

An Ars Poetica

1. Writing

Poetry is the poet's body.

The poet transcends when pure and true.

Permeability to truth creates purity.

Truth is its own evidence.

No poetry is more radiant than the poet.

Truth is fidelity of word to thought, of material to spirit. Truth needs courage. Purity fosters courage. Falsehood is blurry.

Control creates an environment for purity. The word 'control' has become loaded with connotations of repression and imposition. Control is about discipline and efficiency. The more pure the poet, the more voluntary the discipline and cooperation with one's self, the more free the restraint, the less the self-dissipation, the more efficient the process, the faster the self-realizations.

The word 'efficiency' has collected connotations of dehumanization and disempowerment. Washed clean of these connotations and understood from a place of unresentment, efficiency is about a focused utilization of resources.

A pure and true poem is a springboard for transcendence. Transcendence is the experience of the poet as the poem is being written. This experience can transfer to the attentive reader. The reader's experience is not identical to the writer's experience.

Truth may not be new in itself, it may have been known by others, it is always new for the one who realizes it. A poet needs to keep faculties pure for more truth, and less error. Truth is graded and not absolute. It is multiple, relative, and specific to the circumstance of the poet. There is true fiction and false fiction. There is pure, and less pure. Truth is subjective. The subject seeks the objective.

The more pure a material, the higher its rate of vibration. Less-pure is on the journey to pure. Purity is achieved by letting truth in, which lets unambitious desires out. Desire for cumbersome self-perpetuation and unchallenging recognition creates impurities. Under its influence, poetry is angled to seduce, capture and captivate (oneself or the reader) – this may be through legibility, obscurity, wit, confession, exploitation of trends (by following or rebelling), or with elements that exist to thrill – whatever is not necessary for the poem or poet – and the poet retards.

What of poetry's purpose? What does the sunlight intend? Sunlight has no purpose of its own; it is the form of, the body of, and the medium of the sun, it is invested with the sun's purpose. In so far as the poem is the sunlight, the poem is an instrument, breathed into, inspired. In so far as the poet is the sunlight, s/he is the instrument breathed into, inspired.

While forming, the poem can have no outer witness, that would skew the poem and would not yield realization for the poet. The reader who is other than the poet is a beneficiary. The necessary witness to the poet-creator is the poem. The necessary witness to the poem is the poet. This does not mean that the poet is isolated or that the poetry is irrelevant to anyone else. On the contrary. It is exactly because the poet does not care about the external reader that s/he can be undistorted and true, and more relevant for the reader who is a part of the universal context which is a part of the individual poet. The poet turns into two and opens. The individual

opens out into the universal and the universe proves the grandness of its scale through the unique.

Poet-poem enacts creator-created. Poem reflects poet. A microscope reveals the same as the telescope: inner-space patterns the same as outer-space; sub-atomic space parallels planetary. The poet evolves, poem evolves, and the poet is a witness of evolution.

The created is a part of the creator's biography. Not the complete biography, but a telling biography, even a favorite biography. Placing poetry within single-directional time shows a biographical trajectory. Evolution may not seem continual and progressive because it may loop back or pause to gestate and access energy or wait for timing. Poetry is the material form of poet energy, and it is evidence, photograph, self-documentation. Poem releases the past into the present.

The poet relinquishes authority to let the poem seek itself out. S/he loses to find. Creator becomes as if caretaker, as if medium, as if governor, as if witness, and seeking self-knowledge, needs to carry on creating.

The poet is stalled by intervention and observers. Poetics cannot be taught. Borrowed poetics does not fit the poet's purpose. Imitation does not lead to self-knowledge. However, when exposed to other poet's practices, a poet becomes first wary, then aware, realizes that every poet is unique.

A poem is a thing but it is also part of the poet's space. It is complete and incomplete. A poem may imitate wholeness, and may be appreciated for that, and for what it represents. Contrived imitation of wholeness create distortions rather than unity.

It is by uniting with one's selves that one materializes poetry. This matter is debris, slough, rubbish – and it is useful. It has helped the poet pass on to the next step, and may help

another reader later. As the poet passes through the poem, its germ is released for annihilation. Homeopathy and urinopathy work on the same principle, the law of similars. Scatopathy waits to be investigated and utilized. When the poet unites, the other substance produced is ecstasy. Ecstasy is poetfood. Poet is speed.

