

Literary Criticism (From Plato to Leavis)
Doctor Merin Simi Raj
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Madras
Edgar Allan Poe's The Poetic Principle Part-2

Hello and welcome to today's session.

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design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true Poetic dignity and force, but the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there neither exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified, more supremely noble, than this very poem—this poem *per se*—this poem which is a poem and nothing more—this poem written solely for the poem's sake.

With as deep a reverence for the True as ever inspired the bosom of man, I would, nevertheless, limit in some measure its modes of incalculable. I would limit to enforce them. I would not enfeeble them by dissipation. The demands of Truth are severe; she has no sympathy with the myths. All that which is so indispensable in Song is precisely all that which she has nothing whatever to do. It is but making her a flaming paradox to breathe her in gems and flowers. In enforcing a truth we need severity rather than effluence of language. We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mood, which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. He must be blind, indeed, who does not perceive the radical and chasmod differences between the truthful and the poetical modes of incalculable. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.

Dividing the world of mind into its three most immediately obvious distinctions, we have the Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense. I place Taste in the middle, because it is just this position which in mind it occupies. It holds intimate relations with either extreme, but from the Moral Sense is separated by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues themselves. Nevertheless, we find the offices of the trio marked with a sufficient distinction. Just as the intellect concerns itself with Truth, so Taste informs us of the Beautiful, while the Moral Sense is regardful of Duty. Of this latter, while Conscience teaches the obligation, and Reason the expediency, Taste contents herself with displaying the charms—waging war upon Vice solely on the ground of her deformity—her disproportion—her animosity to the fitting, to the appropriate, to the harmonious—in a word, to Beauty.

An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odors, and sentiments, amid which he exists. And just as the lily is repeated in the lake, or the eyes of Amavltis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of



We are looking at this essay *The Poetic Principle* by Edgar Allan Poe, the American poet and critic. After having spoken about the heresy of didacticism which we have taken a look at in the previous session, he goes on to talk about the distinctions between poetry and truth. He tries to differentiate between the elements of poetry and the elements of truth. And this is also in stark contrast with the prevalent belief that poetry and truth are similar in certain ways.

And here, we also find him moving away from the Romantic impulses that were predominant in England, from the British poets who also believed that poetry is truth, that poetry is perhaps the best expression of beauty as well as truth. And we also find this equation getting very pronouncedly articulated in most of the poems of the Romantic writers of that period in England.

So, this departure is very significant, particularly in the critical articulations of Edgar Allan Poe where he tries to tread the same line as the Romantics in terms of some of his principles. But he also tries to move away from some of the cardinal elements, particularly as we will now shortly see, in the differentiation between poetry and truth.

“With as deep a reverence for the true as ever inspired the bosom of man, I would, nevertheless, limit in some measure its modes of inculcation. I would limit to enforce them, I would not enfeeble them by dissipation. The demands of truth are severe”. So this is the way in which he begins to differentiate one from the other. “The demands of truth are severe, all that which is so indispensable in song is precisely all that with which she has nothing whatever to do”.

So, if song is something which is a significant attribute of poetry, then truth has got nothing to do with it. “It is but making her a flaunting paradox to wreath her in gems and flowers. In enforcing a truth, we need severity rather than the efflorescence of language”. It is something which cannot be captured within poetic language. Truth is something which demands severity, gravity of expression.

“We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mode, which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical”. Here, truth is seen as something which is antithetical to poetry. The impulses which govern both these elements are seen as entirely different. “He must be blind, indeed, who does not perceive the radical and chasmal differences between the truthful and the poetical modes of inculcation. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of poetry and truth”.

Poetry and truth are seen being as separate as chalk and cheese, as separate as oil and water. They cannot be reconciled together at all. Here I also want you to recall what Sidney had articulated in his defence of poetry where he defended the poet against the allegation that poetry was also the nurse of all abuses, nurse of all lies. So he pursued this argument that the poet, in the first place, never claimed to say the truth. So he cannot logically lie either.

