



CRITICAL CONTEMPLATION AND CREATION IN THE SELECTED WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE'S WORKS

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Abstract

The study in this research paper attempts to elaborate the literary theories of the two eighteenth century romantic age poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The study will deal the poetic works of both the poets in order to understand their theories of poetic imagination, process and creation. It aims to discuss critically their sensibility towards the ordinary experiences derived from society, humanity and nature. It explores their power of balancing the poetic pleasure and creative process in terms of moral conceptions of the society and basic forms of life.

Keywords: *Poetic Imagination, Humanity, Nature, Poetic pleasure, Creative process*



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Introduction

The poetic creations through ages and in all ancient civilizations have been a process of imaginative and emotional outburst and pleasure. It is a result of choice of sequences, observations and events linked necessarily as according to the contemporary attributes of society and as per the poetic talent and reasonability of the poet's mind. In this process the poet is the perceiver, the maker and the speaker. Through his observation he collects external impressions of the world and his own experiences and the experiences of the worldly people are transformed with his sense of perception and contemplation into oneness and whole organic unity. Subsequently the poet makes the real-life experiences universal and of higher reality. During this transformation, the inputs of his emotions, excitement and imagination stimulate responses, reactions and sensations. The observations and recollections when received by the poet, then response is related to real and sensual pleasure. When the same response to pleasure is transmitted with intellect, poetic language, perception, the poetic creation leads to aesthetics. The extreme level of ecstasy is to relish the experience as perceiver; the higher form of poetic expression is to cherish the experience as the maker; the

realization of poetic and universal consciousness is to sensitise and prophesize the experience as the poet.

William Wordsworth's Poetic Unity and Bliss

The poet William Wordsworth in his literary criticism in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* published in 1802 and 1805 respectively regards that personal feelings/experiences/impressions/observations lie in state of rest in subconscious mind i.e. in the memory. When the poet recollects those emotions in tranquility, there is indeed spontaneous overflow of emotions and these emotions become the subject of contemplation. During the process of contemplation and meditation, the poet's memory juxtaposes with his desire for expression and the continuous dialogue with the self and memory with the process of imagination causes excitement. The poet's vision then taste the spirit of universal consciousness in humanity, in nature, in God and he unites all into oneness. Consequently the poet's constitution as in the poems *Lines Written on Tintern Abbey*, *Solitary Reaper* and in *Daffodils* turns poetically into sublimity, nobility, unity and creativity. During the poetic process his mind and body achieve eternal bliss and solitude, while the readers find in his simple creative urge the eternal language of divinity and integrity.

William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) poem entitled "Lines written above a few miles from Tintern Abbey" elicits his recollection of emotions and observations while revisiting the banks of the river Wye on July 13, 1798. Here we find three moments of his experience – one that he had been there earlier, second he has toured this place again after three years and third the line composed while he is on tour. During this phase of reminiscence and revisiting, William Wordsworth's physical body in the visible nature is "the terminus or circumference of the invisible world" (Ibid.) or it is vice versa his inner moral and spiritual aspect in the visible world is corresponding with the living harmony within Nature.

Five years have passed; five summers,
with the length Of five long winters!
And again I hear these waters,
Rolling from their mountain springs
With a soft inland murmur.
Once again Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene
Impress thoughts of more deep seclusion,
And connect the landscape with the quiet of the sky (lines 1-9).

The harmony in human consciousness is symbolic of integration of mood, temperament and perception. The origin of compassion and sympathy, sublimity and sublimation metaphorically lie inherently in the disguise of harmony. This is the phenomenon of unity and bliss in human nature, but paradoxically it is the phenomenon of beautiful divine Nature. This integrated vision and sublime presence of Nature which is perceived in individual components whether in past or in present, whether in solitude or in pensive mood, whether in original sense of wonder or in familiar aspects of nature according to Emerson is separateness from the material world, it demonstrates that nature is an entity, a divine expression and a phenomenon of universe and an art of perception with the will of man. Emerson says 'everything is separate from the inner individual — nature, art, other men, our own bodies' (Emerson, Ch.1 *Nature*).

