

From Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Felling to Recollection in Tranquility – The Poetry in Poem

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Abstract

If I *read* a book and it makes my whole body so cold that no fire can warn, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry.

– Emily Dickinson

Whatever generates from creativity but devoid of *poetry* CANNOT stand the trial of time. Poetry is that internal voice in every creative experience that speaks more intensely to provoke one’s imaginative and intense perceptions of oneself, the world, and the interrelationship of the two. It is that element central to human existence; something having unique value to the fully realized life; something that one is better off for having, spiritually impoverished and administratively decadent without. However, these generic values appear to be degenerating in this part of the world. Poetry now belongs to a subculture. It is no longer part of the mainstream of artistic and intellectual life. It has deteriorated to the specific effort of a relatively diminutive and isolated group as poets ‘fade’ into the corridor of the idle or the jobless. So long as these divergence and discontent make themselves but silently felt within a limited (literary) class, the powers of reaction may frequently succeed in suppressing these manifestations. But now that the silent turbulence grows into conscious expression and becomes almost collective as a torrent of poetic voices calling for “our assessment and reassessment” of the poetic experiences, it necessarily affects all phases of human thought and action, and seeks its individual and social expression in the gradual transvaluation of global existing values. This paper has developed from this fundamental questioning seeking to challenge the poetic taxonomy of some compositions with the objective of returning poetry to its original form: deep and grave (often in very simple) words for its unique effect of entertainment and mental and emotional development. Consequently, it is designed to capture and dismember the core of the topic as a factor for rebellious awakening in poetic experimentations embodying the spirit of universal ferment and the longing for poetic function – a cradle of radical thought rousing the indignation of man’s conscience for social change.

Introduction

What is a modern Poet’s fate?
To write his thoughts upon a slate –
The Critic spits on what is done,
Gives it a wipe – and all is gone.

– Thomas Hood, “To the Reviewer”

It is not all those who write poems that can be called poets as erroneously assumed by many. Poems do not make poets; only poets make poems. And it is not all poems that we can classify as poetry. My experiences with species of creative pieces have conveniently convinced me that poetry is deferent from poem. Poetry is that beauty that is inherent in everything acknowledged by the soul and approved of the soul; it is the loveliness and splendor that endears the soul or the spiritual being or the spirit man of every individual. Poetry is the spirit, the soul or the life of every creative work. In other words, anything that does not have poetry (including man) does not have life, and so may struggle to survive existence. Emily Dickinson says “If I *read* a book and it makes my whole body so cold that no fire can warn, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry.” From what Dickinson says now, it can be deduced that poetry is not the same thing as versification or poem. In fact, a poem needs poetry to be alive, to be functional. Poetry is that inner voice that speaks pleasure, pain, admiration, truth in lies, lies in truth to the soul-man of him/her who deciphers it projected with intensity in fashion-designing, sports, parenting, leadership, mathematics, medical science, sex, smile, happiness, court cases, sadness, weeping or wickedness. Poetry is the substance in every drug that works to heal or kill. It is the effect anything has on a highly probing psyche. That is why Barack Obama concludes that:

Everybody experiences it differently. There are no rules for what makes a great poem. Understanding it isn’t just about metaphor or meter. Instead, a great poem is one that resonates with us, that challenges us and that teaches us something about ourselves and the world that we live in. As Rita Dove says, ‘If [poetry] doesn’t affect you on some level that cannot be explained in words, then the poem hasn’t done its job’ (President Obama, 2011).

Poetry is semantically multifaceted. And, whatever is semantically multifaceted, demands deep and a variety of descriptions to achieve clearer cataloging. Poetry has its understanding in connotative meaning(s) provoked by a range of experiences of the past, the present and the future.

