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THE IMAGE AS A FORM OF ARTISTIC THINKING

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ABSTRACT

The image in art is like a rocket which has been launched into a certain orbit and is following the prescribed trajectory. It has its own logic and develops following its inner laws which are not to be violated. The artist “launches” the image in a certain direction, too, but having done that, he cannot interfere in its evolution without going against artistic verity. The life material on which a work or art is based acts as a guide at times leading the author to a rather unexpected finale. The image in art is an instance of individualised generalisation, which reveals features essential for a range of phenomena in the individual and through the individual doing it in a concrete sensual form. The individual and the universal are mutually interlaced in life. The universal can exist only in the individual and through the individual. The dialectics of the universal and the individual in thinking corresponds to their dialectical unity in life. In art, every character is a type and at the same time an individual, a “familiar stranger”. A type is artistic generalization achieved through individualisation. The image is inimitable, its uniqueness is absolute. Even treating the same material and discussing the same subject proceeding from identical ideological positions, different artists will produce different works, each marked by the artist’s individuality.

INTRODUCTION

Imagery

“Imagination is more important than knowledge” EINSTEIN

The terms image and imagery have connotations and meanings, Imagery as a general term covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of mind and any sensory or extra-sensory experience. The term has often been applied particularly to the figurative language used in a work, especially to its metaphors and similes. Images suggesting further meanings and associations in ways that go beyond the fairly simple identifications of metaphor and simile are often called symbols. The critical emphasis on imagery in the mid-20th century, both in new criticism and in some influential studies of Shakespeare, tended to glorify the supposed concreteness of literary works by ignoring matters of structure, convention, and abstract argument; thus Shakespeare’s plays were read as clusters or patterns of ‘thematic imagery’ according to the predominance of particular kinds of image (of animals, of disease, etc). Without reference to the action or to the dramatic meaning of character’s speeches.

DISCUSSION**Metaphor, Paradox, Association**

The artist thinks in images. The image is a figurative metaphorical thought which characterises one phenomenon through another. The artist causes phenomena to clash producing a spark which shows life in a new light. According to Anandavardhana (9th cent.A.D), in old Indian art, figurative thinking (dhvani) had three basic types: poetic figure (alamkara-dhvani), sense (vastu-dhavni), and mood (rasa-dhvani). Each was evolved on the basis of the laws of artistic association, i.e discovering common features in entirely different phenomena. In the earliest work of art, the metaphorical quality of artistic thinking is probably most strikingly manifest. Objects made by Scythian craftsmen in the animalistic style present fanciful combination of existing animal shapes, such as cats with birds, talons and beaks, or gryphon's who have fishes' bodies, human faces and birds' wings. Alaskan tribes produced drawings and masks in which human and animal shapes are interwoven. One of the masks is an otter with a life like body and demoniac face. Pictures of mythological creatures, such as dragons, the goddess Nuwa, a snake with a woman's head (ancient China); Anubis a man with a jackal's head (ancient Egypt), a centaur, a horse with a man's head (Ancient Greece), of half-man, half-deer(Lopari) can serve as an example of the image in art. Here, the artist's mentality joins the objects in such a way that each is both preserved and dissolved in another, as a result of which an unheard-of creature emerges which fancifully combines the features of its ancestors.

The Egyptian sphinx is a lion-man. It is neither a lion nor a man, but a man represented through a lion and a lion represented through a man. The "lionesque" in the man and the "human" in the lion are blended in such a way that a new being appears which does not exist in nature but which helps man to comprehend both nature and his own self. The fantastic combination of man beast reveals man's regal power and his real supremacy over the world. Logical thinking establishes a hierarchy of phenomena; the image describes one phenomenon through another drawing a parallel between two independently existing phenomena. That is the essence of artistic thinking; it is not superimposed on the object but is an organic product of a comparison between objects and of their interaction. These features of the image are very obvious in a passage by the roman author Aelian; "touch a swine, and it will naturally squeal. It has neither fur nor milk nothing but flesh. When touched, it knows at once what threatens it, for it is well aware of how it can be used by man. Tyrants behave in a similar manner: they are always filled with suspicion and are afraid of everything, since they know that, like a swine, they have to give their life away to anyone". Similar to the sphinx, the image in Aelian's passage is constructed in accordance with the principle of extended metaphor. But while the sphinx is a lion-man, Aelian's tyrant is a man-swine. The parallel drawn between two creatures which normally stand for a part has produced new knowledge showing the reader that tyranny is beastly and disgusting.

