

Poeticisation of the Human Being and the World: The Future Poetry and the Poetic Future

Any discussion about the future of literature concerns the future of the human being and of the whole world. Such a discussion must not only have poetry as its central theme, but the discussion itself must become poetic if there is to be any future worth discussing.¹

Never in the history of the world has so much literature – and so much poetry – been written and published as is in our own age. And yet little of what is written can truly be said to be poetic.

Here I would like to draw attention to a distinction that Owen Barfield also points to – that of the difference between poetic experience and poetic form, i.e., something we experience as being truly poetic, and something that looks like a poem on a piece of paper.²

What is truly essential for the future of the human being is that we come to an appreciation of poetic experience – which, in Barfield's term, can be considered as “a felt change of consciousness” (whereby we come to see the world differently thereafter) – poetic experience where we are able to raise our consciousness from that of the everyday (prosaic) to a higher (poetic) level.

In the past, this poetic consciousness was one that was *given* to human beings. Human beings themselves were poetic. This can be clearly seen in their literature. The stories they told (such as the ‘Dreamtime’ stories of the Australian Aborigines) and, later, the stories they wrote down (*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *The Odyssey* for two examples among many) were poetic. Human beings lived in a poetic world, and the words they used embodied this.

Gradually, however, consciousness and words themselves have slid down the slope from the poetic to the prosaic. As a consequence, today we have both thinking and words that are essentially prosaic – essentially dead.

The upside to this is that human beings of today have the possibility of freedom. That is, because the poetic consciousness of previous times was given, freedom was not possible. Their poetry was provided for, in a way.³ Today it is up to us. The gifts that were once bestowed must now become ones that we freely choose to fashion. We now have the possibility of becoming freely (and therefore, perhaps, *truly*) poetic.

Part of this process clearly involves a freely chosen climbing of a freely fashioned ladder up to the light-filled heights of the poetic – both in terms of consciousness and in terms of understanding of words / language – where we ourselves become free, active participants. This represents not a return to some ideal, poetic home, but of making a poetic home of this place. In so doing we can elevate words (and ourselves) to their rightful place in the poetic, through our freely chosen usage.

¹ This piece represents only a very small contribution to an ongoing discussion that we are all involved in.

² See Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study In Meaning* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928).

³ For one of many examples which illustrates this in different ways throughout history, see the muse-inspired writings of Homer's *The Odyssey* which begins: “Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways...” trans. Richard Lattimore (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

This poeticising of consciousness and the word undoubtedly includes a greater capacity for the metaphoric. It is essential, however, that this not be a subjective use of pictures, but one that arises out of a heightened, objective, poetic consciousness. In ascending to the poetic realm of the heights, we are also better able to find the right pictures and words to express this objectively experienced change of consciousness.

For example, when we talk about higher consciousness itself, we don't talk about it as a tunneling down into the dark centre of the earth, nor as a standing in the midst of a busy, restless city – but we associate it with metaphors such as mountaintops, clear skies, vast panoramas, the soaring flight of an eagle. We use words like 'clarity' and 'light.' When we have new ideas (which always come from the poetic realm), we talk of 'the light going on,' or that we 'see the light.' We even use terms like 'brainstorming' as a reference to lightning as new thoughts. These are poetic pictures that point to objective experiences we share. That these experiences occur on the subjective stage of our inner life is irrelevant. If we are really able to live into such pictures, the duality of subjectivity and objectivity is overcome.

This points us to the actual aim of such poetic work – namely, that it is able to create the opportunity for the reader (or the 'other') to ascend to such poetic realms themselves; that it offers itself up as a ladder for all those who wish to climb it; that it can stand as a book to be read whereby the reader, if they really enter into it with all their will, can become the true author, the true poet of the work as it then appears in the poetic sphere.⁴

The entire world can, in fact, be seen as a collection of poems (or even one giant poem) to be read.⁵ It is, in a way, waiting for our reading, and for our subsequent authorship or 'poetship.' Otherwise it remains on the level of the prosaic. This reading can be seen as (true) science. Art, then, can be viewed as what we actually *do* with the reading we have experienced on the level of the poetic.⁶

In this way, everything we do in the world can become artistic – can become poetic.⁷ That is, if we are able to act out of this poetic sphere, our whole life can become one imbued with art, imbued with poetry – we can become poets in every sphere of the social life, and live a kind of 'social poetry.' We, as human beings, can become social poets, which includes, importantly, our interactions with one another. We can, as it were, wake up in the poetic nature – in the poetry – of one another as human beings. To be able to do this is a central (if not *the*) central element if any kind of social poetry (and therefore poetic future) is to unfold.⁸

By acting from out of such poetic understandings, therefore, we can strive towards a poeticisation of not only literature and poetry itself (which is so desperately needed), but of everything that lives in the cultural and spiritual realm, as well as the political and economic realms – as individuals, as groups, or as humanity.

In doing so we can lift ourselves up from the dry husk of the prosaic, and avoid further descent into the darkened, non-human catacombs of the 'sub-prosaic'; in so doing we can bring about our own much-needed ascent to the mountaintop,

⁴ Orland Bishop has also articulated this during a workshop in Järna, Sweden, July, 2009.

⁵ See Georg Kühlewind, *The Logos Structure of the World: Language as a Model of Reality* (Virginia: Lindisfarne Press, 1986).

⁶ See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in Rudolf Steiner, "The Activity of Knowing and Artistic Creativity," in *The Science of Knowing* (New York: Mercury Press, 1988).

⁷ See also Joseph Beuys & Volker Harlan, *What is Art?* (England: Clairview Books, 2004).

⁸ Experience shows that we will, undoubtedly, fail over and over again. But, like any evolving artist, ongoing practice, striving and experiments are fundamental for further growth, as is a capacity to turn failures into lessons by which to develop further.

carrying with us the gifts of our original descent – the gifts of freedom and love; in so doing we can, as co-authors, artistically ‘write’ the most important poem of all – the poeticisation of the human being and of the world.

John Stubley

westrive.org, September 17, 2009