

# **Timeless Love: The Harmony of Nature and Romance through the Ages of English Poetry**

Ms. Gurudevi V

II M.A English

St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)

Tiruchirappalli –620 002, Tamilnadu, India

## **Introduction**

The delicate tapestry of poetry woven with an eternal muse: 'nature', who weaves the verse with delicate beauty that enchants our hearts over centuries. Nature's majesty serves as a metaphor to imply profound emotions and intricate romance. The aural energy of nature flows from the whispering woods to the serene rivers that capture solace love on moonlit nights and beaming emotions filled in blossomed meadows. Throughout the age many poets have created symphony of words that capture and celebrate the fusion of nature and love. This symbolic relationship enhances the allure of poetry and appreciates the depth of nature and love with dynamic qualities like wild, serene, fragile and enduring.

Throughout the history of literature, poets used nature as a tool to articulate the intricate emotions of human heart. The change in seasons mirrors the phases of love, which blossoms with passion during period of spring, cold longings of winter, warmful accompany of mid-summer and melancholic autumnal farewells, whereas mountains and oceans symbolize the vast feelings that embrace the lover's heart. Even the celestial objects witness the secret communion where the souls expand out of the body and unites beyond the physical world.

Nature acts as the backdrop in the realm of poetry, which reflects and magnifies the ecstasy and anguish of lovers. These poems create a vivid and sensory experience that invites readers to lose themselves in the enchanting imaginations of the poet. In the world of romantic poetry, different eras and cultures have embraced nature, dwelling with the words of love. Connection between nature and love remains as a constant source of inspiration, starting from the ancient pastoral poems about idle and simple rural life to the Romantic age that reflects the sublimity of nature.

## **Eternal Echoes of The Heart: Imagery and Metaphor in English Poetry through the Ages**

English poetry flourishes with the imagery of love's blossoming cycle, mirroring the fertile garden. The rhythm of sonnets murmurs as a stream while the verses whisper the echoes of passion and devotion. The blossomed roses symbolize the blush of lady love, the unrelenting wind conveys the heartache of loss and the memories of the past entangled in the leaves of meadows. The ever-evolving human emotions of love expressed on the literary journey through the ages are captivated by the poets with their masterful imagery.

The intertwined themes of nature and romance doesn't confine to any single era of Literature. The Romantics, Metaphysical poets, Elizabethan poets, and even the Modernists were inspired by nature in order to uncover the mysteries dwelling in the depths of the human heart. Starting from Geoffrey Chaucer, who used evocative metaphors to John Keats' symbolic poems, the power of the natural world can be witnessed, that is easily bound by expressing complex and eternal emotions. Spenser uses meditative and vivid descriptions of nature to connect the deep senses, memories and affections that occupy his heart. His successor Shakespeare in the Elizabethan era filled his sonnets with natural images, which include the warm beauty of a summer day, the constant presence of the Northern Star and flowers of true affection and virtue. These poetic verses grounded in the natural world provide a sense of authenticity and permanence.

Modern poets in the contemporary world express environmental concerns which reflect the changing relationship between nature and humanity, yet there is a persistence in the themes of love, harmony and loss that remains as the central region in the field of poetry. So, beyond the changing perceptions of nature, the unchanging essence of these themes prevails. The intrinsic legacy of nature and the human heart is enduring over centuries. English poetry does not only deal with the beauty of nature with the emotions of humans, but they also portray the connection that every human carries with the creation of God.

### **Seasons of Affection**

The human heart is an altering object that functions with numerous feelings and emotions in the sphere where humans and their lives revolve. These inner feelings keep on changing as life proceeds to the various stages. The seasons endured in nature can be related with the phases of relationships that progress from stage to stage with different emotions. In Chaucer's poetry "Troilus and Criseyde" the poet describes the setting of early morning in the month of May, which is the time in nature that deals with flourishing and changing things. The

changing light of dawn is described as 'Morning' which looks very pale to behold, which symbolizes the blossoming new beginning, and sets the platform for the love story between Troilus and Criseyde to unfold.

The nature of love is to give both solace and agony with the change of time. In John Gower's "Confessio Amantis", the poet compares love with the seasons, illustrating love which is like flowers of summer that brings joy and beauty diverged against the harshness of winter. He uses these metaphors to suggest that love can bring both flourishing happiness and challenging times.

Shakespeare, a masterful Sonneteer who is well known for his most famous love sonnet, "Sonnet 18", in which he compares his beloved to a summer's day. "Sonnet 18" was written in the 16th century, and it's admired for its timeless manifestation of love's enduring natural spirit. Shakespeare metaphorically raises a question to address his beloved as a summer day who carries beauty and warmth within as "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" (Shakespeare) and he eloquently portrays the temperance and immortality of love by elevating it with the 'eternal summer' in the line "But thy eternal summer shall not fade" "Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st," (Shakespeare, lines 9-10).

