

*Poems of Science* was a book by Professor Phillips Salman of Cleveland, Ohio, and John Heath-Subbs of London, published by Penguin Books in the Spring of 1984. It was the first book on this subject I had ever seen, and the Publishers kindly allowed me to print an extract from the Introduction, written by the two authors, and to include in the article a selection of poems before the date of publication. The ISR issue was published in December 1983.

The authors defined their subject as an anthology of poems, written in English and dealing with pure science. Technology was not included. They mentioned the objection which might be made that poetry and science can have nothing to do with one another, as they represented two entirely different ways of looking at the world. Yet they were convinced that both were based on imagination, the common impulse of their creators, and hence found sufficient incentive to compile their selection.

The Introduction continues with a brief and scholarly review on how our knowledge of the Universe had influenced the poetry of science through the centuries. Beginning with the Horatian view that the aim of poetry was to instruct by pleasing, this instruction might just as well be about the nature of the Universe and man's place in it, as about ethics and manners. The examples reproduced in the Anthology begin with the Aristotelian tradition in science in English poems of the 13th century.

Until the 17th century there was some reluctance to replace the Copernican theory with the heliocentric one, and even Shakespeare relied on earlier scientific notions by turning them into images representing his characters. Even Milton, considered more modern than Donne, preferred Ptolemaic cosmology as it worked better for theological poetry, having been used so often before that the reader was used to it.

Newton's laws and Linnaeus's classifications had influence on contemporary poetry, as for example Erasmus Darwin's great botanical epics. [See also ISR 20/4] Blake and Wordsworth, as well as other romantic poets, recognised the effect of science on poetry as attractive and powerful but thought that it ignored other human qualities, like imagination and emotion.

In the ISR article only a small selection of poems of science contained in the authors' book could be included. These were by the following poets and scientists: Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Milton, Cowley, Swift, Armstrong, Erasmus Darwin, Wordsworth, Humphry Davy, Emerson, Clerk Maxwell and Tennyson.