The conversion of energy into matter happens via vibration. Vibration results in magnetism, language glue. Sound and light come together, inkmarks are the negatives of light and live in the light of space.

Even poems that are not rhetorical utilize sound. Poems made with sound as one of its primary considerations will guide the reading voice tightly. Reading a poem releases the beneficial effects of the sounds stored in it. Poets will find sounds they need the most.

Light and sound may seem like two entirely different poetics. Some poets disdain sound, suspect its patterns to be those of outer beauty, and fear it to be a lie. Poets working with sound pity meaning and its vanity, its hopes for revelations. Two people, walking, come to the foot of a mountain. One goes to the right, the other goes to the left. The answer, is a circle.

In itself, poetry goes nowhere. It is a place, a sign, a material through which the poet has worked, and moved on, moved on to work s/he has now become capable of doing. Poetry is there to be created or mediated and inhabited and observed and then shed. Poets who expect things of poetry (rather than from poetry) are disappointed, and the purpose of this disappointment is that it pushes the poet to move on to the end of all desire: unity.

Poetry is the body of the poet. The poet is more than that. Poetry cannot transcend, the poet /reader can. Poetry is words / body. Poet is spirit. Poetry cannot be pure, it is made out of impurity. It is the poet who becomes permeable. The poet leaps out of the poem. And no courage is necessary for this because it is joyous.

2. Reading

And my poems are a rubbish heap
(*Wingspan, 1987*)

There is a regard for sound when I write poetry. Sound is not without meaning, and the challenge is to operate perfectly as meaning as well as sound. I have a feeling for the mantra, the chant from the Indian region. I feel one with the geometry of the mantra sound, and find in it the right fit for my interest in trans. It is both inheritance, and investment.

Vibration is omnipresent. Different states produce different sounds, and conversely, different sounds and combinations of sounds, or keys, produce specific results and harmonies. Arrangements of sound create potencies and compensate for deficiencies in our being, at subtler levels – call it atomic or molecular – where all matter is really a form of energy. Sound can rule in my work, and privilege outer meaning. Eg:

Numbers metartise tear stars at tention.
(*Catapult Season 1992*)

Shoc shok winter's here at swansea.
It cannot be. The glaze mazes
but the enamour is dying shrill.
(*Catapult Season 1992*)

Incantation is a sound pattern, air architecture. Winding and trailing, drawing in and out of measures of breath (duration) while between the parts there operates a mathematics, or a firm relationship. Eg: *At the sun to see how it never changes, at the moon to see how it does, algae slipping beneath our feet, roots traveling and dewdrops dying in visible speed.* (*Echolocation 2003*).

There is no need to breathe in this line until I get to door: *Arranged again in parallel lines my bare feet face the door welcoming the railroad of time space. (Echolocation 2003).*

The line achieves progression in loops and by modified repetition. *The longer we look the more we recognize and anything we could say is too obvious. The songs we like are the songs we know and every song on the radio is about us (Echolocation 2003).*

Dogged repetition manifests as alliteration: *A clay clasp cooler than your hand (Echolocation 2003).*

Sounds exercise the parts of the mouth: *We squeaking in our boychoir voices (Salt 2000).*

Enunciation: *Held in the fangs of a wristwatch, a well-worn path of a nail in our veins, heart-hammered time trail. Or: Good job clipper, scrales the rake (Echolocation 2003).*

Indian languages have made my mouth adept for sounds like ksha, gha, nna, gnya, and the experience of working the Indian sound range is a fulfilling experience for me.

Beyond the alertness to sound I have noted, there are other mantra patterns I observe, in hindsight, in my poetry. A mantra is a group voice and the achievement is a collective achievement that draws its strength from the agreements and additions – differences – in voices. The split into louder and softer, aside or omniscient chorus, creates the dramatics.

Life begins when the children are out of the house and the dog is dead, I said.

*She laughed
Dyed her hair black
Made me stay*

TIME BRINGS CHILDREN.

*THEY BURN HOLES IN OUR STOMACHS.
POP OUR BELLY BUTTONS.
DEATH MAKES SENSE.*

*Weightless in your sticky fluids
Too long you kept me in
(The Last Beach 1999)*

Mythologies and identifiers are also related to tradition. Writing is a riddle constructed, and a revelation decoded. Sounds embedded work invisibly and have keys that the reader witness may or may not have.

