

Denise Levertov's "The Goddess": Representative of her Interplay of Longing for Lies and Adoration for Truth.



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April-May, 2013

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ABSTRACT

Denise Levertov is an established figure in the twentieth century post Second World War American literary scene, marked for her striking individual note. Critics widely vary about the emphasis of Levertov on immediate and transcendent. The elements of her vision are rightly characterized by the various critics, but her subtlety of her perceptive creation, her vision of synthesis has still escaped the critical eye.

Denise Levertov's poetry is marked by a continuous inter-penetration of the within and the without. The 'I' in her poems penetrates the 'Me' as well as the 'Not me'. Even her 'I', with a swing abstracts itself from that particular moment of emergence, takes an over-view of the whole situation and perceives the significance of the experience in the broader context. Her 'The Goddess' is representative poem of her duality as well as interplay of her longing for lies as an artist and her adoration for truth. This paper is an attempt to fathom the same.

Denise Levertov is an established literary figure in the second half of the 20th century. Her poetry is marked not only for imbibing the deep influence of Williams but also for its striking individual key-note. Most of the critics appreciate the dual nature of her perception - immediate and transcendent, but they differ in their emphasis on lone or the other of the two poled.

According to Wagner the poet's role as a participant in Levertov's later poetry in contrast to that of an observer in the earlier on is the mark of her poetic progress.¹ Some critics try to sort out Denise Levertov's case by highlighting one of the two elements. Ralph Mills Jr. characterizes Levertov's poetry as the "poetry of the immediate" signifying "the complex of relationships existing between the poet and the elements that are close at hand in her personal experience."²

He, however, fails to penetrate the solid seeming wall of her private perception. Louis Simpson, however, finds Levertov's poetry "a little static in description" and feels it to be a "poetry of meditation."³ Thomas Duddy specifies her poetry as a celebration of reality - "the effect to create a circumstance in poetry that will celebrate reality while remaining faithful to the facts."⁴ Present researchers is of the opinion that though the elements of Levertov's vision, taken separately, are rightly apprehended by the various critics, due to subtlety of her perceptive creation, her real vision still escapes the critical eye. Denise Levertov's poetry is marked by the continuous inter-penetration between the within and the without. 'I' in the poems penetrates both 'Me' and 'Not Me'. Denise Levertov's being a conscious artist, her mind often turns to the mystery of poetic creation and the magic of imagination. "The Goddess" pictures the speaker's evolution from an artisan bound to "close rooms" tellingly only "lie for

lie," to the real artist who speaks in her "own tongue." The poem opens with the formal adoration, "lip service" not the whole-hearted devotion to the Muse, name but not her face. The poet deals with lies only - "I lay in lie castle." Delineating the initial position, she proceeds to picture the coming of the Goddess upon her. The action verbs - fling, hit so hard that it would resound, wrench, pull - describe the violence implicit in the real experience. Only such naked confrontation gives the necessary authenticity to the work, for-

*The best work is made
From hard, strong materials,
Obstinately precise -⁵*

The third stanza signifies her entry from the potential presence - "the seeds of a forest were in it" - to the unconscious recesses of mind. She tastes the mud that "splattered her lips." For Denise Levertov, tasting is the prerequisite for understanding - "O Taste and See" she says. Then she falls asleep. It is not a state of physical lethargy but a state of psychic transformation, "asleep and growing." Lip service is replaced by taste - experience.

The next two stanzas record her responses from within. She recalls here the process of poetic creation dimly felt that moment. In the wakeful slumber, the primordial silence responds to the one within her mind. The unraveling of the whole mystery is not suggested for it is again a life. A correspondence, a link, a thread is hinted. A forest - a live mystery - tries to find expression - "pushing itself out of sleep" - through her "submerged fingers". It is not a conscious strategy for analysis but an unconscious attempt for self expression. Her spontaneous participation, "hit a forest seed" produces the original poem, "It spoke on my tongue". Then taking the abstracting step, the poetess observes

the significance of this encounter. Only because of the Goddess' coming down upon her, the infinite vistas of real experience opens to her. She can taste the cold air "outside of the outer walls" and also can achieve her individual expression, her "own tongue".

According to Denise Levertov, in a work of art, the work of imagination is not only the far-reaching and faithful permeation of the details, but the illumination of the whole.⁶ "The Park" captures a perpetual conflict in man's mind - the encounter of imagination with reality. At the very outset the poet is conscious of the fact that it is a "garden of illusion."⁷ but her tone of wonder "the carpenters are preparing marvels" balances the possible corruption of the innocent joy by the ever doubtful rational mind which is represented by

the family across the street standing "clustered" but "hesitant" in their porch. The poet is not a party of these doubters. All observers pass through illusion about the fountain. At last, the poet's son comes into the garden and only he discovers reality - a man playing the horn is the true voice of the ghost. But this joyful discovery does not disillusion him. He has made a discovery, "true magic exceeds all design."

Conclusion:-

This discussion undertaken in present paper clears the vision of the readers about Denise Levertov's concept of poetic creation. At the same, detailed discussion of the poem 'Goddess' presents the process of Denise Levertov's poetic creation as a dynamic interplay of the poet's genius for lying and her adoration for truth.

REFERENCE

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5. Levertov Denise, The Poet in the World (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 71.
6. The Poet in the World, p. 203.
7. With Eyes at the Back of Our Heads, pp. 69-70.