INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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PREFACE

This book, which the Asia Publishing House commissioned us to write, is neither a History of English Literature nor a Guide to Literary Theory; it is what the title clearly implies—an *Introduction* to the *Study* of English Literature. What we have tried to do is to combine diverse elements—literary theory, linguistic and literary history, cultural history and the history of ideas—that are relevant to the study and enjoyment of English literature. But although the main emphasis in the book is on the study of English literature in terms of Western critical categories, there are also references to literature in other languages and the criteria enunciated in Indian treatises on poetics. The total aim of the book is simply to help the student to view English literature in its varied extrinsic forms and appropriate backgrounds, and also to see it in its true inwardness and universality.

While we are no doubt jointly responsible for the entire book, in the first instance the division of work was as follows:

K. R. S. : Parts I (except Chapter II) and III
P. N. : Chapter II of Part I, and Part II

Some matter from our earlier writings published independently has been incorporated in a suitably modified form in the present book. Belonging as we do to two generations (one of the collaborators being the other's daughter as well as former pupil), in a joint work like this it was inevitable that the younger collaborator should have undertaken most of the initial spade-work and the drudgery of preparing the 'copy' and seeing it through the press, while the other should have assumed the main responsibility for planning the work and giving it the final form. The circumstance that we happened to spend the long Summer vacation of 1965 together facilitated constant consultation, discussion and review, and this has contributed to whatever coherence and unity of tone the book may have.

A book like this necessarily derives from earlier studies, and many of these are listed in our Select Bibliography; but we ven-

ture to think that this *Introduction* has no close parallel, for the ground that we have tried to cover is not covered elsewhere, or in the same way. We therefore hope that this book will give the student of English literature the kind of assistance that he needs in a compact and convenient form, and also stimulate further critical explorations on his own.

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14 September 1966

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Part I

Backgrounds and Approaches

I

THE MAKING OF LITERATURE AND THE USE OF LITERATURE

ART, literature, poetry: the words are in common use, but if we were asked to state what exactly we meant by them we should pause for an answer. 'Art' seems to involve 'skill' of a sort in doing things: the making of a house, a table, a vase, a delicacy, a piece of embroidery, or a temple, a statue, a painting, a tune or a poem; in every instance, some 'skill' is called for, there is need for the play of 'art'. From a session of purposive action has resulted something that we can use or 'enjoy'. It is customary to distinguish between 'practical' or 'useful' arts like house-building, carpentry, pottery, cooking and weaving and the 'fine' arts—architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature. Yet it is not as though we cannot take delight in the 'useful' arts or that the 'fine' arts are merely 'extras' we can do without. We need cabbages, and we need roses, and so we grow (if we can) *both* cabbages and roses.

Life makes demands of all kinds and we have somehow to learn to meet them. There is the urge to live, and there is the desire to live well. The so-called 'practical' arts are of demonstrable use, but even the 'fine' arts are supposed to have 'value'—or a special kind of 'use'—for us. We grow cabbages to be able to live and grow roses to be privileged to taste the savour of life. The *Gita* says, *Yogah Karmasu kausalam*: Yoga (the Art of Life) is perfection in works, in the performance of actions. To do it well (that is, 'artistically'), one has to be engaged in the action with total attention, yet one has also to rise above the taint of attachment and one has to view the completed action as something autonomous and unique. Of course there are differences between 'action' and 'action', 'art' and 'art', but it is largely only a difference in degree, not kind.

The 'fine arts', then, are of little use, but could be of much 'value', and when we talk of Art we generally have these 'fine arts' in mind. In our attempts to define Art we are driven to use

question-begging terms like 'value', 'beauty', 'truth', 'reality', 'knowledge'. Impressions come to us from the outside world through the windows of our senses: we see, we hear, we smell, we touch, we taste. We share this kind of experience with the entire animal kingdom. But with man there is something more as well. Man is a thinking animal. He is a talking animal. He broods, he dreams, he looks before and after, he forms mental images, he forges the filiations between the outer world and the world within. By these means sensory experience is qualified and heightened, and there is found room for an endless enrichment of experience and extension of knowledge. If man is a thinking animal, he is also a social animal. He would fain share his inner experience with others. And, even otherwise, not until he externalises his inner experience (that is, gives form to his dream or vision) can he really come to terms with it. It is the external world that impinges on the mind to start the process of image-making: only when the image is externalised does the process end.