So here we find this argument being articulated in an entirely different form by saying that truth and poetry are two different impulses which have two different demands upon language. So it cannot co-exist, they are as separate as oil and water. If you try to bring them together it would be like trying to bring in two very obstinate things which cannot be yoked together at all.

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With as deep a reverence for the *form* as eyes inspired the *knowing* of *form*, I would, nevertheless, limit in some measure its modes of incantation. I would limit to enforce them. I would not enfeeble them by dissipation. The demands of Truth are severe; she has no sympathy with the myths. All that which is so indispensable in Song is precisely all that with which she has nothing whatever to do. It is but making her a flaming paradox to breathe her in gems and flowers. In enforcing a truth we need severity rather than effluence of language. We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mood, which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. He must be blind, indeed, who does not perceive the radical and classmate differences between the truthful and the poetical modes of incantation. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.

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An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odors, and sentiments, amid which he exists. And just as the lily is repeated in the lake, or the eyes of Amaryllis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of these forms, and sounds, and colors, and odors, and sentiments, a duplicate source of delight. But this mere repetition is not poetry. He who shall simply say, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and colors, and odors, and sentiments, which greet him in common with all mankind—be, I say, as yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to all which he has not chosen to the central cuisine. This thirst balances to the



Now Poe gets into some kind of philosophising over here where he talks about the need to divide the mind into three in order to understand how this works. He divides the mind into three, the pure intellect, taste and moral sense and there is a hierarchy. There is a sense of hierarchy that he begins to identify, a certain kind of combination and permutation which he thinks would be possible within this framework.


“I place Taste in the middle, because it is just this position, which in mind it occupies. It holds intimate relations with either extreme, but from the moral sense is separated by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues themselves. Nevertheless, we find the offices of the trio marked with a sufficient distinction just as the intellect concerns itself with the truth. So taste informs us of the beautiful, while moral sense is regardful of duty”.

So here is taste placed in the middle, so it can tilt towards intellect or towards moral sense. You cannot have both at the same time, he is trying to say. So, intellect concerns itself with truth, taste informs us of the beautiful and the moral sense is regardful of duty. So he says that while conscience teaches you obligation, reason the expediency, “taste contents herself with displaying the charms, waging war upon vice solely on the ground of her deformity, her disproportion, her animosity to the fitting, to the appropriate, to the harmonious, in a word, to beauty”.

So we find this peculiar kind of positioning that Poe also talks about where in the mind, taste occupies the centre stage, and it could move towards the intellect or towards a moral sense,

and these two are almost diametrically opposite. These two cannot come together as he talks about truth-- truth and beauty in the previous sense.

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extreme, but from the Moral Sense is separated by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues themselves. Nevertheless, we find the offices of the two marked with a sufficient distinction. Just as the intellect concerns itself with Truth, so Taste informs us of the Beautiful, while the Moral Sense is regardless of Duty. Of this latter, while Conscience touches the obligation, and Reason the expediency, Taste contenteth herself with displaying the claims—waging war upon Vice solely on the ground of her deformity—her disproportion—her animosity to the fitting, to the appropriate, to the harmonious—in a word, to Beauty.

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The struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness—this struggle, on the part of souls fittingly constituted—has given to the world all that which it (the world) has ever been enabled at once to understand and to feel as poetic.

The Poetic Combustion of genius, near Aristotle's ideal in various respects. In Aristotle, in



In the next passage, he is trying to link the impulse of poetry towards immortality. “An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the beautiful”. So there is an instinct to move towards the beautiful and that is the poetic impulse and that is perhaps, the instinctive impulse within man to move towards immortality, and this is how he situates poetry over here.

As he reiterates, “we have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown as a crystal spring. This thirst belongs to the immortality of man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the beauty before us, but a wild effort to reach the beauty above”. So, this is how poetry gets elevated to a divine status over here.

