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## APPLICATION OF I.A.RICHARDS' THEORY OF SYNAESTHESIS IN THE STUDY OF POETRY

Dr. Pramod Prasad ([1943pramodprasad@gmail.com](mailto:1943pramodprasad@gmail.com))

Former Professor of English, L N Mithila University, Bihar, India

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The purpose of this paper is to show how the application of I.A.Richards' theory of 'Synaesthesia' can enable the readers of poetry to understand and appreciate a poem work of art in a better way. Richards' theory of 'synaesthesia' expounded in The Foundation of Aesthetics, leads us into the vital complex of warring impulses which generate the aesthetic momentum in the psyche of the artist. The synaesthetic state which conduces to the creation of a work of art has been described by Richards as the state of equilibrium:

*Not all impulses, it is plain, as usually excited are naturally harmonious, for conflict is possible and common. A complete systematisation must make the form of such an adjustment as will preserve free play to every impulse, with entire avoidance of frustration. In any equilibrium of this kind, however momentary, we are experiencing beauty.<sup>1</sup>*

The 'equilibrium' Richards is talking about need not be misconstrued as the state of oscillation between two sets of contradictory impulses which impairs the mind's potentials for action. Rather it implies a dynamic state of mind in which opposed pulls of life, by counter pressure, enrich and complete each other. In this unique organization, the rivalry of opposed impulses is avoided, not by excluding the impulses that prove to be incompatible with the emerging structure, but by giving them an opportunity for an unhindered outflow. In Principles of Literary Criticism, Richards observes that there are two ways in which the impulses of the psyche "may be organized; by exclusion and by elimination. Although every coherent state of mind depends upon both, it is permissible to contrast experience which wins stability and order through a narrowing of the response with those which widen it."<sup>2</sup> The most valuable states of experience, therefore, are described as those which have, as their special character, a "balanced poise, stable through its power of inclusion, not through the force of its exclusions."<sup>3</sup> Out of the disparate strands of life, the poet is free to make his choice, but he never does that, he is never committed to any particular course of action. Since to choose is fraught with the dangers of limiting the aesthetic focus, the poet owns the contradictions to the point of containment. Any attempt to

override the contradictions inherent in life is bound to lead to some kind of intellectually wrought philosophy of life, is bound to be lopsided in its impact. The poet, therefore, allows the conflicting impulses to have its sway on his sensibility. The opposed impulses of life, so easily discernible in great poets, enabled them to sustain their aesthetic dynamism in order that they may view and review their own experiences and transmute them into the texture of the work of art. It is an attempt to reflect the lively dance of vital creative force at the very bases of life where the opposing currents meet and impinge upon each other.

Works of great poets like John Donne, John Keats, W.B. Yeats, Robert Frost and Edna Millay show that the aesthetic enterprise necessarily involves the interactions and interanimation of the opposed pulls of life. John Donne's "A Valediction: forbidding mourning", for instance, achieves its effect because the experience rendered in the poem has its roots in the poet's sense of conflict between physical and spiritual love. Donne's much- admired image of "gold to aery thinness beate" gives the impression that the poet makes a passionate endeavour to transcend the dichotomy between physical love and spiritual love. But, the word "yet" at once reveals the poet's conviction that fusion of the two contrary aspects of love may not be possible, and even though they are momentarily fused, their essential identity remains intact:

*Our two souls, therefore, which are one,  
Though I must goe, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to aery thinnesse beate.<sup>4</sup>*

Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" is another instance in point. The poem achieves its peculiar tone and effectiveness as a result of the counter-pressure of the opposed notes of life. The poet expresses his impulse to escape the "weariness, the fever, and the fret"<sup>5</sup> of this harsh world so that he may lapse into the world of nature resonant with melodious song of the nightingale. But soon this yearning of the poet to steal away into the shadowy nowhere is subdued and chastened by his consciousness of the real world which tolls him back to his real to his "sole self". The tension between the opposed impulses remains unresolved till the end of the poem:

*Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music: - Do I wake or sleep?<sup>6</sup>*

It is, in fact, the inclusion and the balance of the contrary impulses of life which endows the poem with the dimensions of a great work of art. Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break" fails to achieve artistic coherence in spite of its communicative potentialities, merely because it reflects its unmistakable preference for the world of reverie in complete supersession of the world of mundane existence.

