



Romantic imagination and revolutionary idealism: Two aspects of William Wordsworth

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Abstract

The Romantic Movement of the Nineteenth century was a turning point in the literary history of not only England but also the whole Europe. It sprinkled the waves of change and challenges in the literary geniuses of the entire world. There was a kind of revolution in all the genres, but it became more evident in the field of poetry. The conditions in social, political and economic issues of the day affected the intellectual minds fully. The Romantic Movement had its roots in the American War of Independence, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution of England. The hard and bitter living conditions of lower strata of society moved the heart of the Romantic masters. They started writing for the deprived, distressed and disadvantaged sections of the society. They gave pages to the ideal human conditions and vibrant natural settings along with personal imagination and feelings. The French Revolution and its ideals of 'Equality, Fraternity and Liberty' coloured their hopes for justice and freedom for all. Though they did not deal with any kind of political crisis but events of the day filled their hearts with a new kind of enthusiasm, which they shared in their poems. Though all the Romantic masters like William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, John Keats, P.B. Shelley and Lord Byron felt enthusiastically about the French Revolution and shared their romantic idealism, but the highest poet of nature, William Wordsworth stands forwarded to all of them.

Keywords: revolution, romanticism, imagination, political, economic and enthusiasm

Introduction

The Romantic Movement in literature of nineteenth century England was an intellectual orientation in the field of music, painting, architecture and literature. It appeared as an offshoot reaction against reason, order and rationalism that epitomized the Neo-classical age/ the Age of Reason. The Romantics were inclined towards the sublime, subjective and simpler/nobler forms of life, which were seen to be imbued in entities of nature. William Wordsworth brought the Romantic revolution in the field of poetry, by writing 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads', wherein he propounded his theory and practice for the Romantic poetry. In this seminal manifesto, he clearly puts forward his intention for championing the cause of the marginalized people.

Wordsworth did not deal with political crises or events that may not interest humankind. He is concerned with the essential qualities of human heart and the primary feelings that arise in heart. He discusses the ordinary circumstances of commonplace life. The simpler and natural workings of the heart are the matters of his concern. All his poems are a kind of his meditations on one or another aspect of human nature. He had never any wish to escape from the commonplaces of life. He accepted them all, and viewed everything with a calmness and courage that was never shaken. He did not perceive anything as humble or trivial. He only required that it should be familiar. He did not value anything for itself so much as for what it can tell of ourselves. He did not feel need to search anything for his poems, nor he decided to follow the beaten track to make them familiar. He observed a sense of feeling in everything and tried to listen everything around

him. He heard a voice, a kind of music in nature and he fabricated its thread in human passions.

His characters are not special characters of his time; rather his poems abound with figures such as leech-gatherer, farmers, beggars, shepherds, soldiers and mothers. He took little interest in the study of character or characteristics, which distinguish one man from another. He found his interest in qualities that are common to all men and uses language common to them.

Wordsworth says that the language of poetry is "a selection of real language of men in a state of vivid sensation" and "of the language of prose". (1The Preface)

It did not matter what names he gave them. He did not describe their habits that might be connected to their occupations. They were not drawn as clearly marked types. They did not represent any class rather they are individuals. They may not be familiar in any world but they have their own world. They are simply men, old or young, or women or children, as nature makes them, and as little affected as may be by the conventions of society. In his poems, he uses the simple language, the language of common people to communicate and express their feelings in a solid and better way. He used the language really spoken by men to develop a kind of link between men and nature.