Examining the global poetic experiences from diverse angles: evolution, theoretical concerns, artistry, aesthetics to thematic issues, one truth appears self-evident that some poets and critics alike, as evident in their

works, do not admit a fundamental truth that “there is [should be] poetry in everything” (Osundare, 2001). Of course, there should be poetry too in poems because poetry is the soul of every creative work. But in their ignorance of this fundamental truth, many writers and critics fail to delineate between ‘poems’ and ‘poetry’, and as such, they make both concepts more obscure and elusive. This paper is therefore an attempt to review the reviewer through the redefinition of the defined and the definition by investigating these major questions:

- (i) Are all Poems necessarily Poetry;
- (ii) Should poetry necessarily be composed in *big* (difficult) words with cryptic hardness;
- (iii) Do Nigerian poets know that it takes poetry to produce poetry (even in poems); and
- (iv) What major differences (or similarity) are noticed between a poem and poetry?

As a way of attending to these questions, let us attempt some definitions, delineation and evaluations of both concepts by asking these vital questions: What is poem? What is poetry?

What is Poem?

It may appear an unusual and uncommon task attempting to give deferent definitions of poems and poetry or trying to distinguish between poem and poetry. This, of course, is a task many have either deliberately or otherwise ignored or avoided claiming that they do not perceive any difference between both concepts. What most critics do is answer the question of poetry with what poem is, and answer poem with what poetry is. Some even find it pretty comfortable to answer the question of “What is poetry?” with the definitions of “poetry” but refer you to “poetry” when asked “What is poem?” The reason is not far-fetched. As earlier stated, a good or great poem is made up of poetry. In other words, the beauty of a good poem is poetry. Thus, a poem that is not good or great is devoid of poetry. This, I must mention here, also depends on a good or great reader with poetic intuition and insight who has developed a high degree of capacity to deeply feel the poetry in a poem, and does not attempt to evaluate a poem before the poem is understood. However, some books and authors have attempted good definitions of poem. The dictionary or the encyclopedia, for instance, has attempted defining poetry.

Cambridge International Dictionary (1999) sees poem as “a piece of writing in which *the words are chosen* for their sound and the images and ideas they suggest, not just their obvious meaning. The words are arranged in separate lines, often ending in rhyme”. According to *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (2002), a poem is “a literary composition, typically, but not necessarily, in verse, often with elevated and/or *imaginatively expressed content*” or “a creation of *inspiring beauty*” (Emphases are mine). This second definition suggests that, as mentioned earlier, poems need “imaginatively expressed” substance – an “inspiring beauty” to be good or great. The “imaginatively expressed content” or the “inspiring beauty” it contains is the poetry in the poem.

Traditionalists argue that a poem is an expression of a vision that is rendered in a form intelligible and pleasurable to others and so likely to arouse kindred feelings. For Modernists, a poem is an autonomous object that may or may not represent the real world but is created in “language made distinctive by its complex web of references”. Postmodernists look on poems as collages of current idioms that are intriguing but self-contained — they employ, challenge and/or mock preconceptions, “but refer to nothing beyond themselves”.

The understanding of these definitions is that the poem is like the shell of a snail, while the snail itself is like the poetry in the poem. To compose it, the “poet” may be initially influenced by forces beyond his/her control – the Muse – or by his immediate environment. Whatever he writes is not of his own normal state but the Muse that dictates. Of course, in the course of composing poem there are inspirational stages the writer passes through. The first is the stage of initial contact with the subject of his/her concern. At this stage, the poet knows what to write on but not what to write and how in terms of the choice of “words” to make the “imaginatively expressed content” that will inspire “beauty”. Of course, he/she does not just want to compose a piece in “verse” with “words... arranged in separate lines, often ending in rhyme”. Yes, if he/she does, he/she would have succeeded in composing a poem which may not stand the test of time. Therefore, he/she needs a poem that will outlive him/her. As a result, he/she, under the influence of the Muses, goes to the next stage – the stage of transcribing the abstract ideas into a concrete or graphic status. And this is the second stage.

