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Critique of the Essence of Art, Poetry, and Science

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Abstract: Poetry, one of humanity's earliest art forms, has conveyed history, religion, and philosophy through rhythm and meter. While universally revered, it has faced criticism. Plato dismissed poetry as a deceptive imitation, while Freud saw it as an illusory gratification, though he acknowledged its therapeutic effects. Aristotle, however, viewed poetry as

cathartic, expressing universal truths beyond history. Horace emphasized its dual role—to delight and uplift. Despite differing views, poetry’s power to move, heal, and enlighten remains undisputed, securing its lasting significance in world literature.

Keywords: Poetry, Aesthetic expression, Universal truths, Philosophical critique, Therapeutic effect, literary tradition, Emotional appeal.

“Poetry is one of the earliest aesthetic activities of the human mind. The most common vehicle for history, religion, magic and even law, has been poetry which is rhythmical and metrical in form”¹. Aryan race in India versified almost all types of metaphysical compositions and ruminations. Even Egyptian cosmogony and astronomy were versified. Religion also expressed itself in rhyme or meter. Poetry in some way can be considered as a heightened or emotionally charged form of ordinary speech. Still, finding this definition incomplete, I would rather say that poetry is a metaphor.

All countries and all human languages have their literary tradition entrenched in poetry which arises mainly from emotional utterance. Even primitive men expressed this very emotional utterance through dance, music, and simple verse. As such, poetry is held in high esteem in all world literature. Though poetry is held in high esteem throughout all the world literature, only a few thinkers in the past like Plato, Sigmund Freud, Lenin, Marx and Stephen Gosson made adverse comments.

In Book X of his famous book, ‘The Republic’ Plato, on ethical and metaphysical grounds, thoughtlessly banished poets from his ideal state. All art in his opinion is the product of wild imagination for it distorts truth and is also thrice removed from reality. Further, it being an imitation of the idea of God it becomes an imitation of imitation of imitation. Though he

believes that poetry makes an immediate appeal to the emotions of the audience, he also believes that poetry has a baneful effect on the healthy growth of mind.

After 2500 years, Freud raised similar doubts and apprehensions about art. He considered art as a 'substitute gratification', 'an illusion in contrast to reality', but however, considers literary men as precursors and adjudicators of psychoanalysis, as they can comprehend the latent motives of life. He also feels that 'poetry has a therapeutic effect in releasing mental tension'.

Aristotle, like Plato, believes that poetry makes an immediate appeal to the emotions, but for him these emotions are aroused with a view to make the audience undergo a cathartic experience (purging unpleasant feelings from the soul). In the medical language, it denotes the removal of painful or disturbing elements from the organism; elimination of alien matter leads to the purification of the soul. So, the emotional appeal of poetry is health giving and artistically satisfying. Through poetry the poet reveals truths of a permanent and universal kind. To prove this, he draws a comparison between poetry and history. While history speaks of what has happened, poetry, what may happen? Poetry, therefore, for Aristotle, is something more philosophical and higher than history, for poetry tends to express the universal, history, the particular. As for its function, he says, the immediate function is to please and delight. 'To instruct is not ruled out if it is incidental to the pleasure it gives'.

For Horace, poetry should be both pleasure giving and morally elevating. Further, the test of poetry lies not in delight or instruction or persuasion, 'but in its transportation--its capacity to move the reader to ecstasy.'

What P B Shelley said about poetry is really remarkable. He says, 'Poetry reveals to us the loveliness of nature, brings back the freshness of youthful feeling, revives the relish of simple

pleasures, keeps unquenched the enthusiasm which warmed the spring time of our being, refines youthful love, strengthens our interest in human nature by vivid delineations of its tenderest and softest feelings, and through the brightness of its prophetic vision, helps faith to lay hold on the future life.' Shelley wrote a beautiful essay, 'A Defense of Poetry' in 1821: 'Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of Knowledge, it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought. It is that from which all spring and that which adorns us all; and that which, if blighted denies the fruits and the seed, and withholds from the barren world of nourishment and the succession of the scions of the tree of life. It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of all things; it is as the odor and the color of the rose to the texture of the elements which compose it, as the form and splendor of unfaded beauty to the secrets of anatomy and corruption. The delight of love and friendship, the ecstasy of the admiration of nature, the joy of the perception and still more of the creation of poetry, is often wholly unalloyed. Those who produce and preserve this pleasure are poets or poetical philosophers.'² Poetry, continues Shelley, immortalizes all that is best and most beautiful in the world. Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man. It turns all things to loveliness, it exalts the beauty of that which is the most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed, it molds exaltation and honor, grief and pleasure, eternity and changes; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches; and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes: its secret alchemy turns to portable goal the poisonous waters which flow from earth through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the beauty of its forms. He is the

wisest, the happiest and the best in as much as he's a poet, is equally incontrovertible: the greatest poets have been men of the most spotless virtue, of the most consummate prudence. A poet participates in the eternal or the infinite.

