

Imagination as a Path to Reality

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Abstract:

The Romantic poets are known for their use of imagination and imaginary pictures that describe the natural world as an ideal world. Critics consider this point as a weakness in the poet himself, believing it to be an escapist attitude. This paper tries to discuss this point saying that this is not a weakness but a method to grasp reality

A considerable number of critics¹ considered the romantics as escapists, believing that the romantic poet tends to escape to the happy world of imagination leaving the miserable reality behind. The Romantics are distinguished by their special view concerning 'imagination'; for each poet it is considered to be a theory of poetry. It is important for the process of composing poetry because it is a crucial literary fact by which the romantic poet can prove his individuality.

The two words 'imagination' and 'fancy' are very important for Wordsworth; for him imagination reconstructs reality. It is the power that leads him to 'truth'. It is both vision and

reconstruction; "it brings the mind into union with the object of contemplation, disengages the forces or principles that govern it and interrupts it in the light of these."²

On the other hand, the word 'fancy' is to deal with the outward forms or manifestation of things and to depend on the rapidity with which fancy scatters the thoughts and images.

In his Prelude to the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth introduces for the first time a completely new and unique theory of writing poetry. For him the creation of poetry is a process by which all the experiences and feelings have to pass certain stages; first it starts with the stimulation of the poets' feelings and

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emotions by a unique experience, second would be the incubation of such experiences within the poet's mind, third is the recollection of what is kept in the mind which is going to cause a stronger feeling of excitement that is joined with contemplation. According to P.S.Sastri, within this stage there is no more

When oft upon 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 daffodils⁴.

[lines 3-8]

The same point is referred to in 'The Solitary Reaper';

The Music in my heart I bore
Long after it was heard no more.

[lines 31-32,p.221]

Thus, the truth of poetry is perceived through imagination, when the poet does not react to a stimulation immediately he is in fact thinking deep of its reality, and he is not escaping towards imagination to search for a relief out of his bitter reality.

A character like 'Lucy' in the 'Lucy Poems' ,isolated unknown by anybody except the poet and few like him,

She lived unknown and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be
But she is in her grave and oh!
The difference to me.

[She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways, lines 9-12,p.176]

accidental features, there is only "that sane state of feeling which arises out of thought and which is called contemplation."³ And the last stage is creation, which is proceeded by a strong feeling of excitement and joy, Wordsworth refers to this in his 'Daffodils'

and very attractive in nature and beauty, would reflect a point of criticism. She symbolizes the values that are no more valid in the corrupted world of materialism, this is why whenever we hear about her she is isolated, unseen by everybody;

The whole world is different for Wordsworth because he is no longer able to see beauty, Lucy for him was the ideal with which he can compare his life and discover the misery in his corrupted materialistic world as compared to her nature world.

Truth here is perceived through the poet's ability to create the imaginative perfect world of Lucy, and then through a comparison between his own world and the world of imagination he would reach the bitter reality, i.e. the deterioration of his world.

In "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways" Lucy is described as a 'violet' very beautiful charming violet which grows in the middle of stagnant, dirty water beside a 'mossy stone' and this violet is 'half hidden from the eye'. It seems that there is something special about these natural creatures that are 'half hidden', as if they resemble what is

Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse: and with me
The Girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shal feel an over seeing power
To kindle or restrain.

obvious in our daily life but it is half hidden', not everybody is able to see corruption around him, nor everybody is able to recognize the causes of corruption despite the fact that those reasons and symptoms of corruption are clearly shown in society. Only those who are able to appreciate the existence of that beautiful brave violet in the middle of ugliness are the ones who are able to see and recognize reality. The violet here is a symbol of purity and innocence. It reflects nature, the world which man lacks in his life. Wordsworth believes that nature gives man the ability to see and appreciate beauty, as well as to recognize reality by means of comparison and good judgment.

In "Three Years She Grew" nature talks and explains its procedure by which it can raise up a human being according to certain principles that are set by God;

[lines 7-12,p.176]

Then in the sixth stanza she say;
And vital feelings of delight
Shal rear her form to stately height
Her virgin bosom swell;
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell.

[lines 31-36,p.177]

This is the heaven that man destroyed by his arrogance and corruption. By comparing this world in which Lucy is living with the world of the city, surely the comparison is between heaven and hell. Imagination for Wordsworth is connected with truth, the inward of reality, by which the poet has to study the society very well so that he can reach a better understanding of its problems and finally be able to express them. While 'fancy' is related to the outward manifestation of reality, thus it does not lead to truth, it is not a vision. The search for truth, according to Wordsworth, is channeled only through imagination.