Elimination of details discordant with the poet's intellectually conceived philosophy of life may be a convenient exercise, but it ultimately leads to a trivial and anaemic poem as in the case of "Break, break, break" which expresses the poet's gloomy attitude towards life. A mature view of life requires some awareness of the complexities of human experience. Cleanth Brooks warns that "If the poet tries to include too much of the heterogeneous ideas, if he lacks the power of imagination to reconcile the disparities, if he increases tension beyond his power to control it, then the poem simply explodes into incoherence."<sup>7</sup> It is wise to agree to Brook's enunciation that tension is difficult to manage and that it depends on the potentialities of the poet to encompass it within the texture of the created poem; an unwary handling of it is bound to doom the total endeavour of the poet to an exercise in futility. The balance of the heterogeneous elements, if secured, endows the poem with variety, thus galvanizing the total personality of the readers into action. The balance of the opposites, the continual tension between the warring impulses, sustains the aesthetic momentum which conduces to the configuration of the specific experiences of the artists, to the crystallization of his emotions into an intellectual structure. Resolution of tension in intellectual terms, unlivened by the felicities of emotion, limits and constricts the poet's view of life and reality, thus failing to stimulate the readers intellectually and emotionally both. A really great poem is stimulant of thought and action both, reflecting a compact structure in which the disparate strands of existence, dream and reality, emotive impulse and intellectual crystallization, image and philosophy, find their apt placing, their consummation. The need for balance, rather than resolution, in a work of art is what is suggested by Keats' doctrine of "negative capability"- "that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."<sup>8</sup>

W.B. Yeats' statement that it is only out "of the quarrel with ourselves"<sup>9</sup>, that we make poetry emphasizes the truth that the creation of art is a dialectical process which involves a tension between the conflicting impulses, between the artist's awareness of what *is* that what should *be*,

between his conscious self and his buried self. His own poems serve as illustrations of this conviction. The conflict within the psyche of the poet whether he should opt for the world of natural beauty or for the world of pure being has achieved its metaphorical configuration in such poems as “ Among School Children “ and “ Sailing to Byzantium”. The impulse of the poet to enjoy the beauty of the body, as revealed in “Among School Children”, is thus sharply balanced by his equally strong impulse to enjoy intellectual beauty, symbolized by “ Byzantium”. The force behind Yeats’ poetry, indeed, owes its force to the tension between conflicting impulses.

Likewise, the greatness of Robert Frost’s poetry consists in his ability to strike a balance between the varied rhythms of life rather than to fuse them into a forced unity. It is his sincere endeavour to impregnate his poems with the basic inner tension of life that enables him to appraise the dialectics of creation, to find the metaphor for the flux of things that this world reveals. In “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”, he keeps himself poised between the contrasting poles of human experience, without making commitment to either of them. The fascination for the dark woods which induces in him a mood of reverie is thus sharply balanced by his absorbing practical concerns of life: “ Woods are lovely, dark and green/But I have promises to keep/And miles to go before I sleep/And miles to go before I sleep”.

To reflect the basic discordance of life and to suggest that a structure is yet discernible in the midst of the discordant facets of life have been the lime light of Edna Millay’s poetry also. Millay’s much-admired poem “Renascence” illustrates her conviction, achieved through the experience of the constantly shifting facets of life, which life operates through the interpenetration of opposed pulls, through the conflict of motives, wills and responses. The poem records the typical human response to the painful and the joyous aspects of life, both equally strong---the will to live and the will to die. The Rhythms of life and death are so poised in the poem as to remain in a state of dynamic equilibrium. The poem aims at the evocation of the setting of Millay’s childhood, with all its associations of joys and sorrows, with its gusto for expansiveness as well as its limiting impact on the impressionable self of the poet. The consciousness of the world’s weight of sin and suffering becomes so intense that it throws her “In infinite remorse of soul”, She could exclaim in the vein of shelley “Oh, lift me as wave a leaf, a cloud I fall upon the thorns of life: I bleed,” She longs for the relief o death and imagines herself buried in the cool earth. But soon she finds the anguish of existence countered by an