How is the artist to externalise—or give 'form' to—his inner experience, his singular dream or vision? He has to make use of some material medium or other—stone, or bronze, or colour, or sound, or symbol—something that could be seen or heard, or that could stimulate thought; and sometimes the nature of the artist's experience, the intensity of his dream or vision, chooses the medium, and sometimes the medium available conditions the work of the artist. Architecture, sculpture and painting are called the 'arts of the eye', or 'visual' arts or 'space-arts', because these are to be seen, they are three—or at least two—dimensional; and music and literature are the arts of the ear, or 'time-arts', for these are to be *heard,* and the sense of sequence is important, for there is a beginning, a middle and an end in musical and literary composition alike. These different arts have their particular possibilities and also peculiar limitations, and the German philosopher Hegel arranged them as under so as to form a descending series in terms of concreteness which is also an ascending series in terms of suggestiveness:

Architecture, three-dimensional, spatially expansive, materially substantial as well as symbolic.

Sculpture, three-dimensional, an approach to an ideal image of the living body, apparently static yet suggestive of inner poise or tension; the sculptor presents Laocoon's struggle with the serpents, stresses the tension of suffering, while the poet Virgil is able to render the fierce agonising cries and the whole pathos of the situation.

Painting, two-dimensional, but the play of colour facilitates far greater freedom in the rendering of life and Nature than the solid media of sculpture or architecture. "A good painter", says Leonardo da Vinci, "has two chief objects to paint, man and the intention of his soul". It is the latter that exercises his art, for he has to make the suggested movement of the body reflect the working of the mind, and the very attitude suggests the fluttering of the heart or the disturbance in the soul.

Music, in which the three dimensions of space are wholly eliminated, while the stream of sound (like the play of colour in painting) tries to render the inner emotional experience of the artist.

Poetry (or literature), which employs language, an essentially symbolic medium, to render the inner landscape of the mind or the passions, feelings, agitations and ecstasies of the heart and soul. Literary art is supposed to be capable of universal expression because in a way it comprises the other arts as well.

We may thus talk of the 'architecture' of an epic or a novel, the literary 'sculpture' that has given us some of the unforgettable characters in imaginative literature, the 'painting' of a memorable scene in poetry or fiction, or the melodic richness of an ode or an elegy. And in the art of Tragic Drama all the other arts—architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry—as also the arts of acting and dance—could be held together in splendorous unity.

Just as a significant segment of the external world, impinging on the sensitive mind of the artist, starts the artistic process, the finished work of art being at once like and unlike what had inspired it: so also a work of art could itself impinge on the artist's sensibility and start a fresh artistic process, the new artistic creation being at once like and unlike the work that had inspired it. Velasquez's 'Two Dwarfs' has been the inspiration behind Picasso's painting on the same theme. A skylark inspired Shelley's poem, and Shelley's skylark inspired Hardy's poem. Benjamin Britten turned Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into a modern opera. Some unknown artists raised the Pallava citadel at Mahabalipuram, but today its magnificent ocean-swept ruins become the subject of poems by James Merrill, John Press and Louis

MacNeice. The fall of Eve and Adam has been described by Milton in *Paradise Lost,* Book IX, and also by Blake in his paintings. Life inspires art: Poetry inspires painting, one form inspires another: and sometimes there is also a translation from one artistic medium into another—Drama into opera, sculpture into painting, or painting into music. The intimate relationship between the arts is also suggested by expressions such as 'architecture is frozen music', 'a painting is mute poetry', and 'poetry is a speaking picture'; and we have Horace's simple law of equivalence, "as is painting, so is poetry". Always is the artist imaginatively seized by the 'subject': and when he tries to render his vision of life or art into a fresh artistic creation, he needs must bring into his task both essential fidelity to the 'subject' and total integrity to his artistic conscience.