Coleridge, on the other hand, perceives truth through a higher level of

imagination which is the primary imagination that is the ordinary perception of the organ; the brain. Within this level the most important thing is that man can perceive his world through his senses, and he can reach a primary understanding of his world because of what he hears, sees, touches and tastes. Yet this is not the full truth about the world. For Coleridge, 'full truth' can be reached through the 'secondary imagination', the world that reconstruct this miserable world and reforms it. The outcome of this secondary imagination is poetry and values other than those necessary for living; in addition to us every quality beyond the account of physics and sense perception;

The PRIMARY IMAGINATION, I hold to be the living power and Prime Agent of all human perception, and a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the finite I AM.

The SECONDARY IMAGINATION, 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 operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital even as all objects are essentially fixed and dead.⁵

The manifestation of this theory is clearly shown in Kubla Khan, the division of this poem into two parts reflect how the poet controls the world of Imagination. His reading about the khan and his city enables him to describe

Could I revive within me her symphony and song
To such a deep delight it would win me,
That with music loud and long
I would built that dom in air,
That sunny dom those caves of ice

Then it is the strong, powerful feelings that lead the poet into the world of the secondary imagination, which is referred to in the poem as 'deep delight'.

And all who hear should see them there
And all should cry Beware! Beware
His flashing eyes his floating hair
Wave a circle round him thrice
And close your eyes with wholly dread
For he on honeydew hath feed
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

the city as if he had seen it, but it is not the description that makes the poem very important but rather it is the ability to create such visions. The definition that is given in part two of the poem reflects the concept of the poet for Coleridge;

[lines 42-47,p.355]

The poet then is a man who has full control over his mind. Only emotions of special degree make him write poetry. Coleridge also says;

[lines 48-54,p.355]

Thus the poet controls not only his own mind, but he even controls the mind of his audience. The moment they hear his poem they are under a spell, enabling them to visualize the city believing that the poet is a magician. What is important in this poem is the moment of realization; the poet is a holy and imaginative man whose spirit dwells in paradise, where it is introduced to beauty and happiness. Thus, he is the only person capable of diagnosing and writing about the misery of life enabling the reader to compare and realize the

But thou, my babe! Shalt wander like breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible,
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
Great universal Teacher!

In these lines Coleridge “expresses his belief that God [is present] in all the objects of Nature and that His voice is articulate in the various sounds of Nature .He also hopes that his son will live in constant company of Nature and learn the language of God.”⁶ The

fact that he is living in a corrupted world that needs to be cured.

In ‘Forest At Midnight’ Coleridge clearly says that he is not going to raise his child in the city which is full of smoke and pollution. This he expresses would prevent man from seeing natural scenes except for the sky and the stars. He points out that he would rather bring him up in the natural world where he is going to be introduced to the law of God as reflected in the natural scene;

[lines 54-63, p.372]

poem reflects the need to enjoy the natural scene and to look at nature not as a place of joy only but as a place where the philosophy of God is reflected. The message given here is that man should have this insight about the natural world .There is an implied invitation to

leave the corrupted city and enjoy the purity of nature, and that the city is blinding man and preventing him from seeing the truth about life .Man can not see his reality let him come to the natural world and by means of comparison he will be able to decide whether he will stay in this corrupted world or leave it to live in the natural world .Of course this state of mind can never be reached without the help of imagination and the ability to create visions that show reality.

C. D. Thrope believes that Keats always “understood (imagination) to be the supreme active principle in poetic composition.” ⁷ Reading his poetry shows that there are two separate worlds, the imaginative and the real, and both of them share one element, which is 'insight'. Man's insight is very important

Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and specter-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

This world is miserable and hopeless, man can no longer live like this, and we are born dead. Youth and

for the creative mind to write poetry through describing the imaginative world. In Ode to a Nightingale, Keats is using his imagination to describe the dream world which is in fact the world of nature. The poet portrays nature as a world that can not be reached or seen by the usual ordinary man because his mind is blinded by his daily activities in the real miserable world.