The simple facts of life become the subject of his poetry only as they appeal to his heart. He described poetry as natural and feelings as beatings of a heart. He felt it in a slow and ordered course of human life. He felt poetry as taking its origin in 'emotions recollected in tranquility' (*Preface to Lyrical Ballads*). All that is vital in his knowledge has been revealed

through feelings here and there and everywhere in his poems. His subjects and themes provided him the strength in which his knowledge was reflected. Not at any point, he was separated from either feelings or wisdom. He used imagination to incite and support his feelings to what he thought later. He used his meditative calm to recall his memories. He used his memories and Nature was a kind of escapism, a way to express his sorrows and joys for the poet Wordsworth just after the French Revolution. Aggrieved with the sense of grief and pain, in his personal life and at the national front, he found in it a medium to relieve all the misalliances and disturbances that he felt in the world around him. His earlier poems are mere reflections of his personal feelings and beautiful scenes of nature. Passing through a lot of agony and despair, he communicated everything to nature. After some years, he felt a kind of kinship with nature. All the places he visited in his tours left a lasting impression on his mind and haunted him in his memories. He felt everything minutest observation. His thoughts and feelings got maturity when he came close to his friend S.T. Coleridge and his sister Dorothy Wordsworth. His long discussions and debates with his friend and his sister on the impact of religion and nature on human mind matured his philosophy for life. He found a kind of strength in his feelings and shaped his poems based on them. His feelings were the base of his vision, which he reconstructed in his poems.

He found a healing touch, a kind of sympathy in all manifestations of nature. In all the stages of his life, he linked nature to man and man to nature. His views for nature were different when he saw different perspectives, different forms of nature in various phases of his life. When he was a child at Cumberland in England, he played in the lap of nature as a carefree and innocent child. When he became adult, it attracted him with all its beauty. He felt sensuousness in nature. It was wild and beautiful for him. When he was a young man of twenty-five, the time he wrote "Tintern Abbey", it was a kind of companion for him as he started to develop joy and happiness in the company of nature. At this stage of life, he found a kind of communication between him and nature. He became mature and wise in the lap of nature again. Nature gave a sense of unity to his poems. He reflected all shades and colours of nature and he counted all joys and blessings of it, which are gifted to human beings in one form or another.

In his poem 'Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth portrays the setting of the ocean, and the green earth vividly. Most of his poems proclaim the loveliness, sublimity and the living soul of Nature. His *The Prelude* records candidly and beautifully his evolution as a lover of nature from his early childhood to maturing adulthood. He passed through four stages of life in his love for nature i.e. from childhood to youth, and youth to old age. The first stage is the age of young blood and happiness. In this carefree life, the poet has spent his years in the midst of the beautiful surroundings for angling, hunting and enjoying the lovely spectacles of nature. It is about a healthy boy's delight in freedom and the open air. The second stage is the age of senses and sensations. The scenes and sounds of nature enchanted and thrilled him. The physical aspects of nature appealed him more and more. He loved

beautiful landscapes, waterfalls and dark green woods more passionately and deeply as he records in "Tintern Abbey":

The sounding cataract
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me
 An appetite; a feeling and a love. (98 Wordsworth)

In the third phase of his life, Wordsworth faced several sorrows and sufferings around 1790. His sister, Dorothy propelled him towards the sights and sounds of nature. He spent his solitude in its lap and experienced the presence of a divine spirit to console him. After passing the turmoil of the French Revolution, he espied the nature's teaching- the human morality. His love of nature became both-- divinized and humanized. The love of nature became indivisible from his love of mankind. The music of woods silenced his inner turmoil. The eternal entities of nature reminded him of the decay of the human body, but the permanence of human goodness.

This stage of his life is a stage of transformation or the stage of intellect wherein Wordsworth begins to rationalize why he should feel for the sufferings of his fellow human beings. When he begins to rationalize, he discovers that the same principle which lies in him is present in all other beings. In other words, there is 'one underlying principle' which is pervasive in all beings which is felt by the poet in his poem "Tintern Abbey" as:

And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of 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 rolls through all things. (93-101)93

The image of the union of mind and nature is one of the concerns of the poet. The human mind resides in perceptions and nature provides in abundance. The poetry is invoked by a perception of how exquisitely they are fitted to each other. The mind is attracted towards opposites, the opposites of human nature. It is attracted towards the reciprocals and this reciprocal fitness of mind allows it to form images in nature. It is engaged in a union, which is the ground of all imagination. When this fitness of inner and outer worlds is established then it gets a conception of totality in all objects of the universe. This equilibrium is the basis of all imagination. There is a system or coherence in nature, and it allows the human mind to get the same unity in its various forms. The relation of fitness between these two worlds finds its ground in a sense of totality, which forms the basis for the articulation of the space of transcendence between them. The inner mind of man wants revelation and nature is the accurate medium for articulation of all feelings.