Poetry is that which allows man to be immortal and by extension, art is that which allows man to be immortal. So we find this even in the poetry and in the writings of the Romantics of the British Isle as well. So we do find that, for instance, when the Grecian urn is being talked about poetically, it is also about accessing immortality. It is about a thing of the past, which has almost been recreated in the present.

So, poetry here becomes something which makes immortality possible. It is about the art which lives beyond the artist, which lives beyond its creator, thereby vicariously achieving a status of immortality.

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The struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness—this struggle, on the part of souls fittingly constituted—has given to the world all that which it (the world) has ever been enabled at once to understand and to feel as poetic.

The Poetic Sentiment, of course, may develop itself in various modes—in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance—very especially in Music,—and very peculiarly and with a wide field, in the composition of the Landscape Garden. Our present theme, however, has regard only to its manifestation in words. And here let me speak briefly on the topic of rhythm. Contenting myself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of metre, rhythm, and rhyme, is of so vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected—is so vitally important an adjunct, that he is simply silly who declines its assistance—I will not now pause to mention its absolute essentiality. It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—the creation of supernal Beauty. It may be, indeed, that here this sublime end is, now and then, attained in fact. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an earthly harp are stricken notes which cannot have been unfamiliar to the angels. And thus there can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development. The old Bards and Minstrel-singers had advantages which we do not possess—and Thomas Moore, singing his own songs, was, in the most legitimate manner, perfecting them as poems.

To recapitulate, then—I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*. Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the Intellect or with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth.

A few words, however, in explanation. That pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we also find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, of the soul, which we recognize as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the Heart. I make Beauty, therefore—using the word as inclusive of the sublime,—I make Beauty the province of the poem, surely because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to



He is further separating the idea of duty or truth from the poetic impulses when he says, “To recapitulate, then I would define, in brief, the poetry of words as The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty. Its sole arbiter is taste”. It is entirely dependent on the taste, it is entirely dependent on instinct and common sense, as he had reiterated right at the outset of this essay.

“With the Intellect or with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no connection whatever either with Duty or with Truth”. So it is a very unapologetic statement which states very clearly that poetry has got nothing to do with duty or truth; there is no purpose, there is no aim, there is no larger moral objective which is beyond the poem itself. So poetry is an end by itself and its ultimate aim is to produce beauty, to celebrate beauty, and its sole arbiter is also taste, not intellect, not reason, not any kind of moral conditioning.

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To recapitulate, then—I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhetorical Creation of Beauty*. Its *sole aditus is Truth*. With the Intellect or with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth.

A few words, however, in explanation. That pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we also find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, *of the soul*, which we recognize as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the Heart. I make Beauty, therefore—using the word as inclusive of the sublime,—I make Beauty the province of the poem, simply because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation in question is at least *most readily* attainable in the poem. It by no means follows, however, that the increments of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth, may not be introduced into a poem and with advantage; for they may subserve, incidentally, in various ways, the general purposes of the work; but the true artist will always contrive to tone them down in proper subjection to that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem.

I cannot better introduce the few poems which I shall present for your consideration, than by the citation of the "Proun" to Mr. Longfellow's "Wail":

The day is done, and the darkness
Falls from the wings of Night,
As a feather is washed downward
From an eagle in his flight.

I see the lights of the village
Gleam through the rain and the mist,
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me,
That my soul cannot resist.



And this kind of pleasure which one derives by appreciating the beautiful, he says that is perhaps the ultimate kind of pleasure and that is the kind of pleasure that poetry affords too. And he goes on to give a series of poems where he feels he can personally, very subjectively experience this kind of pleasure.

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Read from some lamelier poet,
Whose songs gushed from his heart,
As showers from the clouds of summer,
Or tears from the eyelids start;

Who, through long days of labor,
And nights devoid of ease,
Still heard in his soul the music
Of wonderful melodies.

Such songs have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care,
And come like the benediction
That follows after prayer.

Then read from the treasured volume
The poem of thy choice,
And lend to the rhyme of the poet
The beauty of thy voice.