We have seen that literature, since it has to handle the symbolic medium of language, is not only the most elusive of the arts, but also the most inclusive. Just as architecture involves more than an edifice in stone, painting more than a mere daub of colour, so also literature involves more than a mere assortment of words, more even than exercises in grammatical language. What, then, is literature? We might here begin with John Morley's description of literature as consisting "of all the books—and they are not so many—where moral truth and human passion are touched with a certain largeness, sanity and attraction of form." Literature is a collection of books (poems, dramas, novels), and there can be no exclusion in respect of the country of origin, the time of composition, or the language medium. It is a global heritage, and every year adds to its opulence. It is a well of living waters, although we may at one time perceive but a part of it and can taste only even less of it. A concern with man's inner life—his passions, his feelings, his thoughts—is the distinguishing character of literature. This concern is allied to a sense of moral truth, a feeling for universality, a grasp of causal relations, and an instinct for beautiful form.

A distinction is sometimes made between 'pure' and 'applied' literature. Poetry is not only 'pure' literature, but is the purest of the pure. Poetic drama, fiction like *Pride and Prejudice,* and essays like those of Lamb or Beerbohm are also classed as 'pure'

literature. But isn't Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* literature? How about Darwin's *The Origin of Species* or Boswell's *Life of Doctor Johnson?* History, science, biography—when do these gain the dignity of literature (or at least 'applied literature')? When historical, scientific, or biographical knowledge is massed together and imparted in such a way that the truth of fact or truth of logic is wedded to the more purely artistic qualities of 'largeness, sanity and attraction of form', then history, science and biography too become literature. In 'pure' literature —the sonnets of Shakespeare, the odes of Keats, the essays of Lamb—what concerns us is only the writer's fidelity to his own experience. In literature we look especially, not for fact or science or logic, but for human emotion and feeling, the play of the imagination, the discipline of thought as revealed in the beauty of form. And it is as poetry that literary art achieves its finest efflorescence.

Since the beginnings of civilised debate, critics and philosophers have posed certain fundamental questions about poetry (or literature). How does poetry come to be produced? What is the anatomy of poetry? What does poetry do to us? These are really one broad question on the origins, nature and uses of poetry. In Western literary tradition, the debate goes back to Plato and Aristotle, indeed to Socrates himself. In a Platonic dialogue, *Ion*, Socrates is made to say:

> ...the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him.
>
> (Jowett's translation)

The Socratic view, then, is that poetry is the creation of sundry inspired individuals. The conscious mind is in abeyance, and a sudden frenzy takes control: and the words come, as if unbidden, from a source extraneous to the poet himself.

This is one extreme view. The other extreme view is associated with the 19th century French literary historian, Taine, who evolved the formula of the *race,* the *milieu* and the *moment* to explain the origin of all literature. By 'race' Taine meant the continuing characteristics of a distinctive people (say the Anglo-

Saxons) from generation to generation: the *milieu* means the complex of physical, political, social, cultural and institutional surroundings: the 'moment' means the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age. The 'race' and the 'milieu' are more or less 'constants' for a national literature, while the 'variable' is provided by the 'moment', say the coming of the Renaissance, the impact of the French Revolution, or the World Wars of our century. But of course even the other two factors—the race and the milieu—are subject to a process of change. Races mix and mingle and fuse as they have done in India, England and elsewhere: there are social, political and institutional changes over a period of centuries. Even the physical environment could change, although this is more difficult. The 'frontier' region of one century becomes central to a civilisation in a subsequent age. The terrors of African or South American jungles, the aridity of desert sands in Asia or Africa, the inaccessible regions of central and northern Australia—even these might be tamed in course of time. Men and women of the Anglo-Saxon race who have settled down in Canada or Australia have to make adjustments with a physical environment basically different from that of England. Indians living near the Himalayas, or in Rajasthan with its bleak sandy stretches, have to come to terms with a different set of environmental factors from those that confront people in Kerala or Mysore. Taine was no doubt wrong to reduce it all to a formula, as if the three factors—race, milieu, moment—automatically (like elements thrown into a crucible) produced the distinctive literature of the age. The force of these external circumstances was the same for Chaucer as for Langland, for Shakespeare as for Ben Jonson, for Hardy as for Meredith. How is it that, the determining factors being the same, the men of letters in any age are but a few, and no two of them are exactly alike? The backgrounds—race, milieu, moment—certainly help to define to some extent the quality of the literature produced in a particular age. The 'material' of literature is usually provided by the age: the language of the age is the tool which the writer has to handle as his efficient instrument of expression: and the current tastes of the people are another determining factor. The men of the Heroic Ages of old created the Epic: the city-centred sophisticated ages evolved the Drama, the Industrial

