

A. Pope as a Poet (7)

Pope's position as a poet has been a source of controversy. There are some critics who deny him the very name of a poet, while some give him the first place. Stephen treats Pope's works as 'rhymed prose'. Arnold shows his dislike when he says, "Dryden and Pope are not classics of our Poetry, they are classics of our Prose." A Nicoll concludes with the question, 'was Pope a poet?' But in his own time the reading men of letters were quick enough to recognise his merits. Many critics ranked him as the greatest of his contemporary poets. One critic puts a counter question and says 'if Pope be not a poet, where Poetry is to be found.' Several have no hesitation in placing him on a par with Dante and Shakespeare.

An impartial study reveals that Pope belongs to an age of prose, intellect, reason and rationality. He gave to his age the Poetry it needed. It would not be justified to judge his Poetry by the Romantic criteria. Of course, Pope could not reach the height of poetic grandeur of some Romantic poets. He lacked inspiration, lofty sentiments, chivalrous devotion, lyrical gift and strong emotional passion. He had no ear of subtlest melody of verse. He lacked lyricism and musical symmetry. He had little creative ability and sensuous beauty.

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As a matter of fact, Pope's poems are not creative but critical. They examine the follies and foibles of his contemporary fashionable society. They are didactic and satirical, for he thinks that no writing is good that does not tend to better mankind. 'The Rape of the Lock' is an exposure of the vices and weaknesses of the fashionable society. The Essay on Man is philosophical and moral in tone. The Essay on Criticism is an epitome of

critical canons. The Dunciad is a piece of bitter sat
sature against dunces

But, Pope's poems are limited in subject and style. They take people of their own class and deal with their experiences. Common interest and aspiration His poetic Muse never goes to the people of countryside. So the Romantics hate him for his artificial outlook His style is wholly restricted to the heroic couplet, used in didactic strain.

With all these limitations Pope's work is powerful and effective. His wit is keen and satire burns like acid. He has the gift of imaginative intellectual perception, and his brain works by the incalculable ^{process} perception of intuition. His versification is mechanical, but his thoughts spring from his imagination. He possesses a lovely fancy, a power of using words so consummate that he has left his mark on Language. He expresses what all feel but all cannot say. After Shakespeare, he is the most quoted poet. Even the common place ideas are expressed with such force that they get the accent of proverbs.

Pope is a perfect spokesman of a particular class of society. His poetry is an authentic mirroring of his time. With all its minutes. If Shakespeare deals with man's passion and irate emotions Pope delineates manners and motives which spring from social habits and institutions. Really, Pope is a poet of civilization of town and fashionable society and none have voiced their thoughts and feelings with so exquisite beauty.

The 'Rape of the Lock' abounds in many best couplets that show Pope's poetic imagination and unrivalled gift of expression. His language is full of phrases and words which owe their value to their suggestiveness and not

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to their exact meaning. His subject is mainly human nature, interpreted in the 18th Century. He was very much sensitive to the manners, passions, prejudices and sentiments of his day and portrayed them with rare delicacy and felicity of diction. See the following lines:-

" O thoughtless mortal mortals! ever blind to fate,
Too soon dejected and too soon elate
Sudden, their honours shall be snatched away
And cursed for ever their victorious day."

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