

The Power of Poetry



ENGLISH PRACTICE – SWZ feature writer Geoff

Barclay identifies **a cause for concern and ponders as to the power of poetry** to assist in finding a solution to escape from the *tram-tram* of everyday life.

Bolzano – Time is tight. Time is precious. How to reconcile the moments of time in this multi-tasking, **multi-faceted**, multiple psychotic conditions world of ours? The work-life balance is often precariously tipped to the work scale and individuals and couples **struggle to cope**. Even worse at times, is that people have no tools to use to help address the **plight** they find themselves in, and all that results is a rather confused tale of existential nothingness.

To add to the melancholy nature of this, it is commonly agreed that the world is in a state of flux, doubts about types of leadership to the fore, social fabric torn to shreds, and reservations about what a national identity should consist of. A pretty bleak picture all in all.

It is in poetry that man has often found the solutions to the very state of mankind

'Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom' is the line from 'Let it Be' that we often **hum along** too, and yet we really stop to query where this wisdom can truly come from. The answer might well lie in much of the Beatles music. Poetic it is. Yes, poetic I say. It is in poetry that man has often found the solutions to the very state of mankind, to his essential identity, purpose in life, and motivational force. 'We are what we read' is the often-used **retort** and in Britain we go further and say that one's character as an adult is determined by which Shakespeare plays have been read at school. Food for thought indeed. A man who does not read is often termed as an empty vessel, yet the conundrum in the modern world is summed up in the cry of 'Where on earth do I find the time to read something?' True, the question of pressure of time is even more exacerbated by our reliance on social media and the consumption of **gibberish** and **gobbledygook**.

Where does the answer lie? Well, a **dash** of poetry could be a good starting point. Not necessarily the trendiest form of writing in new-age terms, maybe or maybe not, but certainly well worthy of a consideration or two. Poetry has evident advantages over other forms of writing, especially when the **'busy-bods'** of today are concerned: it can be brief and to the point, it can be easily divided as text into short verses which are easy on the eye, it can play easily on the music and rhyme of words; it can be a sounding board for a person's need to face up to conflict and resolve dilemmas – yes, little is it known, but poetry can often speak back to the individual.

Poetry can capture the moment and focus on a sentiment or an issue and produce something intimate and exclusive

It can indeed be magical at times – the verses leading spontaneously on one from the other and providing an overall structure to refer to. It, in essence, can capture the moment and focus on a sentiment or an issue and produce something intimate and exclusive which relates to an inner need of a reader. Of course, the qualities of poetry are not of recent discovery – poetry through the centuries has provoked, comforted inspired, and led to much reflection. One only has to think of the war poets and their reflections

on the human condition to highlight the point. Wilfred Owen's 'Mental cases' is just one poem which serves to literally force reflection on us about the merits of war, and its devastating consequences on individuals.

These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.

Memory fingers in their hair of murders, Multitudinous murders they once witnessed. Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander, Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.

On the other hand, poetry can comfort, provide us with a sense of belonging, and help us deal with daily issues. Haig Barclay confronts the issue in his poem 'Going nowhere'

A life lived on the open seas, Constantly exploring, for ever searching Having no home to call home No idle chat, no daily chore, no loving hand How I miss my childhood room

Poetry has something of a reputation for being outdated in style, in that much is written in an over-sophisticated and elaborate language with obscure references to mythology or other remote and high-browed circumstance. However, there is much movement nowadays to expressing poetry in simple, straightforward terms and Poetry Slams events and poetry events generally feature fine work expressed in a simple and straightforward manner.

Poetry can relate to a personal issue

The contention that poetry can help leaders evaluate their roles, provide a sense of calm, and even furnish a solution or two is a brave one. Yet, a little research will help one to find reading, not demanding in nature or time, which can be a force for the good – one's own good and the good of people around one. Take for example, the collection 'Poetry Pharmacy' by William Sieghart, described as 'true and tried prescription for the heart, mind, and soul'. Be assured that we are not so much talking about physical conditions for which there is a prescription, but conditions such as loneliness, lack of courage and decision making, feelings of inadequacy, inability to express oneself.

So, here is a concrete example of how poetry can relate to a personal issue, and where the reading of the poetry can help you appreciate that the condition in question is not just yours alone, but can be an **ailment** which affects many. Not only is the recognition important, but of course the cure, and at least an indication of how to approach and alleviate a condition or behavioural issue. As the Penguin review says about the collection:

Sometimes only a poem will do. These poetic prescriptions and wise words of advice offer comfort, delight and inspiration for all; a space for reflection, and that precious realization - I'm not the only one who feels like this.

Apart from being therapeutical, poetry can also be a source of hope and inspiration or depending on the process, inspiration and hope. Storytelling can be considered one step up the literary length **ladder** to poetry. At times the distinction can be blurred, but at other times the verse division, the almost musical lyrics of lines, and the metre adopted can make of a poem everything a short story has. This is why there is also a tendency now to publish periodicals which focus on Poetry, Short Stories, and

Flash Fiction, so as to give the reader a digestible periodic read. The quarterly illustrated magazine of new writing called Popshot is a fine example of such. It is an illustrate magazine with each issue being primarily concerned with a topic area e.g. identity, romance, hope, nostalgia. The easy lay-out and pleasant illustrations make it a joy to read.

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The underlying point of this article is that there is a way to find reading which corresponds to one's time availability and that the reading can be a source of comfort, a cure for malaise, and a font of inspiration. And, if one ever needed proof of what poetry can do for a person, a reflection on the following citations of well-knowns might assist.

Bill Gates: "Out future is more dependent on poets than it is on engineers."

J.F. Kennedy: "When power leads men towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence."

Plato: "The true nature of mankind and of human nature is not in the history as told in book, but in the vital integrity and insight as provided in poems."

What better conclusion than to state that the discovery of poetry, and the joy benefits derived from such can even lead to a person putting pen to paper him or herself. There is no need to be a master of punctuation, a slave to rhyme, or a wizard of word manipulation, but rather to possess or acquire a willingness to jot ideas and feelings down, be they thrilling sensations or grave concerns. The play with words is after all one of the great creative forces mankind is fortunate to be blessed with. Shakespeare, the great bard himself, was first famous as a poet and indulged in word play as a catalytic force for his later successes and no doubt is there that simple lines jotted down on paper did him the power of good. As a final example we finish with his remarkable line:

"She's love, she loves, and yet she is not lov'd"

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assists individuals, companies and organisations in their internationalisation process.

GLOSSARY

to ponder: nachdenken
tram-tram: (hier) Langeweile
multi-faceted: facettenreich
to struggle to cope with sth.: mit etw. zu kämpfen haben
plight: Notlage, Misere
to hum along: mitsummen
retort: scharfe Antwort, Erwiderung
gibberish: Geschwätz
gobbledygook: Geschwafel
dash: Messerspitze, Prise
busy-bods: (umgangssprachlich) beschäftigte Menschen
ailment: Leiden, Krankheit
ladder: Leiter