The structure of the artistic image is not always as transparent as in the case of the sphinx or the swinish tyrant. But the type of thinking remains the same in more complex images as well. For instance, Lev Tolstoy or Fyodor Dostoyevsky portrayed their characters through the reflections and shadows they cast at one another and at life, and the other way round. In war and peace, Prince Andrei is depicted through his love for Natasha, his relationship with his father, the sky of Austerlitz, and a thousand things and people to whom, as he realizes on his deathbed, every person is linked. The image always brings together that which is seemingly incompatible, thus revealing hitherto unknown aspects and relations of real things.

The artist thinks in associations. To Trigorin, a character in Chekhov's play *The Seagull*, a cloud looks "like a grand piano" a gleaming splinter of a wine bottle and a dark shadow cast by the mill-wheel provide him with all the needs to imagine a moonlit night, while the fate of a girl reminds him of that a bird. He suggests that plot for a short story; a young girl lives on the shore-lake.....she loves the lake like a seagull, and is happy and free like a seagull. A strange man comes upon her quite by chance and ruins her life just out of boredom, in the same way as an inexperienced hunter shoots a seagull. In a certain sense the image is built here by "bringing together" phenomena which are far actually apart from one another.

A WEALTH OF MEANING AND MEANING HELD BACK

While in science and logic everything is definite and unambiguous, the meaning of a work of art can be interpreted in a number of ways, for artistic image is as rich meaning and significance as life itself.

One of the things that make the image meaningful in diverse ways is the fact that it is not explicit. Chekhov said that the art of writing is the art of deleting. Hemingway likened a work of art to an iceberg. The bulk, the essential and the significant, remains under water, and that is what makes the reader an active party turning the very process of perception in to creation.

The artist compels the reader or the spectator to think but not to invent. The recipient is offered a certain initial impetus, a certain emotional state and a programme of processing the information, but at the same time he retains his freedom of will and has enough scope for creative phantasy.

The absence of explicitness is an image which stimulates the reader's or spectator's thinking is most clearly manifested in the principle of non finita (absence of ending, incompleteness of a work of art). Twentieth-century artists in particular are fond of leaving their work unfinished, supplying scanty information about the characters future, and leaving loose ends dangling.

In a great work of art, the image always has numerous aspects and a wealth of meaning which gradually comes to the surface as centuries go by. Each epoch finds new sides to a classical image and interprets it in its own way. In the 19th century, Hamlet was regarded mostly as a deliberating intellectual, while the 20th century, in accordance with its spirit, has turned him into a fighter. A typical 20th century interpretation of Hamlet was given by the soviet actor Innokenty Smoktunovsky in the film directed by Grigory Kozintsev. At the price of certain simplification and curtailment of character, at the price of losses and omissions (Claudius's prayer is a case in point). Hamlet is shown as a staunch fighter against evil. The interesting thing is that both interpretations are legitimate. King Lear is another Shakespearean character who is just as complex. An infinite variety of approaches to the essence of his tragedy has been evolved. The play was regarded by some as a tragedy of treachery and filial ingratitude and reduced to a family squabble, almost a melodrama. Others maintained that King Lear's tragedy had political origin, since he was spitting his kingdom at the moment when historical necessity ruled unification.

To questions concerning the idea of Faust Goethe replied he was unable to formulate it. To explain it, he would have had to write the whole thing all over again. The image is a whole system of ideas. Speaking about his intent in the old Man and the Sea, Hemingway said "I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough, they would mean many things."

If the image in its entirety could be translated into the language of logic, art could have been supplanted by science. On the other hand, if it had been totally untranslatable, literary and art criticism and theory would have been impossible. The thing is that the image both can and cannot be translated in to the language of logic. It is untranslatable since a "residue of meaning" invariably remains after any analysis. It can be translated because delving into a work of art, one can penetrate more and more layers of its inner meaning. The image corresponds to the complexity, aesthetic wealth and variety of life itself, and so the relation of critical analysis to the image is that of endless appreciation and penetration.

A Deeply Felt Thought, A Thought-Out Feeling

The image in art is a blend of thought and feeling, of the rational and the emotional. When even one of the components is missing, artistic thought disintegrates and art ceases to be.

The presence of emotion is historically the earliest and aesthetically the most important element of the basis of the image. Ancient Indians believed that art appeared when feelings became so acute they could be held back no longer. A legend about the author of Ramayana says that once valmiki the sage was walking along a forest path. In the grass he saw two snipes calling to each other with tenderness and love. All of a sudden, a hunter appeared and killed one of the birds with an arrow. Moved by wrath, grief and compassion, Valmiki cursed the hunter, and the words which burst forth from his heart overflowing with feeling formed themselves

into a couplet which has since then become an accepted meter known as sloka. Later, the god Brahma enjoined Valmiki to glorify the deeds of Rama using this metre. This legend assumes that poetry was born out of explosive and expressive emotional speech.