And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares, that infest the day,
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.

With no great range of imagination, these lines have been justly admired for their delicacy of expression. Some of the images are very effective. Nothing can be better than

— the birds sublime,
Whose distant footsteps echo
Through the corridors of Time.

The idea of the last quatrain is also very effective. The poem, on the whole, however, is *likely to be admired for the successful insurance of its metre, so well in accordance*



The first one is a poem by Longfellow who is one of the leading American poets of those times; and Longfellow and Poe had a very problematic relationship with each other. They used to be very cynical and critical about each other's poetry. But here, he uses this work from Longfellow to show how this kind of work affords the ultimate kind of poetic pleasure.

“With no great range of imagination, these lines have been justly admired for their delicacy of expression. Some of the images are very effective”. You can also find that he is very cynical even when he is admiring a certain piece of work which we can find in most of Poe's writings where his compliments are not always direct. Just like he is suspicious about even some of the traditional forms of poetry like epic which this essay also begins with, we find that his appreciation is always a cynical kind. He is very suspicious about the kind of talents the other poets of his time possessed.

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every organ not nerve so gay,
Soft airs, and song, and light, and bloom
Should keep them, lingering by my tomb.
These to their softened hearts should bear
The thought of what has been,
And speak of one who cannot share
The gladness of the scene;
Whose part, in all the pomp that fills
The circuit of the summer hills,
Is—that his grave is green;
And deeply would their hearts rejoice
To hear again his living voice.
The rhythmical flow, here, is even voluptuous—nothing could be more melodious. The
poem has always affected me in a remarkable manner. The intense melancholy, which
seem to well up, perforce, to the surface of all the poet's cheerful sayings about his
grave, we find thrilling us to the soul, while there is the truest poetic elevation in the
thrill. The impression left is one of a pleasurable sadness.
And if, in the remaining compositions which I shall introduce to you, there be more or
less of a similar tone always apparent, let me remind you that (how or why we know not)
this certain taint of sadness is inseparably connected with all the higher manifestations of
true Beauty. It is, nevertheless,
A feeling of sadness and longing
That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
As the mist resembles the rain.
The taint of which I speak is clearly perceptible even in a poem so full of brilliancy and
spirit as the "Health" of Edward C. Pakeney—
I fill this cup to one made up
Of loveliness alone,
A woman, of her gentle sex,
The seeming paragon;



And when he is giving us another example, this is how he talks about this work. “The poem has always affected me in a remarkable manner”. It is also a very subjective thing. The taste over here is very subjective. It is about a certain personal kind of transformation which happens inside the poet. It is not technical. It is not something which is related to anything universal such as duty or truth or some larger objective that particular piece of poetry has. It is a very subjective thing, which can be only experienced.

“The intense melancholy, which seems to well up, perforce, to the surface of all the poet's cheerful sayings about his grave, we find thrilling us to the soul, while there is the truest poetic elevation in the thrill. The impression left is one of a pleasurable sadness”. So here, I also wanted to recall some of the impressions made by Longinus, where he spoke about the power of poetry to elevate, to transport the reader out of oneself.

So that is again a personal experience. That cannot be an experience which could be acquired through any kind of technical perfection. It is about stirring the soul; so it is a very subjective, Romantic kind of an experience which Longinus had articulated way back during the

classical times. Which is why perhaps his works had resurfaced and it got the kind of recognition that it deserved only during the Romantic period. And rightfully Scott James had referred to him as the first Romantic critic.

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Overturning misery,
Into her rest —
Cross her hands humbly,
As if praying dumbly,
Over her breast!

Omitting her weakness,
Her evil behavior,
And leaving, with meekness,
Her sins to her Saviour!"

The vigor of this poem is no less remarkable than its pathos. The versification, although carrying the fanciful to the very verge of the fantastic, is nevertheless admirably adapted to the wild insanity which is the thesis of the poem.