Wordsworth looks beyond surface appearance to gain insight into a deeper level of existence. Distinguishing the 'coarse pleasures' that his younger self took in the forms of nature from the sober reflections of his mature self, the poet states that he has 'felt ... a sense sublime':

Of something far more deeply interfused

Whose dwelling is the light of the setting suns

And the round ocean and the living air

And the blue sky

And in the mind of man –

A motion and a spirit that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought

And roll through all things (Lines Written above Tintern Abbey, 96-102)

In contrast to the superficial unity of the picturesque, Wordsworth uses repeated connectives ('*And* the round ocean, *and* the living air') as a means of fusing mind and nature in a living whole. The 'sense sublime' that 'rolls through all things', including all '*thinking things*' is, as many critics note, a pantheistic life-force, an echo of the 'One Life within us and abroad' celebrated by Coleridge in 'The Eolian Harp' (1795).

The sensitivity of the perceiver subsumes in the creative process of poetry. Love of truth and virtue evokes the insight in the poet to grasp the underlying meaning of the physical world. The insight that is derived from material observations per se the wise man's sensibility manifests the verisimilitude, differences, gradations, similarities in his manifold natural expressions and imaginative creation. He recognizes spiritual meaning and the innate properties of the physical world. For example, the poet begins with an invitation to the reader in the poem 'Michael'-

If from the public way you turn your steps
Up the tumultuous brook of greenhead Ghyll,
You will suppose that with an upright path
Your feet must struggle; in such bold ascent
The pastoral mountains front you, face to face (lines 1-5).

The opening lines do not just objectively imprint poet's mind, rather they touch upon his wisdom and thematically shows a concern with man's immense struggle against the forces of nature that pull him down and sooner or later reduce all life to a dead level. The poet as a visionary sets relationship with the nature and condescends with the fact that nature and natural laws are complimentary for deriving the truth of human identity. But it is the artistic technique and craft of the poet that elevates readers' thoughts while edifying the truth of visible nature. William Wordsworth by way of his pantheism allegorical combines the beautiful forms of objects with the sense of poetic thought in the poetic language to deify Nature; he radically transforms the art and artist by way of his extraordinary and sensible talent. The poet articulates not merely his verbal expressions, but also symbolically conveys the spiritual reality and offers insight into the divine functioning of the ecology, which is at a certain point "a metaphor of the human mind and at other level it is a correspondence one-to-one between moral and material laws" (Emerson, Ch. 1 Nature).

In William Wordsworth's *Prelude* – the moral conception of poetic truth or poetic pleasure lies in the realization of truth and beauty in nature, in humanity and in God's creations, while the purification of emotions lie in his poetic perception that is based in the fundamental basic principles of life that are common to nature and to man's existence. The poem *Prelude* is a long poem. It was written as part only of a even longer philosophical poem, to be called *The Recluse*. Of this only two parts were completed – The Excursion and The Prelude. Wordsworth published The Excursion in 1814, but although it was completed by 1805. The prelude was not published until afterward Wordsworth's death. In the preface to the Excursion, he says of the Prelude:

'The preparatory poem is biographical and conducts the history of the author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself' (pp. v-xi).

This autobiographical poem gives an account of the poet's childhood, youth and early manhood, but it cannot be adequately understood as merely the story of Wordsworth's life. It is designed also as an account of the growth of the imagination and incidents in Wordsworth's life that are not relevant to this account – (That is the story of his association

with Annette Vallon in France), are passed over lightly or omitted. The reader should not expect to find in this poem a frank account of Wordsworth's life, it is the life of his poetic personality that is recorded. This is made clear from the beginning, when the poet invokes the breeze – a traditional symbol of inspiration and seeking blessings. He writes:

O there is blessing in the gentle breeze,

A visitant that while it fans my cheek

Doth seem half conscious of the joy it brings

From the green fields and from yon azure sky (Prelude Book – I, lines 1-4)

In spite of the genetic diversity in nature, the poet like an omnipresent Spirit evolves an enigmatic, ecological and morphological functional significance and develops an analogy in his creative imagination, his creative unity evolves a pattern in the dynamics of nature; his creative potential processes the 'the unraveling of gene and genome structure, expression, function, regulation, evolution, and the potential determination of the genetic basis of speciation and adaptation' (Nevo: 1978). The poet's spontaneous overflow of emotions for heterozygosity in nature overwhelms his consciousness; he perceives purifying beauty and truth in all 'pervading gene diversity and cuts across taxonomic and biotic borders' (Nevo: 1988). Therefore this poem has been considered as the first great poem of an age of science and skepticism. But its aim is not to reveal scientific realism, but the assertion of the primacy of man's creative power, which has the capacity to emerge from nonhuman or inorganic matter, and produce human consciousness itself. He further expresses his polemics from his polymorphous observations with regard to the breeze blows from nature, but also from heaven itself -

What dwelling shall receive me? In what vale

Shall be my harbor? Underneath what grove

Shall I take The earth is all before me..... (The Prelude Book I, lines 10-15).