At this stage, whatever he/she writes is dictated by the Muse which “seizes” him/her anywhere, anytime and anyhow. This stage of graphic representation of the inspired subject is what Plato describes as moment of “madness”. Accordingly:

There is the madness of those possessed by the Muses. It seizes upon a sensitive and pure soul, which it rouses and fills a strong desire for odes and other poetry, and thus by making splendid ten thousand deeds of the ancients instructs later generations. But if anyone approaches the poetic doors without this madness of the Muses, thinking that he will be a good-enough poet through art alone, he is ineffectual, and the poetry of the self-controlled man loses all its splendor when compared with that of the madmen (*Phaedrus*, 245).

This gives details why Robert Browning, when he was asked to explain his difficult *Sordello*, replied that when he had written the poem only God and he knew what it meant; but “Now, only God knows”, (Browning, cf. Kennedy, 1983: 400). Samuel Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan* is another confirmation of the divinity-inspired attributes of poetry. Stories have it that it was “composed” under “extraordinary circumstances”. Coleridge himself gave

account of the composition of the poem that he was in a poetic experience which went on for about three hours in a profound sleep where he had a vision (of *Kubla Khan*). Immediately he woke up, he began to write what he saw in his dream. After a while, he was called away for an hour on business. When he returned to his room to write the rest of his “dream-poem” he found that “with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast...” (*Adventure in English Literature*, 1980: 465) Socrates, speaking through Plato says poets do not compose their poems by their wisdom but by genius and because they are inspired like prophets and givers of oracles, for these utter many fine speeches but know nothing of what they say. “It seemed to me that the poets underwent much the same experience” (*Apology*, 22), suggesting that the poet has no powers of invention until divinely inspired:

So I understood that the poets do not compose their poems because of their wisdom but by genius and because they are inspired like prophets and givers of oracles, for these utter many fine speeches but know nothing of what they say. It seemed to me that the poet underwent much the same experience (*Apology*, 22).

At this level, whenever he/she seats on the tripod of the Muse to write what he/she is inspired to write, he/she is not in his/her right mind, but a sort of fountain that allows its waters rising to flow freely, and since he/she is under the influence of the Muse, the words attract themselves. Plato likens this experience to “the stone” that Euripides calls “the magnet” but that most men call “the stone of Heraclea” (*Apology*, 22). According to him, this stone not merely attracts iron rings but extends its power to the rings so they can attract other objects “just as the stone does”. This experience is also likened to “Corybantes” and the “Bachae” who, when they are possessed, draw honey and milk from the rivers but cannot do so when in their right minds. The soul of the poet experiences the same sort of occurrence. Until he/she gets to this stage and state, any would-be poet is “powerless to produce” poem. However, whatever the poet is divinely inspired to compose comes in words or predicates whose immediate meanings or connotations are simply extraterrestrial. To array it with earthly beauty, the poet refines it. Just as crude oil needs refinement to function “beautifully” the divinely inspired composition of the poets needs refinement. This is the third stage where credit is given to his/her “genius”, the coherent, unified-self who could commune with higher powers and interpret or transcribe them for ordinary mortals. Here we have the poet as “channeller who inspires awe – having, ‘drunk the milk of Paradise’ ” (Coleridge, 1951: 45 cf. Graeme Harper (ed.) 2008: 20).

This conception of the poet, carried into twentieth century, has allowed many budding writers to argue against revision, and to excuse sloppiness and self-indulgence. Most authors who have retained a place in literary history, however, have sweated over their work – “libraries hold the drafts, notebooks and letters documenting the struggle”. It does not matter whether they reported that a brilliant idea first appeared crackling across the sky in a summer lightning storm or an irresistible rhythm came from pounding the streets of a ghetto. That inspiration was only the beginning, not the end-product. This justifies or substantiates Wordsworth’s definition of (poem and) poetry as “...The spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings *recollected in tranquility*” (the emphasis is mine). Before the recollection in “tranquility”, there is always a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling” described as “madness” by Plato. Poetry is everywhere searching for writers, (poets); seeking to be written, (poems). And anyone who releases his/her emotion to it gets possessed to write but beginning with a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling”, followed by the recollection in “tranquility”. During this recollection in “tranquility”, the poet, in consideration of the existing culture and norm of his/her society and, of course, the mentality of his/her people, refines what divinity dictates by selecting and choosing words and predicates from the vocabulary of his/her society whose meanings have effect in the immediate speech community or environment. Sometimes he/she deletes some of the original words that are inspired by the Muse and replaces them with what may achieve the intent of the subject of his/her piece. Some of these words and expressions form the life that produces the poetry in the poem. That is why poetry is seen here as the beauty or truth that the mind or the soul perceives in any poem as inspired by some words and expressions.