Enjoying an oral tradition, I often put in a code, my name or signature inside the writing.

*His voice
is like a vowel gliding
between m and n
(The Last Beach, 1999)*

The exact instance of my name will not be visible to a casual reader – for it is the devoted readers who have their own purposes at stake who deserve to have the most fun – and while the instances are secrets which are present (to be unveiled depending), the game in itself is not a self-important secret.

Some of the motifs and symbols I brood on, and which inhabit my mindspace, are from the Indian tradition. Some personal legends have been constructed over the templates of Indian legends, and their exploration is my own self-discovery. An example: I have a personal legend that has to do with snakes.

The play that is inherent in my writing comes from the tension between the Indian languages (known from surround and familiarity) and English (which is the only language I am fluent in speaking and writing). The familiarity with my mother tongue, for instance, is lively with some depth; I have found myself speaking involuntarily in Telugu when I wake up in the

middle of the night. The tension and jaggedness that is part of the nature of my poetic language is not a “problem.”

I inherited English. It’s mine – with no shame, and with no pride. I mine it I polish it I wear it ... and I don’t dispossess myself of it. I play in English, play out my characters. I call on the English medium for seances in which I receive the French poets and the Urdu poets. I feel intimately soothed by the sound of Sanskrit; I know Telugu and Hindi; I feel comfortable around Tamil and Cantonese and Mandarin; I go past Kannada and Marathi; I tap into many other resources to nourish my composition, the composition of my self.

When I hear the respectful second person address in Hindi – aap (you) – I am reminded that one person is many people. When someone says, in Telugu, that she had a dream – kala kannanu – I note that she did not just have a dream, she gave birth to a dream, and this immediately tells me that our children are the perpetration of our illusions. When I hear, in Hong Kong, in English, he has not come back yet, and I know that it really means he has not come in yet – although I don’t understand Chinese, I absorb one of its tensions, about tense. But none of my sources are overt, because I don’t write about them, their springs are usually well-hid, even from me, and when I see them it is usually with hindsight. In this way, translation is one of the vital forces behind my creation process.

When my composition is decoded, it reveals languages I write and speak and hear, places I have been, and mythologies I received, and made. The influence of this multi-lingual and multi-cultural surround upon me - and my poetry - is not entirely apparent to me, and I am only able to locate some superficial examples. There is an image in this text that arrived from Hong Kong:

*Tomorrow below today
Below tomorrow, the day after
Below on below we go
To the earth to be planted*

(The Last Beach 1999)

It came from Chinese wall calendars, where a page/day is torn off to reveal the next page/day. This image crystallized when I met the less-popular word for tomorrow, ‘Xia Yi Tian’ – which literally means next / below-one-day. (The more popular word for tomorrow is ‘Ming-Ttian’, ie., tomorrow-day.)

And this image flew in from New Zealand: Out of the corner of my eye I catch silvereve, just standing there, waxy, staring at me. The spook in that line comes from the deconstructed presence – as a spirit and as a quality – of the Silver Wax-Eye, a bird species I met in New Zealand.

There was a time when I was frustrated with English as a language, and I guess it came from an awareness of what other languages offer. A simple example: the knowledge of the Hindi word kshobh (anger + pride), and the frustration that there is no single word in English to convey this.

*When feelings combine
How do you combine words?*

*Horror + Sadness
Anger + Disgust
Faith + Unfaith*

*No word fits this
Not pickling not sweatypits
The sensation is squishy yellow brown
Soggier than soggy bones
(Salt 2000)*

Over the last few years I do not see languages in a comparative, competitive way, identifying and bemoaning deficiencies; instead I feel an understanding and acceptance that different languages are different tools, and must have a framework, a delineation that leaves something out, and something in. Together, all the languages express the universe.

A recurring theme I read in my work is that of the limitations of language.

*Wait under palate gate
of lost meaning
Wash words of meaning
say iggy ugga buga luga wari oh numm numm
(The Last Beach 1999)*

*A rooster goes after the slippery sunrise with a box of crayons.
(Haul – unpublished)*

Writing cannot capture the experience of unity. The only writing that comes close is about the yearning for unity. Yearning can re-produce the experience of unity. Poetry cannot go further because it is noisy – and God is a shy bird.

*Dead
Thud
Smug as a poet, published
Zed
(The Last Beach 1992)*