Among the minor poems of Lord Byron, is one which has never received from the critics the praise which it undoubtedly deserves —

Though the day of my destiny's over,
And the star of my fate hath declined,
Thy soft heart refused to discover
The faults which so many could find;
Though thy soul with my grief was acquainted,
It shrunk not to share it with me,
And the love which my spirit hath pained
It never hath found but in thee.

Then when nature around me is smiling,
The list smile which answers to mine,
I do not believe it beguiling,
Because it reminds me of thine,
And when winds are at war with the ocean,
As the breaths I believed in with me,
If their billows excite an emotion,
It is thine that have met from above.



Poe continues to talk about a number of poems which he found exciting at a personal level, which he found very moving in a very subjective sense. So this includes a lot of well-known, as well as lesser known poems. It also includes some of those poems which he refers to as minor poems. For instance, here he talks about one of the minor poems of Lord Byron, one which has never received from the critics the praise which it undoubtedly deserves.

So he also moves out of the critical framework, out of the canonical framework, to look at certain subjective experiences which he renders as more powerful, as more elevated, as more valid than that of the critical opinion of those times. In fact, there are a lot of instances where he quotes certain critics and he says he does not value that kind of opinion. On the other hand, he finds his personal subjective experience and the evaluation based on that more valid.

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And a bird in the scotfold singing,
Which speaks to my spirit of thee.

Although the rhythm here is one of the most difficult, the versification could scarcely be improved. No nobler *theme* ever engaged the pen of poet. It is the soul-elevating idea, that no man can consider himself entitled to complain of Fate while, in his adversity, he still retains the unwavering love of woman.

From Alfred Tennyson—although in perfect sincerity I regard him as the noblest poet that ever lived—I have left myself time to cite only a very brief specimen. I call him, and think him, the noblest of poets, not because the impressions he produces are, at all times, the most profound, not because the poetical excitement which he induces is, at all times, the most intense, but because it is, at all times the most ethereal—in other words, the most elevating and the most pure. No poet is so little of the earth, earthy. What I am about to read is from his last long poem, “The Princess”—

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail
That brings our friends up from the underworld;
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square,
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remembered kisses after death,




And one of the beautiful instances where he talks about another contemporary poet, Alfred Tennyson, is worth citing over here. He says, “From Alfred Tennyson, although in perfect sincerity, I regard him as the noblest poet that ever lived, I have left myself time to cite only a very brief specimen. I call him and think him the noblest of poets, not because the impressions he produces are, at all times, the most profound, not because the poetical excitement which he induces is, at all times, the most intense, but because it is, at all times, the most ethereal.

Again, we find something very similar to that of Longinus, the idea of the sublime. In other words, the most elevating and the most pure. “No poet is so little of the earth, earthy”. He also reads out from one of his last long poems “The Princess”. So here, we also find another very interesting thing.

Alfred Tennyson is someone who could be concerned as a poet whose position is at this transition stage. He was a Victorian poet when you look at the chronology, the periodization of British history. But we find that here, he is being referred to as a contemporary Romantic poet. So there are these overlaps that we would find in these articulations. And interestingly, Tennyson is also seen as a modern poet, a modernist poet, especially his latter poems.

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So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.³⁷

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
To dying eurs, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square,
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret,
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.”

Thus, although in a very cursory and imperfect manner, I have endeavored to convey to you my conception of the Poetic Principle. It has been my purpose to suggest that, while this Principle itself is, strictly and simply, the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty, the manifestation of the Principle is always found in *an elevating excitement of the Soul*, quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart, or of that Truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason. For, in regard to Passion, alas! its tendency is to degrade rather than elevate the Soul. Love, on the contrary—Love, the true, the divine Eros, the Uranian as distinguished from the Dionysian Venus—is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetical themes. And in regard to Truth—if, to be sure, through the attainment of a truth we are led to perceive a harmony where none was apparent before, we experience, at once the true poetical effect, but this effect is referable to the harmony alone, and not in the least degree to the truth which merely served to render the harmony manifest.