The vale, the grove and the clear stream are not to be understood as parts country lakeside, rather they are landscape of the imagination, akin to the Vale of Tempe, the grove of Apollo and the stream of Peneus. In the whole of this introductory passage, William Wordsworth with his emotional sensibility profuse the poetic spirit in the earthly creations, his aesthetic sublimity not only marks his individual artistic talent by touching upon the wonders of beauty, but these allusions in his poetic language shows that he is conscious of following into conventional myth of invoking the poetic muses in order to be blessed with spark for poetic creation. The poet thinking himself a fragile being in the mortal world, and the art he attempts to venture into is the work of divine. Unless the ordinary and the extraordinary assume

oneness, or finitude aspires for infinite, the art cannot achieve its fullness. The poet's anxiety paradoxically manifests his being infinitely small and infinitely powerful, it is only passion that can overcome reason in order to feel and realize that:

Artists at once discover and create what he calls "the primary laws of our nature" by cultivating an emotive disposition "chiefly as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement" (Claudia 392).

It is the element of personality in Wordsworth's poetry which gives it its influence over the minds of those who enter into vital relations with it. He everywhere speaks to man's entire being. His profound thoughts, his vivid illustration, his ennobling sensibility, and his wise reflection have to do with the "here and now," the sphere of our interests, duties, and dangers. He distinctly teaches that the sphere of motives is the sphere of morals; and that love of the true, the beautiful and the good in human action is a higher and worthier source of inspiration than the hatred of their opposites (George: 1888).

With a heart Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty,

I look about; and should the chosen guide

Be nothing better than a wandering cloud,

I cannot miss my way. I breathe again! (The Prelude Book I, lines 15-19).

The poet's pantheistic concept has been his stimulus for his poetic sensibility. He derived life-force in all objects of nature, including trees, rocks, water etc. He sees in the image of 'cloud' the benign presence of divinity, hence the poet personifies cloud as sacred, venerated being. His spiritual leanings find inanimate objects as animated representations of the cosmos and the earth. It suggests that poet's consciousness transcendentalise all nature and natural objects, he finds undisturbed delight even in the 'wandering cloud' and does not wish to miss the way to choose it as his guide to pursue the path of knowledge that 'nature' has offered him on his way of poetic creation. The poet expresses that his freewill would be useless without the humaneness, and his poetic gift will not render any inspiration to his readers, if he himself cannot realize human understanding in the manifestations of nature. He says:

Dear Liberty! Yet what would it avail

But for a gift that consecrates the joy?

For I, me thought, while the sweet breath of heaven

Was blowing on my body, felt within

A correspondent breeze, that gently moved

With quickening virtue, but is now become

A tempest, a redundant energy,
Vexing its own creation (The Prelude Book I, lines 31-38)

Wordsworth contemplation and creation reflect his ideal knowledge of nature, in which his physical self is elevated to the level of spiritual education and perfection. He synthesizes his poetic ability with an all-encompassing life-force which God expresses in nature as it passes through and invigorates his poetic sensitivities. His intuitive faculties see miraculous in common things and transcends his head and heart as a perceiver for higher law of nature. The poem *Solitary Reaper* befits William Wordsworth abound admiration for nature and uneasing influence that he derived from nature. He writes in it –

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travelers in some shady haunt
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides

The poet's natural selection of the nature and natural objects dominates his cherished external impressions; subsequently he diffuses ecological and environmental heterogeneity through the power of developed imagination. The poem *Daffodils* culminates Wordsworth's philosophy of pantheism with the amalgamation of mind and heart in the biotic and abiotic elements of nature. The poetic lines express this sense of union in his creation. He writes:

For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils.

Through the mechanisms of spatiotemporally genetic structure and divergence in nature, the poet metaphorically evolves a model of epistasis. He discovers a kind of mutability, commonness or some kind of beneficial effect on his consciousness, although being different genetically to daffodils. The poet's kinesthetic sense gets additive to daffodils, while daffodils complement his harmonious evolution of soul. There is some kind of catalytic transformation in the poet's life, while being in the company of daffodils or while recollecting the vision of daffodils. The poet derives spiritual dimension, while equating and channelising the genetic divergences of biotic and abiotic factors in ecology. Through his subtle-senses, subtle-mind and subtle-intellect he finds aesthetically and ethically subtle-dimension of cause-effect relationships behind the nature's design which substantiates interaction, adaptation, speciation patterns (Brodsky et al., 2008a,b; Kashi and King, 2006; Kashi et al., 1997; Li et al., 2002, 2004; Haygood et al., 2010). In this way he regains paradise in his soul, constitutes his body and soul to sing songs of humanity and harmony to free world from differences, degeneration and disgust.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Imagination and Poetic Pleasure