age the Novel, and our modern technological age the Cinema and TV. While there may be some truth in these broad generalisations, it is even more true that, after all, literary creation is an individual achievement. It is legitimate to look upon a writer as a creature of his age, owing much to it, being conditioned by its climate of thought and opinion, and speaking in the idiom of the age. On the other hand, his writing isn't necessarily a 'mirror of the times'; more often than not, the writer but articulates nonconformity or dissidence or protest. For example, Dickens and Carlyle and Ruskin and Arnold in their several ways raised their voices against the cruelties and complacencies of the Victorian Age. Is literature, then, only a social, racial product, the eruption of a region, the precipitate thrown by the Time Spirit—or is it really a creation of sundry men and women, driven by their daemons, racked by their pains and fears, sustained by their dreams and visions? Which is the whole truth about the adventure of swimming: the river and the current, or the swimmer? Whether the swimmer swims with or against the current, although without the current there is no swimming, neither is there any swimming without the swimmer himself. In his inner life man is something unique, autonomous: yet no man is wholly an island. Thus although literature, being the image of man's inner life, has its autonomous impulsion and rights, yet since literature has the social function of making a bridge between man and society (or man and collective man), it cannot wholly ignore the claims of the outside world. While conceding that the swimmer alone is central to the adventure of swimming, we should also stress the fact that the river and the current form the necessary background.

But this emphasis on the writer's primary responsibility for literary creation should not be allowed to harden into a dogma. Socrates attributed literary creation to the frenzy that suddenly seizes the poet. Milton said that a good book is the precious lifeblood of a master-spirit. Rilke thought that a work of art is of an infinite loneliness. We have seen, on the contrary, that the world too—the environment—has a part to play in the matter of literary creation. There is a confrontation or a collision between the poet and the world, and poetry somehow results. But exactly how? When Shakespeare makes his Theseus say—

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name—

he seems to imply that the poet's creative frenzy, when it acts upon the heaven-earth continuum, projects through the power of image-making vistas of reality undreamt of before. The extreme Socratic view that the poet is out of his senses when he indites poetry rules out any rational discussion of the problem of poetic creation. The other extreme view that tries to explain the origin of poetry with reference to factors wholly external to the poet reduces poetry to an item of industrial manufacture. While there are clearly understood technological processes that govern the production of a motor car, an aeroplane, or a refrigerator, there are no such generally understood or universally applicable processes for poetic (or artistic) creation. All that we can say is that *both* the external world and the poet's own inner life are somehow involved in the 'mystery' of poetic creation. Quite obviously there are innumerable ways in which the two elements—the world and the poet—could come together. Again, we have to draw a distinction between the poet's actual experience and his imaginative experience, for after all it is the quality of the latter that makes him a poet. Certain details in a poet's actual life (Shakespeare's relations with his patron, Pope's quarrel with Addison, or Keats's consumption) may have had a relevance to his poetry; yet we go to poetry (or literature), not to learn something about the author's life, but to enact our own imaginative life by placing ourselves for the nonce on a level with his imaginative experience as presented in his poetry. With certain writers (Shelley, Lamb), and with certain forms of literature (the lyric, the essay), the 'personal' element may be rather stronger than with other writers (Keats, Jane Austen), or other forms of literature (the epic, the novel). But it is the 'mark' of the greatest literature that it is 'seraphically' free from the taint of personality. In the making of a poem, the poet has more than a mechanical or merely permissive role to play. "The poet", says T. S. Eliot, "has, not a