We shall reach, however, more immediately a distinct conception of what the true Poetry is, by mere reference to a few of the simple elements which induce in the Poet himself the true poetical effect. He recognizes the ambrosia, which nourishes his soul, in the bright orbs that shine in Heaven, in the volutes of the flower, in the clustering of low shrubberies, in the waving of the grain-fields, in the slanting of the tall, Eastern trees, in the blue distance of mountains, in the grouping of clouds, in the twinkling of half-hidden



Coming back to this discussion, Poe is about to wrap up his observations. And he says, “Although in a very cursory and imperfect manner, I have endeavoured to convey to you my conception of the Poetic Principle, it has been my purpose to suggest that, while this Principle itself is, strictly and simply, the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty, the manifestation of the Principle is always found in an elevating excitement of the soul”.

So this is what he ultimately focuses upon. If the poetry that you are reading, if it does not have the capacity to give and to produce an experience of an elevating excitement, then perhaps it is not good poetry at all. So his yardsticks are not technical in that sense. It is more subjective, it is more experience-based, that is what makes him again a true Romantic poet as well.

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which is the satisfaction of the Reason. For, in regard to Passion, alas! its tendency is to degrade rather than elevate the Soul. Love, on the contrary—Love, the true, the divine Eros, the Uranian as distinguished from the Dionysian Venus—is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetical themes. And in regard to Truth—if, to be sure, through the attainment of a truth we are led to perceive a harmony where none was apparent before, we experience, at once the true poetical effect, but this effect is referable to the harmony alone, and not in the least degree to the truth which merely served to render the harmony manifest.

We shall reach, however, more immediately a distinct conception of what the true Poetry is, by mere reference to a few of the simple elements which induce in the Poet himself the true poetical effect. He recognizes the ambrosia, which ascends his soul, in the bright robe that shone in Heaven; in the volutes of the flower; in the clustering of low shrubberies; in the waving of the grain-fields; in the slanting of the tall, Eastern trees; in the blue distance of mountains; in the grouping of clouds; in the twinkling of half-hidden brooks; in the gleaming of silver rivers; in the repose of sequestered lakes; in the star-mirroring depths of lonely wells. He perceives it in the songs of birds; in the harp of Æolus; in the sighing of the night-wind; in the repining voice of the forest; in the surf that complains to the shore; in the fresh breath of the woods; in the scent of the violet; in the voluptuous perfume of the hyacinth; in the suggestive odor that comes to him at eventide from far-distant, undiscovered islands, over dim oceans, illumable and unexplored. He owns it in all noble thoughts; in all marvellous notions; in all holy impulses; in all chaste, generous, and self-sacrificing deeds. He feels it in the beauty of woman; in the grace of her step; in the lustre of her eye; in the melody of her voice; in her soft laughter; in her sigh; in the harmony of the rustling of her robes. He deeply feels it in her winning endearments; in her burning enthusiasms; in her gentle charities; in her meek and devotional endurances; but above all—ah! far above all—he kneels to it; he worships it in the faith; in the purity; in the strength; in the altogether divine majesty of her love.

Let me conclude by the recitation of yet another brief poem—one very different in character from any that I have before quoted. It is by Motherwell, and is called "The Song of the Cavalier." With our modern and altogether rational ideas of the absurdity and impurity of warfare, we are not precisely in that frame of mind best adapted to sympathize with the sentiments, and thus to appreciate the real excellence, of the poem. To do this fully, we must identify ourselves, in fancy, with the soul of the old cavalier.

Then mount! then mount; leave gallants, all.



And he also talks about a conception of what true poetry is, and it is a very Romantic rhetoric over here that he reiterates. “By mere reference to a few of the simple elements which induce in the poet himself the true poetical effect”. And as we have already seen, it is very difficult to define what these true poetical effects are, what this experience of elevation is, and it is left at a very subjective experiential level throughout this work.

