

TREND OF POETIC FORMS & THEMES: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Poetry is the expression of soul. Poetry is a part and parcel of literature. It is the most effective and interesting way of expression. It appeals, vitalizes and electrifies the heart and mind. It is an electrifier. The English poetry has a rich history and records. It has traveled a long way. It has undergone multiple changes, influences and revivals. So is the case with themes and forms of the English Poetry. They have experienced several changes as well as revivals. The past records show that there were different forms and themes in different periods. Various changes in themes can be seen. Earlier, themes were related to Religion, church and Morality. Then came in to vogue the themes of *love and chivalry*. Later, the themes related to the *upper-class people* of the society were in fashion. During the Romantic Period the themes concerning to *common people, rustic life, and nature* were in demand. The Pre-Raphaelite poetry was based on the idea of Art for the Sake of Art. On the contrary, the modern poetry emphasizes on the Art for the sake of life. The war-poetry focused on *war themes*. The poetry of Eliot reflects the shallow mindedness of people and meaninglessness of life. Thus, the English poetry has completed a journey with various changes, adoptions as well as revivals of forms and themes.

Key Words: Trend, Poetic Forms, Religious Themes, Journey, Ballad, Ode, Sonnet, Lyric, Elegy, Satire, Heroic-Couplet, Dramatic -Monologue Religious, Amorous, Chivalry, Romance, Materialism, Interrogation, War-Themes, Spiritual-Sterility

Poetry is the expression of soul. Poetry is a part and parcel of literature. It is the most effective and interesting way of expression. It appeals, vitalizes and electrifies the heart and mind. It is an electrifier. The English poetry has a rich history and records. It has traveled a long way. It has undergone multiple changes, influences and revivals. So is the case with themes and forms of the English Poetry. They have experienced several changes as well as revivals. The past records show that there were different forms and themes in different periods. Chaucerian poetry reveals the amalgam of love, religion and chivalry and humanism. Chaucer's poetry reflects his age. He produced *The Book of Duchess*. It is also known as *The Deth of Blaunche*. It is based on the death of Blanche, one of Gaunt's wife. It is a poem of 1334 lines. It is allegorical. His famous works are *The House of Fame*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the

Legend of Good Women. The House of Fame (1382) is a type of dream allegory with lofty thought and humor. Troilus and Criseyde present the ideas of his time and society. It is his best narrative work. He has used *the Rhyme royal Stanza Form* skillfully.

The Canterbury Tales is Chaucer's most famous work. It is the picture gallery of his time. It reflects the life and manner of the 14th Century England. It focuses the social conditions, the church, and the religion of the contemporary society. It exposes the corruption in church and village. It is in the East Midland Dialect. Chaucer was regarded as English Homer.

William Langland is famous for his Piers, the Plowman. It is the presentation of 14th Century England. It satirizes and denounces the corruption of clergymen. It exposes the evils of the society. It expresses the suffering of common men. It describes the peasant life. It is based on *social and religious themes*. It is an allegory of life. The writer has revived the Old England rhyme-less measure. During the 15th Century, ballad literatures became very popular. The English popular ballads were considered as a type of folk art. They were narrative poems. They were full of communal elements. The barrenness of Post-Chaucerian period was removed by the arrival of Wyatt(1503-1542) and Surrey(1517-1547). They introduced *sonnet-form*. They followed *Petrarchan form*. Wyatt's poetry was personal and autobiographical. Surrey was more effective than Wyatt. The Elizabethan Poetry (1568-1603) is full of the spirit of conquest and self-glorification, humanism, imagination and emotion. This period produced patriotic, philosophical, satirical and love poems. Elizabethan poetry is the proof of the prevalence of various poetical forms such as *lyric, elegy, eclogue, ode, sonnet* and *madrigal* etc. Philip Sydney, Marlow, Shakespeare, Spenser are well known poets of this period. Sydney's *Astrophel and Stella* is a love poem. It is a collection of 108 memorable sonnets about unrequited love. His famous work is *Amoretti*. This is based on his love for Elizabeth Boyel. *Amoretti* is a collection of 88 beautiful Petrarchan sonnets. Marlow's *Hero and Leander*, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonais* are love poems. They are in *the form of sonnet*. Jacobean poetry is full of *ornal and religious* themes.