In the sonnet "Love Is Not All", the modern poet Edna St. Vincent Millay challenges the traditional notions of love and also explores its limitations with the sacrifices it entails. As a contrast to romantic idealization, it shows the realistic nature of love and practical hardships that take place within a relationship. "Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain" (Millay, line 2) through this line the poet compares the emotions of love with rain to portray the inadequacy of that emotion in granting physical shelter or rest.

### **Heart's Garden with Floral Verses**

Flowers are the ordered perfection of nature. Stages of blooming flowers act as a serene image of human love. Poets, with the intention of projecting the unsaid emotions, employ flower buds as images that start to bloom, flourish with fresh colours that are directly related to blushes and fertility bound by love. Later, the falling flowers are symbolically used to describe the unsuccessful love in the hands of fate. Traditionally, the rose is considered as the flower of love, which symbolizes romantic love and plays its role across the ages. Alexander Pope's poem "Eloisa to Abelard", are written in the form of love letters in which he uses various symbols to convey Elosia's undying love for Abelard and longing feelings of melancholy and

sadness. In one such part, Pope uses Rose to symbolize everlasting beauty and integrity that is associated with divine and heavenly qualities, which reflects the enduring nature of love.

“For her th' unfading rose of Eden blooms,  
And wings of seraphs shed divine perfumes,  
For her the Spouse prepares the bridal ring,  
For her white virgins hymeneals sing,  
To sounds of heav'nly harps she dies away,  
And melts in visions of eternal day.” (Pope, lines 127-132)

Scottish poet and lyricist Robert Burns wrote “A Red, Red Rose”, a poem to demonstrate the passionate declaration of enduring love. The poem uses vivid imagery to relate the speaker's newness and vibrancy of love, for which the symbol of ‘red rose’ acts as a monument of constant beauty, freshness and deep feelings. He celebrates the harmonious experience of sweet love with the lyrical vibrance and emotional intensity of melodious song.

“O my Luve is like a red, red rose  
That's newly sprung in June;  
O my Luve is like the melody  
That's sweetly played in tune.” (Burns, lines 1-4)

In modern poetry “somewhere I have never travelled, gladly beyond”, E. E. Cummings interconnects the natural elements like seasons and flowers with the mysterious intensity of love. Here the poet tries to convey the immense embrace the lady love has towards him by giving an image of a flower to his heart and describes that no matter how strong he is, the fragile look of his beloved is easily releasing those holds as if the ‘Spring’ smoothly uncovers the petals of ‘Rose’. Then he continues with those metaphors to convey that he is not the holder of his own life rather he surrenders everything to his lady love and would happily die if that was her wish, like a flower that softly losses its life in ‘Snow’.

“or if your wish be to close me, i and  
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,  
as when the heart of this flower imagines  
the snow carefully everywhere descending;” (Cummings, lines 9-12)

## **Confluence of Nature with Earthly Affections**

Love spreads all over the air and conquers every corner of the earth. Mostly, poets use worldly symbols to relate the enduring love and emotion of human beings. One among them is John Donne, a metaphysical poet whose sensual style of writing and incredible use of conceits are well-known over the centuries. In the poem “The Good Morrow” he metaphorically captures the idea that love conquers everything. Through the poetic lines

“And makes one little room an everywhere.

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,

Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,

Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.” (Donne, lines 11-14)

the poet asks his loved one to turn their small room into an all-encompassing, boundless world. Furthermore, he doesn't worry about the expansion of the world and its boundaries because they possess the love which reigns supreme in the universe. He also proposes to his beloved to have one world which is entitled of only both. So, for the lovers, they themselves are the world and need nothing beyond that.

Marvell's metaphysical poem, “The Definition of Love”, examines the paradoxes of love. He attempts to say that union of true love is an impossible thing. Andrew Marvell compares himself and his beloved as two polar poles of earth “Us as the distant poles have plac'd,” “(Though love's whole world on us doth wheel)” (Marvell, lines 18-19) and says they can't be united until the world collides. With the use of metaphysical conceits, he celebrates the intellectual depth of the emotion and shows the impossibility of their relationship.

## **Romantic Landscapes**

As the poets encompass love with nature, they extend the description of those feelings with various natural elements that the world holds with pure love. For instance, the poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” by John Donne regards farewell to his wife before a journey. The poet uses worldly elements like gold and compass as metaphors to convey the intensity of their spiritual and emotional connection beyond the physical body. He says their love will expand like the valuable gold metal when it's heated to be broken.

“Our two souls therefore, which are one,

Though I must go, endure not yet

A breach, but an expansion,

Like gold to airy thinness beat.” (Donne, lines 21-24)

Donne’s another poem, “The Flea”, uses an insect (‘Flea’) as a metaphor to symbolize the union of lovers. This flea plays the role of the uniter, which is described as “It sucked me first, and now sucks thee”, “And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;” (Donne, lines 3-4).