And he talks about how this could be seen in different things. Some of the examples being here he recognises the Ambrosia and then “he perceives it in the songs of birds, in the harp of Eolus, in the sign of the night-wind, in the repining voice of the forest, in the surf that complains to the shore”.

So the list is quite endless, and he also talks about how it could be felt in “the beauty of woman, the grace of her steps, in the lustre of her eye, in the melody of her voice, in her soft laughter, in her sigh, in the harmony of the rustling of her robes”. So, this is how in very subjective experiential terms, he talks about the experience of poetic elevation, the experience of good poetry, fine poetry that leaves behind a sensuous sensation which cannot be captured by any kind of technical details.

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sunbeams, in the waving of the grain-means, in the shimmer of the oak, cypress trees, in the blue distance of mountains, in the grouping of clouds, in the twinkling of half-hidden brooks, in the gleaming of silver rivers, in the repose of sequestered lakes, in the star-mirroring depths of lonely wells. He perceives it in the songs of birds, in the harp of Echo, in the sighing of the night-wind, in the rejoicing voice of the forest, in the surf that complains to the shore, in the fresh breath of the woods, in the scent of the violet, in the voluptuous perfume of the hyacinth, in the suggestive odor that comes to him at eventide from far-distant, undiscovered islands, over dim oceans, illimitable and unexplored. He owns it in all noble thoughts, in all unworldly motives, in all holy impulses, in all chivalrous, generous, and self-sacrificing deeds. He feels it in the beauty of woman, in the grace of her step, in the lustre of her eye, in the melody of her voice, in her soft laughter, in her sigh, in the harmony of the rustling of her robes. He deeply feels it in her winning endearments, in her burning enthusiasms, in her gentle charities, in her meek and devotional endurances, but above all—all! far above all—he kneels to it, he worships it in the faith, in the purity, in the strength, in the altogether divine majesty of her love.

Let me conclude by the recitation of yet another brief poem—one very different in character from any that I have before quoted. It is by Moberlywell, and is called "The Song of the Cavalier." With our modern and altogether rational ideas of the absurdity and impiety of warfare, we are not precisely in that frame of mind best adapted to sympathize with the sentiments, and thus to appreciate the real excellence, of the poem. To do this fully, we must identify ourselves, in fancy, with the soul of the old cavalier.

Then mount! then mount, brave gallants, all,
And don your helms again:
Denthe's couriers, Fame and Honor, call
Us to the field again.
No shrewish tenses shall fill our eye
When the sword-hilt's in our hand,
Hent-whole we'll part and no what sight
For the foyrest of the land;
Let piping swaine, and craven wight,
Thus weepe and pining crye,
Our business is like men to fight,
And hero-like to die!"



So, he concludes by quoting from another poem. Then he says, “With our modern and altogether rational ideas of the absurdity and impiety of warfare, we are not precisely in that frame of mind best adapted to sympathize with the sentiments, and thus to appreciate the real excellence of the poem. To do this fully, we must identify ourselves, in fancy, with the soul of the old cavalier”.

It also talks about how different poems lend themselves to different kinds of readings at different times. So it is also about the context which produces certain kinds of reading, which compels you to read particular works in particular ways. And this is what perhaps the revolution of that century also had done to the readings and to the writings of those times.

So, Poe is also trying to tell us that this experience, even when it is being very subjective, maybe it is also rooted in those multiple things which lie outside the self, which lie outside the work of art, outside the work of poetry. So, it is also about how particular kinds of circumstances induce certain kinds of experiences or help you to experience certain emotions in a better way or rather in a different way all together.

So with this, we come to the end of this discussion. I hope you have been able to see how Edgar Allan Poe showcases a different kind of Romanticism which is very subjective in nature and which also talks about tradition in radically new ways by detaching himself from some of the conventional ideas which dominate the understanding of poetry. But nevertheless, it talks about the ways in which personal engagement could perhaps give a better understanding, a better appreciation of what poetry is. I thank you for your time and your attention and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.