Spencer's poetry reflects the spirit of Renaissance and Reformation. His *Shepherd's Calender* is *a series of pastoral eclogues* the social and political conditions are communicated through this. The unfortunate love of the poet is also mentioned. *Epithalamion* is another fine production of Spenser. It is an *ethical and religious allegory*. This work is a great example of the magnificent ode in English Language. It is a wedding hymn written in the honour of the writer's marriage with Elizabeth Boyle. *The Faerie Queene* is his master piece. It is an allegory and didactic romance. It has political as well as historical elements. *Spenserian stanza* is used in this epic. This age was replete with sonneteers. It was the golden age of sonnets. The famous sonnets *Venus and Adonais* and *The Rape of Lurce* are the excellent productions of this time. *Verse Satire* was also in use at that time. Wyatt, Spenser and Ben Jonson are the noted figures in this regard. Spenser's *Shepherd's Calender* is a bitter political satire in Heroic Couplet. Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard introduced *sonnet* in England during the first half of Italian model. Later, there were Shakespearean and Spenserian sonnets with slighter difference. Later, the Meta-physical writers came into the scene. They presented their poems in *the form of argument*. The sonnet was the highly conventional art form for their writing. Their work is based on philosophical topics, man's significance and role in Nature.

John Donne was the representative writer of this group. He generated religious and amorous verses. *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* is a glaring example of his romantic poem in the highly conventional *sonnet form*. It reminds the Petrarchan *love sonnet*. He composed *satirical sonnets* also. *Holly sonnet No. 14* is his famous religious sonnet in conventional form.

Andrew Marvell is famous for his romantic metaphysical poetry. He produced odes also. His famous ode is Upon Cromwell's Return. Herbert's poetry is mostly based on *religious theme*. The Miltonic poetry has subject-matter like religion, sincerity and morality. Milton was the representative Puritan poet. His magnificent works are Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. Paradise Lost is a great epic poem with lofty thought and religious theme. The poet wants to justify the way of God. Milton produced fine sonnets also such as. On Blindness, When the Assault was Intended. Actually, Milton revived the Italian sonnet. Milton widened the range of subject matter. The next period is the Restoration Age. This age was enriched with eminent skilled poets. The poetry of Pope is the criticism of the age. The Rape of Lock exposes the frivolity of the society. His Dunciad unveils squalor. Pope handled the *heroic couplet* excellently. His heroic couplet is famous because of its correctness and perfection. The Age of Dryden (1631-1700) is special for its didactic nature and *satire*. Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel is a satire. Its theme is political. It attacks violently on Shadwell Dryden's another creation is The Fable. It is a narrative poem with skilled use of heroic couplet. MacFlecknone is another famous satire by Dryden. The themes and forms faced the Age of Transition. This period shows the existence of double- tendency. Thomas Gray, George Crabbe, William Blake belonged to this time. Gray used closed couplet. Thematically they deal with simple country life. Gold Smith's *Traveler* deals with this wandering through Europe. The heroic couplets are used in this poem. James Thomson's Seasons and The Castle of Indolence are in blank verse. He has used *Spenserian Stanza Form*. The Romantics revolted against the neo-classical schools of writing. They believed in equality, humanity and individuality, simplicity . The simple ways of expression were their assets. They used subjects matters related to the common people, nature, rustic life etc. They used Sonnet form, ballad form, narrative ode, elegy, Spenserian stanza. Terzarima, Rhyme Royal, Lyric etc.

Wordsworth and Coleridge produced excellent ballads. They were skilled ballad composers. Wordsworth enriched the English literature with the excellent ballads. Coleridge's The Rime of The Ancient Mariner is the proof of this. Ballad measure is used in it. The subject matter is the deeds or manner. Wordsworth's The World is too Much with Us is an excellent example of the sonnet. Keats' famous sonnet is When I have fear. He has used heroic couplets in The Anatomy of Melancholy. He also produced *odes* and *epics*. He has also skilled in using Spenserian stanza. Shelley was a great lyrical poet. He has used *tercet, quatrain and Spenserian stanza*. The Victorian poetry is different in forms and themes from the romantic poetry. The themes of compromise, religion, materialism and snobbery are depicted in this period. Tennyson was the representative writer of this period. Browning was another famous figure of this period. The various forms like Idyll, Dramatic Monologue, Ballad, Ode, Epic, and Elegy were prevalent during this period. Browning's poetry deals with *love theme* and the *theme of optimism*. Dramatic monologue is the speciality of the poetry of Robert Browning. Matthew Arnold was the famous elegiac poet. He dealt with the melancholic subject matters and the theme of anti-materialism. He condemned Victorian materialism. His Thyrsis is a famous pastoral elegy. The theme of this elegy is an Oxford country side. Matthew Arnold also produced famous sonnets such as Shakespeare and Quiet Work. The Pre-Raphaelites believed in *Art for the sake of Art*. Their works were full of passion, romance and medievalism.

