

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Frederick Glaysher, *The Parliament of Poets: An Epic Poem* (Earthrise Press, 2012)

The epic poem is for the connoisseurs and the patient readers – I used to think when I got *The Iliad*, *Paradise Lost* or *Absalom and Achitophel* to read as a student of English a couple of years ago. I had the same feeling when I decided to read *The Parliament of Poets*, having becoming curious about a twenty-first century epic. So while reading a story about the Poet of the Moon, Frederick Glaysher appears to me a visionary, a man on the moon who dares to write an epic in an age of hurry and fury.

The central event of the epic is the parliament of the poets – ancients and moderns from East and West – on the moon, summoned by the Greek God Apollo and the Nine Muses to discuss ‘the threatened state of humanity’ and find ‘a worthy vision of life, meaning and purpose’ (23). The Poet of the Moon, the Persona and an ‘embodied spirit’ (28), reaches that parliament through a mysterious journey under the guidance of Cervantes. He has been chosen by the Muses to sing ‘a universal song’ (93) of humanity at a moment when ‘the world goes ‘from bad to worse’ (30). The Persona feels blissful finding all the poets of the world on the moon who he so far has met ‘only in ink, the printer’s art’ (25). After some disputes among the poets about the sudden arrival of the would-be poet among them, Cervantes requests all to guide him as if he can find ‘the path of his own soul’ and thus ‘for each and every one’ (32) of the world. Then the poets plan a way and send him on some spiritual journeys – mostly with guides and once alone – to the inescapable past of the different civilizations of the Earth. He magically visits all the seven continents and encounters the beautiful and brutal records of the human world. He meets the thinkers, seers and visionaries at various spots who pour into him the light of wisdom to spread among mankind. Thus the epic-story lays the plot and involves living and dead in a vast panorama of time and place in a fascinating way.

The purpose of the spiritual journey of the Poet of the Moon is to seek deliverance of the modern human from the captivity of nothingness, nihilism and atheism, and from the resulting chaos and chasm of soul. From the versatile he gets scores of life-affirming lessons, yet the core meaning of all is that the Supreme Being as well as the earth is one, and so human beings are one nation irrespective of their clan, class, color, race, religion and gender. In this earth human beings are part of the Great Mystery’s creation and their duty is to keep the balance and harmony of the universe, to achieve union, to choose sacrifice, and to be self-controlled. In this manner Glaysher sings the song of ‘one Earth, without borders, Mother Earth, her embrace encircling one people, humankind’ (19).

Through the four-dimensional flight of the Poet of the Moon the readers apprehensively watch the spectacular vistas of the world and are introduced with mores, customs, conventions and beliefs of its inhabitants. The Persona visits the cave of Lescaux and Mogoa, the Himalayan foothills, the field of Kurukshetra, Angkor Wat, Dunhuang, the Big wild Goose Pagoda, Mt. Carmal, Chartres Cathedral, Fatehpur Sikri of Emperor Akbar, and so on. In this arduous supernatural travelling, his guides are Black Elk, Japara, Tagore, Hanuman, Sun Wukong, Du Fu, Saigyō, Yehuda Halevi, Dante, Wainamoninen, Tolstoy, Attar, Walt Whitman, the Simorgh, and Mbeku, the tortoise. He observes the battlefields, carnage of wars, cave-paintings, dancing, chanting and prayers and meets Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Shakespeare, Vyasa, kabir, Bashō, Erasmus, Tennyson, Blake, Milton, Rumi, Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, Ezeulu and many others. During this observation he undergoes shreds of mental turmoil in every change of scene – sometimes he finds him tensed, sometimes joyous, sometimes grave and sometimes fearful. Going thus beyond the earthly dimension of reality, the Persona views the fragmented Earth and glues those fragmented parts into a totality with the teachings he has got from the sages.

Book reviews: *The Parliament of Poets: An Epic Poem* by Frederick Glaysher. Umme Salma. Transnational Literature Vol. 7 no. 1, November 2014. <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Structurally *The Parliament of poets* likens the traditional epics. It consists of twelve books where the invocation is placed in Book I and III. It is also well 'prefaced', and nicely introduced with an 'Introduction' along with the poet's view on 'The Verse' form and 'A prefatory Ode'. In the 'Preface' the poet expresses how the event of the visit of mankind to the moon in 1969 has stirred the thought of the poet to write an epic. The 'Introduction' outlines the story with the noteworthy information about the derivation of the title from Chaucer and Attar, two poets from two continents. Like Milton, Glaysher also explains that the poem is in blank verse, chiefly in iambic pentameter. But for variation often he uses the feminine ending, that is, an extra half foot of the measure to the ten syllables of blank verse after iambic pentameter. He asserts that he uses this because it is the most beautiful verse form in the English language. Finally, the prefatory ode sets up the poet's style as a unique one. It looks neither like an invocation nor a prayer, but a letter or email, written to 'the Honourable Patron' (xvii), who never helped the poet in need. Now the Poet of the Moon does not need his help and he, like Dr. Johnson and Lord Chesterfield, wants to walk alone in his old and worn shoes (xvii). He decides to write an epic as if,

... She might not perish forever from
The Earth, nay, revive, rally, and lead the eyes
Of men ... (xviii)

At the end of the text we find a 'Glossary' of different religious and cultural terms related to different regions in order to facilitate an uninterrupted study.

The Parliament of Poets, in spite of being hefty, comprises more features to win the readers' heart. I am citing some unforgettable, insightful lines here to note that point:

Sometimes Dreams are wiser than waking (42)

Or, Oh Europe!
Europe, a hallowed tale in the coloured glass, (179)

Or, What a sad and pathetic bunch we human
beings are! Why the universe ever coughed
us up, God only knows! (182)

Or, We are human, our duty is to give
hope to the hopeless, love to the loveless,
sustenance to the poor. (195)

Or, the shining moon is Shams, Shams the shining moon. (204)

Or, Time flows like river but the body
cannot remain steady like a boat.
The soul is a traveler that is forever
in search of its far shore, its goal and aim.(90)

The poem is further enriched by the rarely-used epic simile, natural-supernatural description of the moon, the view of the earth from the moon, natural scenarios such as green lands, mountains,

rivers and forests, images of dresses and figures, and countenances of reverend personalities. The lucid and placid feet of the language moves deftly and smoothly from the beginning up to the last line of the poem.

Bravo to the Poet for this toilsome but brilliant endeavour.

Umme Salma