



Dustin Pickering

“Learning to love by loving”

According to the *Encyclopedia of Human Relationships*, loneliness is “the distress that results from discrepancies between ideal and perceived social relationships.” This dimension to loneliness seems to parallel Kant’s noumenon and phenomenon. Kant distinguishes between the thing-in-itself and the object our senses perceive, noting that we cannot know the thing-in-itself. Is there knowledge beyond the senses and perception? What then can language define? Why is translation so tricky? Some words have compact, specific meanings that do not translate well into other languages. As Wittgenstein wrote, “The limits of my language means the limits of my world.” Language is a meaning specific construct of the human mind. It both binds people who share common requisites, and divides people with its layers of complexity. The mysterious Tower of Babel myth suggests that common language unifies people, but language also has the capacity to divide. The loneliness of language is a mysterious thing indeed.

In *A Defense of Poetry*, Percy Bysshe Shelley writes that poets are “the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” This strange and powerful statement invokes the necessity of language both as a social engine and as a medium of creativity. Poets restore language. They create mythologies and beautiful mysteries with words. Anthony Storr notes in *Solitude* that the modern focus on interpersonal relationships may be the reason for failures in marriage. When we idealize something as the ultimate road to happiness, it disappoints us and we turn against it with bitterness. How then can language restore us to the thing-in-itself? Is it the strange mystical power of poetic sense to suggest and intimate rather than define categorically? What does the solitary mind of a great poet offer a world that does not hear? Stories survive, and in fact love itself is co-narrative. Schopenhauer

wrote, “A man can be himself only so long as he is alone, and if he does not love solitude, he will not love freedom, for it is only when he is alone that he is really free.” What is the objective of the solitary mind? What freedom is sought in solitude? *Scientific American* recently suggested in “The Inconvenient Truth about Your ‘Authentic’ Self” that to feel authentic, a person may have to betray their nature. Our humanity is revealed in conformity to social standards. The article concludes, “However, until we learn more about whether *being* authentic reaps the same benefits as *feeling* authentic, we are left with a tough decision between loyalty to our true selves and conformity to social convention.”

This strikes a note concerning attentiveness. Aldous Huxley wrote, “There isn't any formula or method. You learn to love by loving - by paying attention and doing what one thereby discovers has to be done.” Clearly love is in doing, in patience, in work. Lao Tzu seems to agree: “The sage does not hoard. The more he helps others, the more he benefits himself, The more he gives to others, the more he gets himself. The Way of Heaven does one good but never does one harm. The Way of the sage is to act but not to compete.” Knowledge plus will equals love. Love rules as a force rather than an emotion. Love turned against itself is the source of pain, deprivation, and evil. As C.S. Lewis notes, dark is light's absence. However, the sublimation of pain is humility-- when passion becomes concentrated into dense mass and settles by inward force. Words also follow this logic.

Poetry is love, abstractly speaking. However, a definition must do more than point and isolate; it must investigate and segregate. To define is scrutiny. How then do we define poetry? Is it restoration, is it ornament? Why is poetry not clearly defined? What differentiates poetry from prose, from rants, from fiction? It's strangeness in beauty and thoughtful conceptualizing are what bestows the laurels. How does poetry astonish?

All the arts contain poetic device. Poetry is the mantle of the arts. Harmony of vision, beauty, and awe are poetry's bread and water. It's severe truth appeals to the loneliness of the human soul. As Rilke observed, “Works of Art are of an infinite loneliness.”

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