The modern age is the age of interrogation and anxiety. The writers of this age believe in *the art for life's sake*. Kipling, Brook and Yeats are the renowned poets of this period. Kipling used cockney dialect with its dropped consonants and distorted vowels. Brook produced sonnets. He glorified war, and romantic patriotism. Yeats was a famous modern poet and symbolist. He

experimented several stanza forms and verse forms. In the first two decades of the twentieth century new types of poetry emerged in both England and America. The prevailing mode of the first quarter of the century was characterized by W. B Yeats, Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost. The style was colloquial. Yeats poem ‘Wild Swans at Cools’ expresses the thrill of watching the wild swans ‘upon the brimming water among the stones’.

The poetry of the first ‘World War’ is primarily a record of the experience of war in conventionally heroic terms... (A Background to the Study of English Literature, 83) Rupert Brook’s poem, ‘The Soldier’ is the testimony of this. It is a sonnet. But, the poetry of Sassoon, and Owen shattered Brooks’ conventional idea. Their poetry reflects the horrible effects of war. Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) produced the finest *war poems*. He was a realist. His poems such as Futility, Exposure, and the Anthem for Doomed Youth etc, are the fine examples of his war poems. The following extract reveals the experience of war:

What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?
 Only the monstrous anger of the guns
 Only the stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle
 Can patter out their hasty orison
 (The Faber book of Modern Verse- 192)

Eliot’s work, The Waste Land shows the emotional and spiritual sterility of modern man. He conveys his theme symbolically. In his poem, April stands for infertility; this can be seen in the following extract:

April is the cruelest month, breeding
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
 Memory and desire, stirring
 Dull roots with spring rain
 (The Faber book of Modern Verse – 122)

By this analysis, it is clear that the English poetry has come across several changes and revivals. So many adoptions and alterations were made. Thematic changes are more prominent and frequent during the journey. The forms are also changed from time to time. But, sometimes, revivals of the forms can be seen. The sonnet forms can be found in various periods. The revivals of ballad forms are traced. The Spenserian stanza was ignored during the Augustan period. But, many romantics such as Thomson, Burns, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson used it beautifully. Byron used it for his Child Harold.

Shelley revived it for his Adonais and The Revolt of Islam, Keats used it for The Eve of St. Agnes. Like that, Spencer followed the path of Chaucer for using the Heroic couplet for his satirical narrative. Marlowe adopted it for his Hero and Leander.

A verse satire can be an ode, or elegy. Chaucer used it for exposing the corruption of Church. Elizabethans used it for pointing out courtiers, puritans and women. Dryden and Pope perfected it and used it in a more personal and direct way. The idyll can be lyric, elegy or ballad. Milton used it in his L’Allegro. Browning and Tennyson also used it. *Elegy* and *ode* forms are recurring in English poetry. Milton, Arnold, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Gray were the expert users of these forms. Chaucer’s writing is in the Chaucerian stanza form. It was adopted by Shakespeare for his work, The Rape of Lucrece. The Pre-Raphaelite, William Morris used it for his poem, The Earthly Paradize. The *Ottava Rima* was introduced in England by Thomas Wyatt in the 16th Century. It is like Chaucerian stanza but suitable for humour or satire. Byron used it for his poems, The Vision of Judgment and Don Juan. Shelley adopted it for The Witch of Atlas and Keats used it for his work The Pot of Basil.

Like this, various changes in themes also occurred. Earlier,, themes were related to Religion, church and Morality. Then came in to vogue the themes of *love and chivalry*. Later, the themes related to the *upper- class people* of the society were in fashion. During the Romantic Period the themes concerning to *common people, rustic life, and nature* were in demand. The Pre-Raphaelite poetry was based on the idea of Art for the Sake of Art. On the contrary, the modern poetry emphasizes on the Art for the sake of life. The war- poetry focused on *war themes*. The poetry of Eliot reflects the shallow mindedness of people and meaninglessness of life. It is clear that the English poetry has traveled a long way. The English poetry has completed a journey with various changes, adoptions as well as revivals of forms and themes.

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