By inference, poems are not beautiful. That is why they are hated (particularly by publishers in this part of the world). Only poetry makes poems beautiful. This idea is better captured by Percy Bysshe Shelly when he says “Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed...” This beauty and/or truth are always located in the society, culture and time that produce the poem. Achebe says nothing can be created out of time and place. Particular culture, society and period underpin each text. Jeri Kroll, in the book: *Creative Writing Guidebook*, (2008) says “Poets never really work in isolation, therefore, they are embedded in a culture, which not only affects what they produce but also raises ethical questions”, (p.20). This social and cultural dimension to authorship should concern everyone wanting to write. The beauty or truth in the poem is the beauty or truth in the society. Many authors, however, ignore this truth and beauty particularly because they do not appreciate them. And some who do and include them in their poems but yet their poems do not have life must have committed refinery errors such as misplacement, wrong use, over spicing. The life or lifeline (i.e. poetry) in a poem may be one word that could be the icebreaker of the entire poem. Dylan Thomas describes this as the “movement from overclothed blindness to a naked vision”, and Shelley adds that “it strips the veil of familiarity from the world and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit

of its form”.

These are the major stages every good writer passes through to produce a good or great poem full of life or lifelines. Any writer that does not pass through these stages in his poetic experiences may produce poems but definitely not poetry. It is understood that many may claim to pass through them, but their works betray them. For instance, a good reader will know the difference between a good and a bad poem put before him/her or rather agree that one has poetry and so can be classified as poetry while the other does not have and so cannot be classified as poetry but poem. At this juncture, let us attempt to answer the second question.

What is Poetry?

Poetry definitions are difficult, as is aesthetics generally. What is distinctive and important tends to evade the qualified language in which we attempt to cover all considerations. Perhaps we could say that *poetry was a responsible attempt to understand the world in human terms through literary composition*. The terms beg many questions, of course, but poetry today is commonly an amalgam of three distinct viewpoints.

Niyi Osundare writes that, “Poetry is life; life is poetry”. He continues to say that:

[It] helps us to discover who we are, where we are, where we came from, where we are going. It sharpens our intelligence by helping us see beyond the ordinary meaning of words, and deepens our power of feeling by creating words and images which touch our hearts. It portrays life’s many beauties without hiding its ugly parts. Poetry is everywhere. It is in Sun which brightens our days and the Moon which lights up our nights; it is in the cry of the new born baby and the sad song about the dead; it is in the tall trees of a rainforest as well as the grass of the savannah. Poetry is in the dust on the road and the music made by rain drops as they touch the roof. Poetry is in the way we design our clothes and the way we wear them; the names we bear; the greetings we exchange everyday; the sights and sounds of a busy market place; the silence of a grave yard. Poetry is the rainbow, that eyebrow on the face of the sky. It is the water that flows in the stream of life (Osundare, 2006: ix).

To justify this claim, he writes poems on “Little Things”, “Mosquito”, “My Eyes”, “Lizard” “Little Drops”, “Names”, “Lekeleke”, “Chinua Achebe”, “Mabel Segun” and “Riddles”. His “Pounded Yam”, written in rhyming couplets for musical effect imitating the sound of the mortar and pestle, is full of life celebrating “the most popular food in Nigeria” (Ayo Banjo cf. Osundare, 2004: 48-9). It starts with the sound of mortar and pestle, “Poro poro poro” – the sweet sound of pestle in mortar. “Pit pit pot and pit and patta”, a “delicious” song from his “neighbour’s yard, rhythm of the guts, “the ultimate bard”.