“For this was on Saint Valentine's Day,  
When every bird comes there to choose his mate,  
Of every kind that men can think of;  
And they made such a huge noise,  
That earth and sea, and tree, and every lake  
Were so full, that scarcely was there space

For me to stand, so full was all the place.” (Chaucer, lines 309-315)

The above-mentioned lines are from Chaucer’s “The Parliament of Fowls”, where he depicts the rushed activity of the birds on Valentine's Day, where they gather in large numbers which fill the entire natural environment, and he metaphorically associates the birds' search for mates to human love and courtship.

In the metaphysical poem “To His Coy Mistress”, Andrew Marvell compares his emotion towards his lady with a conceit as ‘vegetable love’ with that he says his love would conquer the whole world like a vegetable plant which grows slowly but occupies the entire empire.

### **Cosmic Elements**

Love spreads everywhere and unites everything. Thus, nature and love embrace together to celebrate human emotions. Furthermore, these themes aren’t bound only to the worldly elements but conquer all over the universe. For instance, Geoffrey Chaucer in his poem "The Complaint of Mars" describes how the God of war, Mars, is lamenting for his unrequited love for the Goddess of love, Venus. Chaucer used natural and celestial imagery to depict emotional instability and the conflict between love and war.

The neoclassical poet John Dryden approached love with order, clarity and classical forms. The poem “The Secular Masque,” proposes the timeless and universality of love with elemental and cosmic imagery. This poem connects the human experience in the world with the order of the universe. It opens with the entrance of the Roman God of War, Mars, followed by the Goddess of Love, Venus, who speaks of the period of love after wars.

“The Ecstasy” by Donne deals with both physical and spiritual love. It also explores how love unites souls. The title word ‘Ecstasy’ comes from the Greek word *ek stsis*, which means stands outside. Here, the poet intends to give a mystical view of the engagement of souls as the contemplation of divine things. To imply on the physical love, he uses the images of firmly cemented hands and twisted eyebeams depicts the intense connection between lovers with a sensual romantic physical space. For the spiritual realm, Donne compares cosmic harmony with their union of souls. He describes the souls of the lovers as equally paired armies which escapes from the body to rise and attain the state of bliss.

Love's mysteries in souls do grow,  
But yet the body is his book.  
And if some lover, such as we,  
Have heard this dialogue of one,  
Let him still mark us, he shall see  
Small change, when we're to bodies gone. (Donne, lines 71-76)

## Conclusion

Nature is a deep state of harmony that is easily constrained by the innate emotions of human beings. Nature revolves as a living character in English poetry, as an important agent to express the emotions that strangle in the veins of the poetic lovers. As mentioned above, regardless of the period, rulers, varying circumstances, progressive social conflicts, numerous ideologies and personal beliefs, the experience and enlightenment human emotions get out of nature won't expire. Thus, the theme of love always holds its hands with the elements of nature, starting from the Classical age of Chaucer to the modernist poets. Nature ties with the human heart and thus poetry serves as evidence to prove the undying association between these two vast themes. Despite the respective poetic styles and different literary contexts of various eras, the symbol of nature unites the poets under the same roof. The love poetry with symbolic images of nature can be brought into the single spectrum of the sun beam which emits different colours of love. Nature bridges the gap between God and human, by which the feeling of this mysterious spirit gets its voice through the creative work of God.

## Internet Sources

Shakespeare, William. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? (Sonnet 18)." *Poetry Foundation*, 2017, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45087/sonnet-18-shall-i-compare-thee-to-a-summers-day>. Accessed 31 June 2024.

Millay, Edna St. Vincent. "Love is Not All." *asia lenae*, 2016, <https://asialenae.com/2016/04/06/poetry-analysis-edna-st-vincent-millays-love-is-not-all/>. Accessed 4 July 2024.

Pope, Alexander. "Eloisa to Abelard." *All Poetry*, <https://allpoetry.com/Eloisa-to-Abelard>. Accessed 7 July 2024.

Burns, Robert. "A Red, Red Rose." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43812/a-red-red-rose>. Accessed 21 July 2024.

Cummings, E. E. "somewhere I have never travelled, gladly beyond." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://poets.org/poem/somewhere-i-have-never-travelledgladly-beyond>. Accessed 21 July 2024.

Donne, John. "The Good Morrow." *Poem Analysis*, <https://poemanalysis.com/john-donne/the-good-morrow/>. Accessed 1 August 2024.

Marvell, Andrew. "The Definition of Love." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44679/the-definition-of-love>. Accessed 3 August 2024.

Donne, John. "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." *Poetry Foundation*, 2017, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44131/a-valediction-forbidding-mourning>. Accessed 3 August 2024.

Donne, John. "The Flea." *Poetry Foundation*, 2023, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46467/the-flea>. Accessed 4 August 2024.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The Parliament of Fowls (middle-english hypertext with glossary)." *Librarius*, <http://www.librarius.com/parliamentfs.htm>. Accessed 4 August 2024.

Donne, John. "The Ecstasy." *Poem Analysis*, <https://poemanalysis.com/john-donne/the-ecstasy/>. Accessed 4 August 2024.