upsurge of sensitiveness to its beauty. Millay knows very well that happiness and misery are the obverse and reverse of the same coin and such she treats the moment of suffering as one of the various rhythms of life, Naturally her consciousness of the world's pain does not give a death blow to her love of life. Soon her unfading zest for life reveals itself in her passionate longing to be alive again when she hears the "friendly sound" of the rain pattering on the roof of her grave such a fascination for the sensuous side of life clearly indicates Millay's love for life. Millay might cry like Keats, "O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!", but this is just a momentary phase, a passing mood. Far from indulging in a life of sensation, she dallies with a vital and thrilling complex of experience. Millay, like E.A.Robinson, seems to maintain that there is something within man which prevents him from drifting towards pessimism, towards a state of unredeemable hopelessness and that "we may laugh and fight and sing/And of our transience here make offering/To an orient word that will not be erased."<sup>10</sup> The realization has given her sufficient strength to confront death to the finish even when she finds herself one day physically ill and helpless: "I shall put up a fight/I shall take it hard...Shrieking to the south/And clutching at the north."This reflects Millay's bold assertion of her sense of identity with the universe. She cries with her full strength to the south and the north as if they are her own kith and kin. Her determination to put up a fight with death might be contrasted to Emily Dickinson's approach to the theme of death. Dickinson does not accept death as distinct from life. She believes that life and death are the two facets of the same coin. Man's potentiality in life is one thing, but he has greater potentiality in death. Puritanism has taught Dickinson that this world is a mere phase, 'a test for life eternal', and it is only after death that one begins to 'live', death opening up avenues to a rich spiritual life. As such, in Dickinson's poetry, there are no signs of struggle, violence or defiance. Rather, we discern in Dickinson's poetry an attempt to merge the issues of life and death into a fresh imaginative structure. Millay, on the other hand, makes no effort towards reconciling these opposed poles of experience. She endeavors passionately to establish the identity of these desperate strands of life, so that they do not fade into each other. Such a poetic stance of life, as opposed to the philosophic one in which the note of discordance is completely stilled, conduces to the creation of work of art which proves exciting from the aesthetic point of view. A really great work of poetry is steeped in the realities of life; and the realities of life being so various, the business of the poet is to reflect them as they are, not as something encompassed within an intellectually wrought structure. The mind of the poet

operates to chasten the emotional stir caused in him by the dynamic experiences of his life, not to evolve a philosophy in which some of the basic facts of life are thrashed into background, Philosophy is, of course, an indispensable ingredient of a work of poetry, but it should remain there not as an end in itself, but merely as means to achieving an aesthetic configuration of the specific experiences of the poet. This is why the pure intellectualism of the eighteenth century poetry fails to touch the emotional chord of the readers; and the unrestrained emotional ardour of Romantic poetry sweeps them away from their moorings in the world of existence. Millay's effort to reflect the essential tension that exists between the disparate elements of life should not thus be misconstrued to be the symptom of a split sensibility; it is a creative effort towards revealing the "balance" of discordant qualities. Edna Millay's interest in the balance of opposites, as revealed in her poems, derives its force from Coleridgean aesthetics in which the interplay of opposites has been deemed to be the very basis of the operation of "imagination".

In sum, it is the poetry of the centre, the poetry in which the whole of the personality of the poet is allowed unhindered activity that defines the great poets' aesthetic commitment. But this concern with the total personality need not be misunderstood to imply passionate involvement in the personal elements. Our study of the works of great poets comes forward to show that such poets displayed consummate skill in the art of transmutation of the personal into the impersonal, the temporal into the timeless. A great poet, even a poet of considerable importance, of course, cannot afford to thrash his personality into background, for any attempt on his part to dislocate his personality is bound to lead to disorder and disruption. When Eliot says that "the poet has, not a personality to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality"<sup>11</sup>, he does not mean to establish that a poet must aim at complete extinction of personality and emotion. What Eliot means to suggest is the subjugation of the personal and private feelings rather than the personality of the poet. The poets who have been mentioned above are really capable of projecting the whole of their personality in their poems through various contradictory experiences vital to their existence. But what is strikingly singular about their poetry is their capacity to resist commitment to any definite attitude towards life. This lack of commitment does not imply a state of oscillation, rather it reflects a state of psychic poise which enables a poet to evoke and appraise the various rhythms of life with the detachment characteristic of great poetry.

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## About the Author

Dr. Pramod Prasad (b.1943) teaches at Christ Academy Institute for Advanced Studies & Christ Academy Institute of Law, Bangalore. He is a former Professor of English, L N Mithila University (India). He was also Professor and Chairman of the Dept. of English, Faculty of Arts, Hodeidah University (Yemen). He obtained his Ph.D. from Bihar University and PGDTE from Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (now known as EFLU). Two of his current books on “How to learn Phonetics and Spoken English” and “Fundamental Concepts of Phonetics” (in Press) are slated to be published by the end of November 2017.