Shelley has really been insightful and meaningful in describing poetry: 'a poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer his own solitude with sweet sounds. Poetry acts in another diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar, it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light'.

For Arnold the function of the poet is not only to present life as it is, but also to add something to it. Poetry for him 'is also the criticism of life and by contributing something to life, enriches it. It becomes the power of forming, sustaining and delighting us as nothing else can. Its future, so, 'is immense' and in future it would replace religion because in it we find all values--aesthetic, moral and religious, coalesce. Religion in its form deals with essentially moral and historical facts, but poetry with ideas born out of the depth of experiences'³. Religion has failed us, Arnold says, because it has attached its emotions to historical facts whereas poetry represents ideas. In a sense, poetry itself is a religious act. Poetry alone can restore man from his fall and establish peace, order and harmony. Peace is not won by war, but by poetry. It has peace as its God. Hence, through poetry, irrespective of its language form, the world can be united, *vasudika kutumbam* can be established. The pursuit of science pleases the scientist. There is no truth in science that can please a common man, being fully the product of meddling intellect. It is not felt in the blood and along the heart as the truth of poetry is. Further,

the truths that science discovers benefit us only materially, but the truths of poetry clasp “to us as a necessary part of our existence”. Poetry is surely the breath of finer spirit of all knowledge. It is the highest and supreme form of human expression. It is an impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science.

According to Christopher Caudwell, art is the science of feeling and science is the art of knowing. We must know to be able to do, but we must also feel to know what to do. Art is all active cognition and science, cognitive action. While science is concerned with external reality, art, with internal reality. Science achieves its purpose of survival by adapting external reality to the genotype just as art adapts the genotype to external reality. Just as art achieves its adaptive purpose by projecting the genotype’s latent aspirations on to external reality, so science achieves its end by receiving the requisitioning from external reality poured into the mind, in the illusory or weird mirror-world of scientific ideology. When necessity is projected into the psyche, it becomes conscious and man can mould external reality according to his will. As art, by adapting the genotype and projecting its characteristics into external reality, tells us what the genotype is, so science, by receiving the reflection of external reality into the psyche, tells us what external reality is. As art conveys the importance and meaning of all we are in the language of feeling, so science tells us the significance of all we see in the real world in the language of cognition. One is temporal, full of change; the other spatial and it appears static. It is difficult, rather impossible to generate a phantastic projection of the whole Universe, but together, though being contradictory, are dialectic, and call into being the spatio-temporal, historic Universe; not by themselves but by the practice, the concrete living, from which they emerge’. The Universe that emerges is contradictory, explosive, full of heterogeneities, ironies, paradoxes and dynamically moving apart, because these are the salient features of the movement of reality which

generated them, the movement of life as well as human life. This apart, when we say that the universe is material, we mean that all phenomena have an underlying unity/underground connections in the form of causes or determining relations which have an ultimate homogeneity we call matter. This is the first assumption of science. The whole history of science is the discovery of these connections and their demonstration through every stage of experiment.'⁴

Though, science perennially works for the advancement of society, art supports and records that advancement. Science contributes to the growth of humanity, and art ensures that humanity doesn't fade away as it grows. Together they both play a vital role in the growth of humanity. That way, both are equally important and neither can prosper and flourish without the help of the other. Science improves technologies that are used to "express" art. Whereas, art provides creativity and answers questions that science cannot, providing "stimulus" to scientists' imagination.

Though both artists and scientists endeavor to see the world in novel ways, and to communicate what they see to the world, the world, ironically, sees differently what is shown, changing the fundamental 'truth' altogether as a result. Further, both scientists and artists with nothing new to reveal and communicate their insights are great failures. It takes both dexterity and skills to make a successful scientist or artist. Both artists and scientists often need to formulate new concepts, ideas and technologies to achieve their goals. Scientists who are able to communicate but have nothing unique or new to say are mere hypesters. Artists who have new ideas and views of creativity but who fail to express these effectively appear wackos. Since both often work very hard to acquire skills and generate novelty that will help them to be successful and to promote knowledge in their concerned areas, many prestigious schools and organizations of science

and art have come up throughout the world to promote both science and art.

Both science and art have wonderful spin-offs as applied science is technology and applied art is adornment. Technology and embellishment combined to make life exquisite, smooth and useful for boosting imagination and furthering all practical pursuits.

One of the most primeval and innate needs of man is to understand the world around him, and then widely share that understanding. We share because we are mainly social beings. The success or failure of others is meaningful and important for all of us. We would like to share all information if we have any, though it may be trivial as we are all tied up together in this world. Science and art are human attempts to understand the world around him. Their background, subjects and methods have different traditions, cultural outlook and protean audiences, but the motivations, objectives and goals are basically the same. The future of science is tied to the destiny of mankind and the future of mankind is tied to the destiny of art. The future of mankind, thus, is tied to the destiny of science and art, both.

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