On the contrary the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his literary criticism written in the book *Biographia Literaria*, published in July 1817 opines that the poetic creation has its origin in an idea or in certain principle or thought, which mingles with imaginative pleasures – that may be real/fantastic/ecstatic/aesthetic. These inconclusively coincide with personal feelings, memories, and fancies unconsciously and consciously. Subsequently the knowledge, the emotions and the personal thought process diffuse, dissolve and dissipate into universal perspective of logical design and distinctive talent and poetic imitation. In consequence to the poetic creation on the part of the poet, the readers surrender their power of imaginative excitement and emotions to the creative power of the poet. This poetic pleasure traps the readers into the willing suspension of disbelief i.e. their sense of logical thinking ceases and the events/situations in the poetic process appear to the readers convincing and credible. The poet writes in the poem entitled *Kubla Khan* the following lines to describe the immense impact and immeasurable image of the palatial dome, which was built in the Orient's style at Xanadu:

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.

It was miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice! (30-35)

The poet builds with his words the live dome-like palace, creates poetic faith in the creation of a dream with his words. He makes the reader fall in trance of an illusion and the poetic words render to the reader nature of dreams “by emulating the state of illusion in dreaming, a poet may create in the reader a propensity to believe the improbable, to suspend his judgment and to follow the poet into the waking-dream experience of imaginative fiction” (Connell 29). The poet in the lines conveys that the pleasure palace was built amidst the vastness of spring, where the mighty waves overflow and gush through the caves measureless to man. Inside the palace such sounds could be overheard because of its splendid architectural design. Surprisingly sunlit domes had underneath them the icy caves. The poet wakes up readers’ subtle-sense to view the magnificence of the Kubla Khan’s palace through his poetic diction, which an ordinary eye cannot view it. The poet romanticizes the beauty of dome and attempts to capture that luxury-palace in his words to take to readers in the world of illusion. Here the poet envisions a recollection; he composes corresponding expressions with his conscious efforts to preserve the splendor of Oriental king which is nothing else than a dream-like vision. Further the poet writes in the poem Kubla Khan:

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid, And on her dulcimer she played,
Sitting on Mount Abora. Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight ‘twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise. (lines 36-50)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge did not hesitate to blend common with superhuman characteristics, his imagination mixes primary external impressions with the fanciful imagination. He builds incredible connection between the observation and vision, between ordinary and extraordinary poetic sense, between reality and art, between thought process and language, between experience and mysticism, between earthly images and creative urges. His poetic imagination transcends boundaries of pleasure and fantastic and achieves a level of ecstasy and enlightening spark. He enjoins unconscious desire with the conscious perception in his poetical compositions, for example in the poem *Frost at Midnight* he writes about child-like expectations that originates from the sights of pictorial experiences and sights. He writes while observing animate and inanimate objects available around him:

But O! how oft,
How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
To watch that fluttering stranger! And as oft
With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower.....(lines 24-29)

Frost at Midnight is one of the most Wordsworthian poems written by Coleridge. Here Coleridge attempts to understand the inanimate object that like a companion play with his mood and environment around him. He interprets the puny flaps and freaks of the thin film on the grate according to his own moods. When the poet was at school, he would often look at the grate to have a look at this thin film, for he had been told that the sight of the film presaged the arrival of a friend or a relative. Next day at school, while he pretended he was reading attentively, he would keep looking at the door waiting for some visitor (Lal 247). Coleridge writes in chapter XIII of the book *Biographia Literaria* that “The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation (Ibid. 91). Samuel Taylor Coleridge opines that a perceiver’s mind prevail its good sense upon the objects as per his mood, his poetic genius observes the external object with the good sense and it stimulates the psychomotor function of the body, then it connects to the some unconscious vision, that log been subconscious latent in the memory, the vision gets life through recollection,

contemplation, selection, modification, recreation and imagination, it forms a shape of fabricated fiction per se the poetic genius of the perceiver's language and the perceiver/poet renders to the fiction a kind of idealized unity by diffusing, dissolving and dissipating the identical parts with the process of imagination and thus performs the act of poetic creation with his poetic talent. The poet indeed does not do any logical reflection, but yet he does grant to his external impressions a certain kind of poetic images, that distinguishes "logical reflection from artisanal consciousness of literary fabrication" (Barthes 97)

Some of the examples of primary imagination that we find in the poetic lines of the poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* are:

"Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere
Nor any drop to drink.
The very deep rot: o Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea (Lines 119-126).