The song of the nightingale is very important because it reflects the alarm that moves the imagination of the poet to see and reflect the misery of the world, thus the poem reflects a sort of comparison between two different worlds each is the opposite of the other, the world of the bird which is full of life and happiness and the real world which is full of misery and corruption;

[lines 24-30,p.824]

beauty decay and die quickly and nothing can be done.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each weat
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;

[lines 41-45,p.824]

Ode to a Nightingale represents an indirect criticism of society by means of comparison. Within the poem we can see that the poet tries to compare between his world and the world of nature, where the natural world is full of happiness, purity and harmony. Throughout the poem the poet tries to give certain images that can reflect and support this theme. The main image is the image of the bird singing for all the seasons as if the natural world lives a continuous happiness no matter what season it is. The creatures of the natural world believe in regeneration and that finally Spring will come to bring life and hope

with it. Opposite to this lively young world stands the world of the city with all its misery and disgrace. The materialistic life of the city people are living in the city is causing total disaster. In more than one place the poet wishes to dissolve, fade away or forget the world of the city and live in the natural world through the imagination. In this poem there is evidence that Imagination is considered to be the means by which man can realize his reality through comparison. Death in the poem is an outlet a way to escape bitter reality, while imagination is the only way to live happily.

Darkling I listen;and,for many a time
 I have been half in love with easeful death,
 Call'd him soft names in many amused rhyme,
 To take into the air my quite breath;
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!.....

[lines 51-58,p.824]

Shelley, in his Ode to the West Wind, tries to change the whole rotten society through the help of imagination;

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is :

What if my leaves are falling like its own!

The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,

Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,

My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe

Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

And by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth

Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

Be through my lips to unawakened Earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

[lines 57-70, p.706]

Through an indirect invitation to start a revolution the poet is reflecting life in the city as compared to the life of nature. The image of leaves that fall down in Autumn, clouds that gather to start the rain, and the waves that tremble when they hear the west wind coming all reflect the idea that within this world Nature always cures itself and regenerates its creatures. By giving such images, the poet wants to say that the sources of corruption represented by

these images can be cured through regenerating themselves just like in the natural world. Winter here represents death that should terminate corruption and Spring represents the new life man should expect after the end of corruption. The final stanza shows the power of imagination to create a whole world that might be real if man wishes it to be. The stanza says through poetry revolution can start and succeed in changing this corrupted world.

Notes:

¹ Consult: B.R. Mullick, R. L. Varshney, Shelley: Selected Poems (Lakshmi: Narain Agarwal. Agra, 1997), p.36. According to A. Cultton-Block "for Keats, the aesthetic life was an escape.", cited in The Mind of John Keats by Clarence D. Thrope (New York: Oxford University Press, 1926) p.34. And S.C. Mundra The Major Romantics and the Victorians (Bareilly; Prakash Book Depot, 1993), P.3 "they sought through their poetry an escape from the cracking cares and corroding anxieties of the world to a world of beauty and joy which their poetic imagination had pictured."

¹ David Nichol Smith, "Introduction" in his Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1932), P. XVII.

¹ P.S. Sastri William Wordsworth: Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (Lakshmi: Narain Agarwal. Agra, 1998) p.43.

¹ The Norton Anthology of English Literature, vol.2, General Editor M.H. Abrams (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979). Subsequent references are to this edition, and will be incorporated within the text, with page

and line numbers, unless otherwise indicated.

¹ Cited in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, vol.2, General Editor M.H. Abrams (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), p.395-396.

¹ R.L. Varshney Coleridge Selected Poems (Agra: Lakshmi Narain Agrawal, 1996) p.342.

¹ John Spencer Hill, ed The Romantic Imagination (London: University Tutorial Press LTD, 1987), p.176.

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الخيال كطريق نحو الحقيقة

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الملخص:

عرف عن الشعراء الرومانسيين ولعهم بعالم الخيال واستخدامهم للصور الشعرية الثرية بالصور الخيالية التي اخذت تتغنى بالطبيعة الام وجمالها. ان اغلب النقاد للشعر الرومانسي اعتبروا هذه النزعة للخوض في عالم الخيال ضعفاً في شخصية الشاعر، الذي هرب الى عالم الخيال، ليتخلص من المشاكل التي يواجهها المجتمع على ارض الواقع. يهدف البحث الى اثبات العكس وان الهدف من الصور الشعرية الغنية بالصور الخيالية هو في الاساس نقداً غير مباشر للواقع الكئيب الذي يعيشه الفرد من خلال استخدام المقارنة بين ما يعرض في القصيدة وما يحدث على ارض الواقع.