

## Symbolist movement in Poetry

The use of symbols by the Romantic poets precedes the Symbolist movement in France which began with Baudelaire's 'Fleurs du mal' and was continued by other French poets - Rimbaud, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Valéry etc. This movement gradually spread far and wide in the literary world and influenced poets of England and America. The use of private symbols by the French poets in their poetry of rich suggestiveness, rather than explicit statements inspired poets like Arthur Symonds, Ernest Dowson, Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Dylan Thomas, Hart Crane, E.E. Cummings and Wallace Stevens. The era which began since World War I has been a notable era of Symbolism in literature. Many notable writers of the period drew symbols from religion and esoteric traditions. The symbols used in their works were priv-

ate also and this accounts for obscurity in their poems, novels, dramas etc. Some of the notable works of the age are Symbolist throughout in their settings, their agents, their sections and their dictions. For example we may cite Yeats's 'Byzantium', 'Afterwards by owl-light' a series of Sonnets by Dylan Thomas - Heart Crane's 'The Bridge', Eliot's 'The Wasteland', Stevens's 'Comedian as the Letter C'. The notable novels in which the writer has made use of extensive Symbols are Joyce's 'Ulysses', 'Finnegans Wake', Faulkner's 'The Sound and The Fury' and Proust's 'Remembrance of Things Past'.

The Imagist movement which exclusively belongs to the modern times in comparison to the Symbolist movement, we must differentiate between the two. The Symbolists by using some Symbols tried to convey

the interplay of various emotions and associations which were otherwise not possible in common language of ordinary speech. Images, on the other hand, are word-pictures used to express the most complex texture of ideas. This accounts for the brevity of Imagist poems. A clear-cut difference of how symbols and images work, can be exemplified by mentioning the 'fire' and 'water' symbols in 'The Waste Land'

Burning burning burning burning  
O Lord thou pluckest me out  
burning  
and

The dry stone no sound of  
water. ~~no sound of~~

And Basho's poem  
An old pond  
And the sound of a  
frog leaping  
into the water.

This is a 'haikai' poem on which the Imagist poems have been modelled. Now let us see

### Pound's 'Alba'

As cool as the pale wet leaves  
of lily - of - the - valley  
She lay beside me in the  
dawn.

The image of 'ruddy moon' and  
red-faced farmer in a small  
poem of T.E. Hulme created  
pictures and tells us so many  
things which the poet otherw-  
ise would have taken many  
words to describe.

T.S. Eliot, while composing  
'The Waste Land' has used sy-  
mbols which tell us a lot by  
their associations and allusions  
which otherwise would have tak-  
en a lot of space. He has lear-  
nt much from Baudelaire and  
Verlaine. In the description  
of London City

Unreal City  
Under the brown fog of  
a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over  
London Bridge ....

We hear the echo of Baudelaire's  
idea of a modern city. Baudelaire

" gave new possibilities to poetry in a new stock of imagery of contemporary life the use of imagery of the sordid life of a great metropolis." He had adapted Mallarme practice of communicating through allusion and suggested analogies. Unlike Mallarme he does not use private symbols which is completely beyond the understanding of the outsider. The obscurity of and the difficulty in understanding the poem arise from the associations and the allusions which symbols evoke. Mallarme wanted to convey his personal emotions or sensations for which he needed special language and symbolism. Eliot's purpose is different. He wants to present an objective view of the society for which he took recourse to impersonal symbolism. He has maintained a better correspondence between symbol and reality.

Arthur Symonds was the first

critic of Symbolism and its first interpreter to English poets. His 'The Symbolist movement in Literature' published in 1899 exercised a great influence upon poets of the period. There is no doubt about it that the poets produced some good poems and their works are memorable. Even the least of the poets produced one good poem. For example we may cite Ernest Dowson's 'Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynerae'. W.B. Yeats was a Symbolist who came in contact with Madame Blavatsky in 1875. The theosophical philosophy which was a fusion of oriental mysticism and occultism attracted him for he found that the new ideas were rich in symbolic material. He read the two esoteric lore - 'Gnosis Unveiled' and 'The Secret Doctrine' by Madame Blavatsky and found that theosophy was rich

in esoteric Symbolism. The  
least poetry of Yeats show  
how Symbols could be linked  
to a deep sub-conscious source  
to carry enough weight to pave  
its way in poetry.

The end.

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