes or human characters with absolute symmetry, proportion and orchestration making a strong appeal to our feelings which neither architecture, painting or sculpture can make. Literature is ‘facile princeps’ in all the fine arts because in it are interfused the elements of painting, music, sculpture and architecture, and as Wordsworth said in his poem ‘Daffodils’

“For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.....”⁹

References –

1. Google search : PoemHunter.com
2. John Keats’s Poems, Ed. Gerald Bullett, Dent: London, Everyman’s Library, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. Re-edited and reset 1944, Last printed 1969, pg. 192
3. I bid. pg. 200
4. Google search : www. PoemHunter.com
5. John Keats’s Poems, Ed. Gerald Bullett, Dent: London, Everyman’s Library, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. Re-edited and reset 1944, Last printed 1969, pg. 199-200
6. H. Ghosh : Alfred Tennyson – Selected Poems, Lakshmi Narain Agrawal, Educational Publishers, Agra, Pg. 48
7. Google search : m.poemhunter.com
8. Google search : en.m.wikipedia.org
9. Google search : PoemHunter.com