Oh pounded yam, princess in the dish
Who dances down the throat with a chorus of fish
You wear a garment of *tete**, a cap of onion
With the gliding okro you’re in perfect union
Ah *sokoyokoto**, your tender mate
On whose green spell you hang your fate
Bride of the mortar, the belly’s groom
Who sweeps off hunger with the fattest broom
Poro poro poro (p. 48)

The effect is best felt in experience. Poetry, indeed, is in our experiences. It is in the lies we tell; it is in the truth we say. It is an abstract entity that poets with poems turn to concrete item; it is a vapour distilled into matter. And the poet is like a dog whose sights of every presence that passes catches his/her attention, or a dog that sniffs around for any contraband. Poetry is a presence or a contraband that every poet backs at and sniffs.

The poet like other writers of other genres in any society cannot pretend to be ignorant of the evils or goods in his society. The attention every verse writer pays to his society for connotative effect is what is usually referred to as poetry not the ones he has refused to address. His experience is very often a mirror of an aspect of the life and social-conditions of the society which give birth to the poetry. This is why what emanates from him/her called poetry is nothing but an inspiration from the Muse and a discharge from the life and social conditions of his/her society, mirroring the same society for sanctity. According to M.J. Murphy in his *Understanding Unseens...* (1978):

A poet is a person who is usually more sensitive than most of the sights, sounds, and sensations of the world around him; to the behaviour of people, their follies, sufferings, their nobility; to the thought that humans ask about themselves and their world: Where do we come from? What are we doing here? Where are we going? More than this, the poet is a person who is capable of expressing these things in language. The poet has some experience which he wants to express in words and he does this in the form of a poem (p. 21).

In Dasyuva’s *Song of Adamolugbe* (2006), there is an enduring effort to utilize Yoruba idioms within the construction of the poems. Conspicuity is also the presence of a cogent effort toward achieving beauty in form of rhythm and rhyme for poetic resonance attempting to achieve the poetic sense that is evident in African traditional poetry whose rhythmic beat often yields musical qualities. A reader critiques that the words are persistently social protest and resistance poems. “As a result, even in a poem like ‘To Obai’ dedicated to motherland – Africa, the

themes of the failures of the state and political events emerge to nurture a protest against the existing political and social structures. Inferences regarding political failures flow as breast milk of a nursing mother. The local anchors the external: at an in-depth psycho-social level, external historical events deeply affect and shape the poetic aspirations of the writer. In this way, there appears a sentimental dimensionality referencing attachment to issues of nationality that reflects deep-seated nationalism, scripted within a poetic tapestry that marks resistance against noxious domination politically and socially. Such fixations help to plot and define the poetic task as presented in the poem, “My hoe nips at mother earth”:

My new song, *kange kange*, from the tail-less gong
Breaks the ear-drums of our sleeping dusk,
Weary nightwalkers grope in mortal fear...
The hoe nips at mother Earth,
Like a blowing wind, my mercuric song reveals
The naked anus of the fowl feigning god.

“Praise” another poet says, be to the mind of the poets, and glory to his pen. Shout “his intellect, for we have been saved, born again into the cosmos and cosmetics of that which must define us” (Falola cf. Dasylva, 2006: 10).