Here in these lines we find realistic and vivid description of nature, no possibility of the suspension of disbelief. The essence of nature is sustained with simple detailing, yet suggestive enough to understand the gruesomeness of the nature and leaves the reader awfully in the process of understanding the difference between the good sight and the bad sight of the nature's creation and natural objects. As Johnson puts it: Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken realities, but because they bring realities to mind" (Brett 5). The reader's insight is enabled to view from poetic vision the nature's characteristics and nature's forces.

The following lines the poem *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* sends our judgment to sleep, because of skillfully blending of the natural and supernatural elements. We neither believe nor disbelieve when he gives horrifying details in the description of his being alone on the ship in the midst of wide sea, where death fires dance, slimy creatures live on, the sea water burnt like the oils burnt by a witch emitting multi colored lights, while the throats of the sailors on ship choked due to heat and dryness on the standstill ship, all sailors cursed to death due to Ancient mariner's sin of killing an Albatross, life-in-death for all followed and

everyone died. However, just as they died, they cast at him a painful glance and curse him with their eyes.

“Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die” (258-260).

The poet Coleridge even when creating pictorial illustration of nature with his simple language, let the readers’ human interest originate into the natural scenery, his imagination make reader believe “the semblance of truth” (Gibbs xvii), in disguise of his poetic faith that he imbibes with his words drive readers into the question of dramatic illusion and credibility. Paradoxically the poet breaks into the inner realm of human mind. He strains audience’s mind to a severe level of incredibility, finally that dramatic illusion appears in itself a disillusion. The mariner describes his helplessness and his fear of being alive and alone on the deck of the ship, he says:

The pang, the curse, with which they died,
Had never passed away:
I could not draw my eyes from theirs,
Nor turn them up to pray” (446-450)

The readers surrender to his poetic consciousness with their eyes open and with their own judgment blocked behind their consciousness. Readers’ ability of reason or their consciousness is voluntarily suspended. There is willing remission of judgment due to the awe and amazing grip of poetic language that he constructs in his simple rhythm and in words. In this context it is apt to quote Immanuel Kant who influenced Coleridge philosophy of understanding nature through one’s conscious mind, the philosopher writes: “we can cognize of things a priori only what we ourselves have put into them” (Kant, B xviii). So according to the Critique, a priori knowledge is possible only if and to the extent that the sensible world itself depends on the way the human mind structures its experience (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant/>).

He relates to such ensamplastic pattern of poetic pleasure in which the external objects of the world are steeped into creativity, glory and dream-like quality through possibilities and probabilities. While in the poem *Ancient Mariner* there is realization of poetic pleasure and moral conception through impossibilities and improbabilities i.e. through the use of supernatural element in the naturalness of the worldly impressions. The poet creates unlikely images or feelings to conceive poetic truth in the painful moments of life and in the

phenomenon of nature. The poetry of S.T. Coleridge has more personal impulsive reactions, sensations and instinctual urge in the formation of poetic creation and creative urge.

Conclusion

Coleridge in this sense differentiates himself from his contemporary romantic poet William Wordsworth because Wordsworth's poems follow rural and humble, rustic and natural visions, whereas Coleridge finds his fantastic creations in nature's forces and nature's creations. Secondly Wordsworth does not live in illusion or create any illusion, while Coleridge with his figurative words draws a world of poetic dream, instead of poetic sensibility, in which Coleridge's poems earlier leave reader awfully dumbstruck, with congealed nerves and at times heart –wracking state; while the poems of William Wordsworth's poems carry the reader to a phenomenon of truth and bliss. Coleridge's objectivity to nature's beauty is of wonder and enigma, while Wordsworth's subjectivity to nature is of a kind of a friend and guide. Both the poets of romantic age sensitise common man to feel nature from the artistic sense in order to derive moral good in human life. It is apt to conclude with the fact that human consciousness, collective consciousness and universal consciousness do play a major role in imparting aesthetics to a piece of literature or art, but it is the high-flown sensibility, logical reasoning and imaginative talent that creates and recreates the world of literary tradition and creativity. The poetic pleasure is possible if there is proper and balanced coordination of language and harmony. Both the abovementioned poets with their own poetic capacity contributed significantly in a novel way to design the poetic art and truth.

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