

Symbolist movement in Poetry

The use of symbols by the Romantic poets preceded the Symbolist movement in France which began with Baudelaire's 'A Fleurs et due 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, Keats, 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, novel
dramas etc. Some of the nota-
ble works of the age are sym-
bolist throughout in their se-
tings, their agents, their sec-
tions and their dictions. For
example we may cite Yeats'
'Byzantium', 'Afterwards by owl
light' a series of Sonnets by
Dylan Thomas - Heart Crane
'The Bridge', Eliot's 'The Wa-
sterland', Stevens' 'Comedian
as the letter c'. The notable
novels in which the writer has
made use of extensive sym-
bols are Joyce's 'Ulysses',
'Finnegans Wake', Faulkner's
'The Sound and The Fury' and
Proust's 'Remembrance of Thi-
ngs Past'.

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

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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 how pluckest me out
burning
and

The dry stone no sound of
water.

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

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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 creates
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 Baudlaire 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 Baudlaire's
idea of a modern city. Baudlaire

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"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 has 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

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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 eam bone 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 - ' Isis Unveiled' and 'The Secret Doctrine' by Madame Blavatsky and found that theosophy was rich

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

The end.

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