The Place of the Reader

Through the combined use of inspired words and those selected and chosen from the rich expressions, powerful metaphors, proverbs and imagery of the narrative processes of his culture, poetry is able to recreate living images in the mind of the reader, weep up and sustain their patriotic passion while reconnecting them with the classical days of moral and ethical certitude. Foregrounded in the linguistic strategy of the poetry is the reader’s ability to construct mental models of situations when processing text information, especially of fictional situations and characters. Thus, the poetry clothes the sociopolitical experiences of a linguistic community making use of shared representations that evoke specific image with historical underpinnings. Perhaps we should agree here that for a poem to be alive also requires the reader to be alive. It appears many readers do not have poetic life in them that is why poetry is not given significant attention (particularly in this part of the world). And since it takes the deep to know the deep, it takes a poet to discover the poetry in anything including poems. This is one reason poetry searches for poets. A good reader must be able to locate the poetry in a poem. Let me at this point confess to the ease I feel having established that poetry in any poem is located by the reader: it is either the reader is good and so can or cannot locate poetry in a poem read or he/she is bad and so cannot locate the poetry in the poem. If a good reader cannot locate poetry in a poem, it simply means that the poem is not good, and so may not survive reviewers challenges. Thomas Hood in his “To the Reviewer” writes:

What is a modern Poet’s fate?
To write his thoughts upon a slate –
The Critic spits on what is done,
Gives it a wipe – and all is gone.

Nothing distinguishes poetry from other literary compositions. They are all texts, to be understood by the same techniques as a philosophic treatise or tabloid newspaper. But that makes sense only to readers of advanced magazines, for poetry does indeed seem different. Even if we accept that poetry can be verse or prose — verse simply having a strong metrical element — poetry is surely distinguished by moving us deeply. In fact, for all but Postmodernists, it is an art form, and must therefore do what all art does — represent something of the world, express or evoke emotion, please us by its form, and stand on its own as something autonomous and self-defining.

Our respect here is that, this paper does not seek, and is not in position, to determine which poem is good or great and so filled with life/poetry, or bad and thus, devoid of poetry/life. Its position is that readers should rise to these challenges – determining which is filled with poetry or life, and which is not. It must also be established that the conclusion of a critical reader does not determine the final status of a poem as we may also need to ask what makes a good or critical reader good.

There are many factors that are associated with the way a reader or a critic evaluates a poem most of which are determined by his/her experiences and sensibilities. A critic or a reader who is pessimistic by nature may find him/herself naturally and yet unconsciously disposed to see elements of pessimism in the work and hence to interpret the works from a pessimistic view of the world. Similarly, if the reader has a religious temperament, he/she tends to look at a given work of composition from an essentially religious point of view and hence to isolate its religious elements for attention, and exaggerating these and holding them up as the true meaning of the work. Sometimes, a religious person might even go to the extent of declaring that a given work is disorganized and meaningless only because the work to him/her does not inculcate any religious truth or experience. The author of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy, for instance, in his essay: “Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool”, declared that Shakespeare was a dull-witted, unimaginative writer because he (Tolstoy) could not see that Shakespeare’s plays could have been concerned with other moral problems which he, Tolstoy, was not aware of.

Tolstoy's pamphlets are the least-known part of his work, and his attack on Shakespeare is not even an easy document to get hold of, at any rate in an English translation. Written about 1903 as an introduction to another pamphlet, *Shakespeare And The Working Classes*, by Ernest Crosby (author's footnote) Tolstoy begins by saying that throughout life Shakespeare has aroused in him "an irresistible repulsion and tedium". Conscious that the opinion of the civilized world is against him, he has made one attempt after another on Shakespeare's works, reading and re-reading them in Russian, English and German; but "I invariably underwent the same feelings; repulsion, weariness and bewilderment". Now, at the age of seventy-five, he has once again re-read the entire works of Shakespeare, including the historical plays, and the same feelings--this time, however, not of bewilderment, but of firm, indubitable conviction that the unquestionable glory of a great genius which Shakespeare enjoys, and which compels writers of his time to imitate him and readers and spectators to discover in him non-existent merits – thereby distorting their aesthetic and ethical understanding – is a great evil, as is every untruth.

