



POETRY – A NATURAL SYMPHONY OF MUSIC

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Music in its essence dispenses with words completely, and tunes, help in imparting its true and deep feelings. An artist's vision gains his expression through sound – which is his medium of expression. Then there is pitch, tone, its rise and fall which are some of the other important elements that a musician successfully uses to create the magic. But when we try to compare literature with music we have to say that literature, particularly in its poetic form, is certainly endowed with not only tonic quality of its own but has signification of words as well.

The poet while composing a poem very skillfully blends the two harmonies – i.e. – the harmony of words with that of the meaning of words. For even those who are tone-deaf, the thought or feeling that is conveyed in words are certain to excite them. The most vital element of poetry is its sound that is rhythm. The basic difference between music and literature is that, music may stir a vague emotional disturbance but poetry does not merely provide sense but sensibility to the emotional response. Although poetry itself is a melodious expression of thoughts and emotions, but the most melodious forms in English poetry are the lyrics, the odes, the sonnets and the ballads. These capture images vividly and in an original, refreshing way simultaneously interweave with the most vital element of sound that is rhythm coupled with a particular meter. The most famous of the lyricists are Sir Philip Sydney, Edmund Spenser, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats. William Shakespeare popularized the sonnet form. Lyric, originally of ancient Greek origin, was basically a small song of single emotion or thought sung in the accompaniment of a stringed musical instrument called lyre, cithara or barbitos. Later with the passage of time, lyric though was not dependent on or was sung in the accompaniment of musical instrument but continued to adhere to a regular meter, based either on number of syllables or on stress. Some other lyricists were John Donne, Robert Burns, Gray and Goldsmith. For example - Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' has lines that move in solemn and measured music, but in addition to the harmony of sound, there is in the poem, clear explication of thoughts in words. As the poem reads –

“Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flow’r is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air”¹

Or the rhythm and natural melody that echoes when Wordsworth in his 'Daffodils' sings:

‘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.’²



Similarly when Keats in his ‘Ode to Nightingale’ makes a contrast between the immortal nightingale and mortal man, music flows –

“Thou wast 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.”³

It is simply awe-striking to note the fluidity and melody that softly gushes out when P.B. Shelley in his ‘Ode to the Skylark’ says –

“Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awakened flowers –
All that ever was
Joyous & clear and fresh – thy music doth surpass”⁴

Who would ever question the joy, clarity & freshness that these lyricists impart to their poetry through the dexterity, expertise & skill of their pens. The song in a sonnet, which is a poem of 14 lines, Robert Burns in his poem ‘O my love is like a red, red rose’ -- the melody ripples –

“O my Luve’s like a red, red rose,
That’s nearly sprung in June,
O my Luve’s like a melodie,
That’s sweetly play’d in tune”⁵

The beautiful harmony of words with that of the meaning adds charm to the poem, & enables the reader to hear the sweetness of love as a melody which is played in tune. We may find a great number of such musical creations in literature specifically in lyrics, sonnets and odes.

Another form in literature which is a narrative set in music is, ballad. “The ballad is at the intersection of poetry song, from traditional folk ballads crystallizing out of the mists of the ancient oral tradition to modern literary ballads in which poet uses the old narrative form to retell traditional legends or to tell stories of their own.”⁶ here’s an example of the lyrical note which sounds so natural and musical when S.T. Coleridge in his ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ describes the mysterious atmosphere –

“The Sun rose upon the right:
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left
Went down into the sea.”⁷

Similarly the melody of romance trickles when John Keats in his ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’ says –

“She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew:



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL of RESEARCH –GRANTHAALAYAH

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And sure in language strange she said,
I Love thee true.”⁸

English Poetry overflows with such melodious creations. The poets who create the magic pour forth the soothing music to the ear through their pens and the various tools or techniques which help them in imparting music to the poetry are punctuation, end – stopped, enjambment, repetition, alliteration, (repetition of consonant sounds), assonance (repetition of vowel sounds though start with different consonant sounds) and refrain-which is a phrase or group of lines that is repeated at significant moments within a poem usually at the end of the stanza, another very effective device that is used by poets is onomatopoeia device which imitates the natural sounds of a thing or we can say it creates a sound effect that mimics the thing described; as in ‘the buzzing bee flew away’. The poets deftly use these literary devices and create such master-pieces that the readers along with the poets are enraptured by the bird’s song and its flutter of wings, his heart is filled with pleasure and dances with the daffodils. The passion of sorrow is created with equal intensity as well. Hence a poet has the capacity to arouse the required emotional response from the listeners, and literature can communicate almost everything and anything to those who are receptive and sensitive, and with the harmony of words and music create an immortal symphony.

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