'personality' to express, but a particular medium . . . in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways". Poetry is neither emotion, nor recollection in tranquillity, but a kind of ignition and the new thing resulting from such ignition. Eliot's notion is that, in the making of a poem, the mind of the poet functions merely as a catalytic agent. Just as a platinum filament, itself unchanged, induces the fusion of oxygen and sulphur dioxide into sulphurous acid, so also the poet's mind, itself unaffected, brings about the combination 'in peculiar and unexpected ways' of 'impressions and experiences'. But this is to assign a too negative role to the poet's mind and personality. In his *Poetic Process* (1953), George Whalley cites another scientific parallel to indicate the nature of poetic creation. Like a quantum invading the atom, something from the external world (the 'physical reality') impinges on the mind or sensibility (the 'psychic reality'): this is the paradeigmatic event which disturbs the balance of the poet's inner life. A process of readjustment follows, and the writing of the poem is an integral part of this process. This translation of the paradeigmatic event into the poem is achieved through 'symbolic extrication' (what Sanskrit writers call *pratibha,* or what Coleridge calls the power of the secondary imagination)—the experience is rendered as a system of symbols, as a linguistic artefact. When the poem has been written, the poet returns to his 'neutral state', and the poem has been launched on its autonomous existence.

But of course these 'scientific' analogies do not really explain the 'mystery' of poetic creation. All that we can say is that external Reality and the poet's inner universe are both somehow involved in the poetic process, and the poem itself, once it is finished, has an individuality of its own which sets it apart as something autonomous, unique.

While poets have been honoured in the past as *Rishis* and *Kavis,* seers and makers, from time to time thinking people have also entertained doubts regarding the influence of poetry on the common people. As mentioned earlier the three inquiries—how poetry originates, what poetry is, and what effect it has on us—are really the three facets of the same problem. We saw that in the Socratic dialogue, *Ion,* Plato tried to deny a rational basis to

the effusions of the poets. Plato was a poet turned philosopher of the fifth century B.C. when people were getting a little suspicious about the whole business of poetry. Already Greek literature had passed its noon-time glory. Homer and Hesiod, Pindar and Sappho, Aeschylus and Sophocles had fixed the pattern of epic, lyric and tragedy. But the average Athenian felt doubtful: Was poetry, after all, worth while? Was it not indeed positively injurious? As the poets wrote in a mood of frenzy, there couldn't be much logic behind what they wrote. Since the poets themselves couldn't explain their 'meaning', can we ever be quite sure whether it is wholesome or only subversive? It should thus be idle to look for steady wisdom or sane guidance in poetry. In other dialogues, and notably in *The Republic,* Plato returned to the attack and mounted a formidable offensive against poetry. Foremost came the philosophical objection, which was really a corollary of his theory of knowledge. There is on the one side the realm of transcendent ideas, and on the other this terrestrial realm of appearances that we know: the reality of Being in contrast to the phenomenon of Becoming. The poets but imitate the latter which is no more than a pale imperfect misleading shadow of the Real: thus a poet's images are twice removed from Reality. Plato further thought that the soul of man is the charioteer guiding and controlling the two horses—the higher and the lower passions—while making a passage through the embattled ways of the world. Poets find it easier to portray the unwholesome and violent passions (as we might say, the *tamasic* and the *rajasic*), and thus appeal to man's irrational part, unleashing violent passions like pity and terror. Besides, the poets—including even Homer—tell such shameful stories of Gods and men, misrepresenting the Gods and misleading humanity. The 'heroes' are often unheroic, the just suffer more than the wicked, and even allegorical interpretations hardly satisfy. Occasioned by frenzy, twice removed from Truth, trafficking in shameful fictions, and pandering to the baser passions, poetry deserves condemnation all round.

Although Benedetto Croce has described Plato with some justification as "the author of the only great negation of art" in the whole history of ideas, another part of the truth has been stressed by Saintsbury when he says that "the beauty of literature is hard-