Wordsworth accepted the gifts of the mystical spirit with a serious attitude than most of his theological predecessors. Like a true evangelist, he cherished the biblical truths and fruits of the spirit as the sustaining force of the routine life. He observed nature carefully. He regarded the objects of nature as divine symbols, which appear now and then, come and go as emblems of moral truth. He modified his senses and sensibility to nourish his affirmation of a living faith, which resides and flourishes in the smiling faces of the living entities. He based his literary world upon the foundation of spiritual and natural theology. His faith is remarkable for its spontaneity and sincerity, as its roots are plunged in traditional groundings. Nature is for him the most important in all, and ultimately all in all. He did not indulge his life in solving the riddles of life and death, but he suggested the ways to live life in a better way. Birth and death are the cycles of the human life, neither to be celebrated nor to be lamented. A man has no control over what he gets, but he has to manage how to use it for full satisfaction. Nature has many blessings in her bosom, which she reveals now and then. She is the true guide and moral teacher in human life and at one point in his poem "Tables Turned" Wordsworth says-

She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.
One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can. (78)

Wordsworth's mysticism is unique, in all forms and formulations. It has the faces and facets of humanism. For him, the man as an individual being is supreme and superior to all the objects of the nature. He needs not to conquer nature to prove his mastery. He is a part and particle of the nature. Nature has blessings for him in every form and shape. It has a scenic beauty to soothe his eyes, deep and melodious lore. The beautiful and melodious songs are chanted by the birds in nature to sweeten man's ears. There are vast plains and mountains to absorb his solitude, and lush green plains with watery streams to satisfy his basic needs. Wordsworth feels the presence of life, and spirit in all the objects of the nature. His poetry strives to link religious morality with his interest in scientific pantheism, which helped him base his lessons from the objective realm of observable phenomena. The grip of science enabled his mind to believe in permanence of things. His faith in religion helped him to support his love for nature in one or another form. In his adoration and admiration for nature, he is a true pantheist. His pantheism has the traces of science in which he subordinates it to the natural theology. His faith in one life, and ultimately the oneness of life or one life in all the things around him, is the cardinal principle of his pantheism. It takes place from outward life to inward mind and then back to the outward side. His mind makes no difference between man and the world, of which he is a part and parcel of everything around him. He obeyed the laws of the nature, and insistence on the obedience of the same laws by all for peaceful and

harmonious co-existence with the same pace and in the same space. He never challenged the established and set canons of religion to prove his supremacy, rather he modified then in his life to make his poetry suitable to all kinds of people. His spirituality was the living universe and his universe was his spirituality. All that was vital in his knowledge came through his feelings and the feelings for others modified his sensibility for his religion. He lost his identity as an individual for a more meaningful existence, and he feels ecstasy, a permanent joy and love in his absorbed self in the lap of nature. He enjoys and feels like a true mystic as felt by T. Crehan in his book, *The Poetry of Wordsworth-*

"This gift, he feels, holds the key to our "unintelligible world". The loss of identity is not complete, however: he becomes "a living soul" and sees "into the life of things". His identity is changed rather than lost though it is very different from the workaday self he takes for granted". (15 Crehan)

Aggrieved with the sense of grief and pain, in his personal life and at the national front, he found in it a medium to relieve all the misalliances and disturbances that he felt in the world around him. His earlier poems are mere reflections of his personal feelings and beautiful scenes of nature. Passing through a lot of agony and despair, he communicated everything to nature. After some years, he felt a kind of kinship with nature. All the places he visited in his tours left a lasting impression on his mind and haunted him in his memories. He attached his views and feelings to man and nature and tried to share a kind of link between the two for the benefit of humanity as a whole.

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