Shakespeare, Tolstoy adds, is not merely no genius, but is not even "an average author", and in order to demonstrate this fact he will examine *King Lear*, which, as he is able to show by quotations from Hazlitt, Brandes and others, has been extravagantly praised and can be taken as an example of Shakespeare's best work. Tolstoy then makes a sort of exposition of the plot of *King Lear*, finding it at every step to be stupid, verbose, unnatural, unintelligible, bombastic, vulgar, tedious and full of incredible events, "wild ravings", "mirthless jokes", anachronisms, irrelevancies, obscenities, worn-out stage conventions and other faults both moral and aesthetic. Lear is, in any case, a plagiarism of an earlier and much better play, *King Leir*, by an unknown author, which Shakespeare stole and then ruined. It is worth quoting a specimen paragraph to illustrate the manner in which Tolstoy goes to work. Act III, Scene 2 (in which Lear, Kent and the Fool are together in the storm) is summarized thus:

Lear walks about the heath and says words which are meant to express his despair: he desires that the winds should blow so hard that they (the winds) should crack their cheeks and that the rain should flood everything, that lightning should singe his white beard, and the thunder flatten the world and destroy all germs 'that make ungrateful man'! The fool keeps uttering still more senseless words. Enter Kent: Lear says that for some reason during this storm all criminals shall be found out and convicted. Kent, still unrecognized by Lear, endeavours to persuade him to take refuge in a hovel. At this point the fool utters a prophecy in no wise related to the situation and they all depart (Tolstoy, cf. www.questia.com, 2010)

Tolstoy's final verdict on LEAR is that no un hypnotized observer, if such an observer existed, could read it to the end with any feeling except "aversion and weariness". And exactly the same is true of "all the other extolled dramas of Shakespeare, not to mention the senseless dramatized tales, *Pericles*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline*, *Troilus and Cressida*." (Tolstoy, cf. www.questia.com, 2010)

Tolstoy draws up a more general indictment against Shakespeare. He finds that Shakespeare has a certain technical skill which is partly traceable to his having been an actor, but otherwise no merits whatever. He has no power of delineating character or of making words, and actions spring naturally out of situations, "Us language" is uniformly exaggerated and ridiculous, he constantly thrusts his own random thoughts into the mouth of any character who happens to be handy, he displays a "complete absence of aesthetic feeling", and his words "have nothing whatever in common with art and poetry".

This does not mean that some works cannot be universally judged as good. But to have such universal agreement, interpretations or analyses must be unbiased and objective irrespective of sentiments. A true interpretation based on valid judgment is one which has been developed in relation to conditions of truth and significance, truth and faithfulness to what is actually given in the work, and significance in the sense of what occupies a position of central importance in the work as opposed to something which is only of incidental purpose.

Conclusion

In his "The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism" 1922, titled *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, T.S. Eliot says no poet has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to other poets and artists. He/she cannot be valued alone; he/she must be set, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. "I mean this as a principle of esthetics, not merely historical, criticism." The necessity that he/she shall conform, that he/she shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it.

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities. In

a peculiar sense he will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past. I say judged, not amputated, by them; not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of dead critics. It is a judgment, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other. To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art. And we do not quite say that the new is more valuable because it fits in; but its fitting in is a test of its value—a test, it is true, which can only be slowly and cautiously applied, for we are none of us infallible judges of conformity. We say: it appears to conform, and is perhaps individual, or it appears individual, and may conform; but we are hardly likely to find that it is one and not the other (pp. 1 - 2).

What makes poetry so wonderful is the fact that it involves all of life, every concern, every desire, and every feeling. If something has some great significance to a person's existence, then it has a great significance in poetry as well. Of course, every single poem may not be enjoyed by every single person. Many people can dislike a great poem and it still will not change the fact that the poem is great. People just aren't capable of being as enthusiastic about things as the next person might be. It is the right of each person to choose for themselves which poet or poem they like most. The most enjoyable poems are usually selected by choosing which poems are the most interesting or which ones are the most lively. However, no two people have the same exact taste or preference in what things they enjoy most. Interesting poems may be new or fresh to the reader. Lively poems might catch the reader's attention very quickly.

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