

UNIT-4

POEM-1

CONVERSATION

-LOUIS MACNEICE

Ordinary people are peculiar too:

Watch the vagrant in their eyes

Who sneaks away while they are talking with you

Into some black wood behind the skull,

Following un-, or other, realities,

Fishing for shadows in a pool.

But sometimes the vagrant comes the other way

Out of their eyes and into yours

Having mistaken you perhaps for yesterday

Or for tomorrow night, a wood in which

He may pick up among the pine-needles and burrs

The lost purse, the dropped stich.

Vagrancy however is forbidden; ordinary men

Soon come back to normal, look you straight

In the eyes as if to say ' It will not happen again,

Put up a barrage of common sense to baulk

Intimacy but by mistake interpolate

Swear-words like roses in their talk.

Louis MacNeice's "Conversation" describes the discrepancy between the outwardly ordinary appearance of some people and the secret "vagrancy" that sometimes surfaces mid-conversation. The secret, socially inappropriate vagrant in the minds of ordinary people typically disappears and hides during conversations, but can momentarily appear in the form of abandonment of common sense, inappropriate emotional intimacy, or swearing. The poem describes this vagrancy as undesirable to the ordinary person: they apologize for it with their eyes, rebuild the common sense in their conversations, and reject the possibility of intimacy that the emergence of the vagrant may have suggested. MacNeice's poem utilizes an ababc rhyme scheme in each stanza, and the image of the "vagrant" is an extended metaphor that lasts throughout the poem's three stanzas. The vagrant metaphor conveys the secret and socially unacceptable strangeness and honesty which seemingly ordinary people hide to maintain polite conversation. MacNeice argues that this forbidden "vagrancy" is kept secret but frequently comes out accidentally in polite conversation, only to be rejected and apologized for by the speaker.

POEM-2

FIRST THINGS FIRST

-W.H.AUDEN

Woken, I lay in the arms of my own warmth and listened

To a storm enjoying its storminess in the winter dark

Till my ear, as it can when half-asleep or half-sober,

Set to work to unscramble that interjectory uproar,

Construing its airy vowels and watery consonants

Into a love-speech indicative of a Proper Name.

Scarcely the tongue I should have chosen, yet, as well

As harshness and clumsiness would allow, it spoke in your praise,

Kenning you a god-child of the Moon and the West Wind

With power to tame both real and imaginary monsters,

Likening your poise of being to an upland county,

Here green on purpose, there pure blue for luck.

Loud though it was, alone as it certainly found me,

It reconstructed a day of peculiar silence

When a sneeze could be heard a mile off, and had me walking

On a headland of lava beside you, the occasion as ageless

As the stare of any rose, your presence exactly

So once, so valuable, so very now.

This, moreover, at an hour when only to often

A smirking devil annoys me in beautiful English,

Predicting a world where every sacred location

Is a sand-buried site all cultured Texans do,
Misinformed and thoroughly fleeced by their guides,
And gentle hearts are extinct like Hegelian Bishops.

Grateful, I slept till a morning that would not say
How much it believed of what I said the storm had said
But quietly drew my attention to what had been done
—So many cubic metres the more in my cistern
Against a leonine summer—, putting first things first:
Thousands have lived without love, not one without water.

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

The English-born American poet W.H.Auden was one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century. His works center on moral issues and show strong political, social, and psychological orientations. His poem First Thing First was published in the year 1957.

The speaker of this poem is a young man who is all by his own. On a winter night, the speaker witnesses a storm. He finds the storm enjoying to its fullest. He kept listening to it till tiredness made him half asleep. In such a state of mind, inspired by the storm, he began to compose a verse in his mind.

The speaker chose to compose the poem on the storm in his imagination. He praises it by calling it the child of Moon and the West Wind. Being a child of God, it has the power to tame both real and imaginary monsters. He finds its presence everywhere and that it blessed the place where ever it visited.

The storm was loud and it awakened the speaker from his loneliness. He experienced a peculiar silence that made him to think of the day that had gone by. It was so silent that even a sneeze could be heard from far off. The sudden arrival of storm changed the scenario. Its presence was like a precious rose for him.

The speaker wanted to savor this moment for the future and was compelled to think of composing a poem in English. He was wondering how to praise nature when the very civilization of which he was a part of, was dictated by commercialism.

He was now concerned about how fearsome the summer would be. He could no longer worry about the love for nature, just like the others who were living the same way, leading a lonely life. For his survival mattered the most and as water is there, life will continue.