To create an immortal masterpiece, the artist must not only present a broad panorama of life but also evolve an emotional and ideological approach to the events, which is essential for "processing" the impressions the world offers him. In this connection, it will be appropriate to recollect an episode of Benvenuto Cellini's life. Once, moulding a silver figure of a condottiere, he suddenly realized he did not have enough silver. Cellini appealed to his compatriots for help, and they started bringing to his workshop silver spoons, forks, knives and salvers, which Cellini threw into the liquid metal. When the casting was finished, the people saw a beautiful statue, an example of consummate craftsmanship. But a fork handle was sticking out of the condottiere's ear, and a piece of spoon, out of the horse's croupe. While the townspeople were on their way with the silver cutlery, the temperature of the metal poured into the cast fell, and not all articles melted.

Similarly, when the author's feelings are not strong enough to "melt" the material supplied by life into a complete work of art, the audience will notice the bits which have not been treated, "forks against which a recipient will stumble".

The World and The Artist's Personality; the Material out of which the Image Is Built

The image unites the objective and the subjective. It reflects the essential aspects of life and has a great deal of objective content. At the same time, art does not expect its imagery to be taken for reality. This is what distinguishes it from religion. The image includes not only the facts treated by the artist's creative imagination but his personal attitude to what he portrays and, in a way, the whole of his personality and his life experience.

A modern computer may have "sight" and "hearing", it can even process information according to the programme it has been fed. But even the most intricate artificial brain lacks individuality. It is possible to understand the "poem" written by a computer, but it certainly is not a poetry:

An insect
All children are small and dirty,
Iron can cut all dragons,
And all pale, blind and submissive waters are cleaned,
An insect, dumb and scorched by the heat,
Is coming out of a larva,
How does the insect get into this fur?

This verse produced by a machine lacks the charm of poetry for it lacks the charm of individuality and offers merely a mechanical conjunction of notions and a rigid combination of phrases which do not develop a coherent thought or express a definite individual view of the world.

The role of artist's personality is most apparent in the performing arts, like music or theatre. Each actor interprets the character in his own way thus highlighting different aspects of the play.

Tommaso Salvini, the famous Othello of the 19th century, gave a romantic interpretation of the character portraying him as a credulous, pristinely naive Moor who had little idea of the niceties of Venetian etiquette. The spectators saw a splendid general with volcanic temperament but for all that a primitive natural man who was too simple-minded to grasp the ways of civilized society. Alexander Ostuzhev, the Great Russian actor, saw Othello's trustfulness as a manifestation of his highly developed inner being. He clashed a harmonious and humane personality with the world of mediocrities. Sir Laurence Olivier interpreted Othello in an anti-romantic fashion. Like Salvini, he saw the Moor as a natural man unable to fit into European civilization. But Salvini performed the part in such a way that Othello's destiny was perceived as a reproach to the refined society. While Olivier has stripped the Moor's primitive state of all romantic embellishments. Olivier's Othello is a kindly and attractive person whose undeveloped consciousness is unable to cope with any situation which is at all complicated. The very first interruption of the familiar flow of his life throws him back

into savagery and chaos. This is a clash not between Othello and Iago but between the barbarous state and civilization which is at times cruel and hypocritical and yet polished by centuries of evolution. The differences between the two have been glossed over in the course of historical development but they are still there and bring about a tragedy – that is Oliver’s interpretation of the play.

Each of the three actors performed the part in accordance with his own approach to life and his creative individuality. Even in science, it is not a matter of indifference whether the research is carried out by a talented person or a mediocrity. And yet the personality leaves a comparatively insignificant mark on the work of the scholar. The fact that the law of the conservation of energy was first discovered by Lomonosov and later by Lavoisier does matter when priority is being established, but irrespective of who was first, its substance and formula remain the same on the strength of the objective truth it reflects. Art is different in this respect. Let us imagine that, instead of suggesting to Gogol the idea of the comedy

The Inspector-General, Pushkin had written it himself, most probably, not only the plot but the subject and the message poet’s creative individuality. Inspector would have been a different play. Since the author’s personality is reflected in the system of images, the more brilliant the personality, the more brilliant the work. Great art is able to satisfy both the most refined taste of a connoisseur and the tastes of the general public, but this does not mean the opposite is impossible.

Occasionally, a work appears which a great success with the public is; although its artistic merits leave much to be desired. Conversely, critics have been known to condemn a work, important but not easy to understand, on the basis of its being “not clear to the masses”. However, if one treats the problem “the artist-the public” historically, there have been very few collisions between mass consciousness and major works of art. A realistic image always preserves the balance of the subjective and the objective; life in a work of art is lit up by the artist’s ideas, feelings and ideals.

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