

Mind, Passion and Language of the Ordinary Men: A Critique of the Selected Poems of William Wordsworth

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ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the critical analysis of the selected poems, 'I Travelled Among Unknown Men' and 'The World Is Too Much With Us'. Wordsworth claims, that he decided to write these poems to describe incidents and circumstances from the routine life of common masses in the language, used by them repeatedly (Wordsworth, 1802). Wordsworth anticipated and alleged that the exhibition of ordinary things to 'the mind in an unusual' manner would 'make these incidents and circumstances exciting. The present paper is an attempt to assess this claim of Wordsworth, through a critical analysis of the poems. The major themes of the selected poems are yearning for the earlier life, missing the little things, a sense of attachments, acquaintance with the places and people, and melancholy related to the loss. If the mind of a reader is all-encompassing and dynamically strong, it would qualify for various pleasures, preserving a state of enjoyment.

Key Words : Poems, Mind, Passion, Language, Wordsworth

INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth as an English romantic poet who not only introduced the Romantic Age, but also presented a critique of the romantic poetry in the form of 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads*. The second edition of *The Lyrical Ballads* published in 1800, contained a preface from the author himself. In this preface, Wordsworth (1802) states that the volume of *Lyrical Ballads* has been published 'as an experiment' so that the same 'might be of some use to ascertain' through the 'selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation'. Wordsworth also gives his famous definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity", and calls his own poems in the book "experimental". A fourth and final edition of *The Lyrical Ballads* was published in 1805. The main focus of the experiment was to judiciously inform about an extent of pleasure to the men through the 'metrical arrangement' of his poems. Later on, the

ideas offered in the 'Preface' proposed to be 'adapted to interest of mankind permanently' and 'in the quality of its moral relations' to 'prefix a systematic defence of the theory'. One of the main arguments of the theory was that it would be necessary to point out the modes with which human mind and language 'act and re-act on each other'. Wordsworth emphasizes here that this context of language and human mind is not only pertinent in literature, but it is also relevant in human society itself.

The idea about the interaction between language and the human mind finds allowances in the 'Preface' in the claim of poet. Wordsworth claims, 'I propose to myself in these Poems was choose incidents and situations from common life, and relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in selection of language really used by men' (Wordsworth: 1802). Wordsworth expected and believed that the presentation of ordinary things to 'the mind in an unusual' would 'make these incidents and situations interesting'. In the light of this argument, the present paper is an attempt to asses this claim of Wordsworth, through a critical analysis of the poems, 'I Travelled Among Unknown Men' and 'The World is Too Much With Us'. The poems have been selected due to their popularity, passionate expression and preciseness of their structure. Thus, the selection also appropriately suits the expanse of the research papers, like this one.

These two poems of Wordsworth structurally differ as the poem, 'I Travelled Among Unknown Men' is in lyrical style and the poem, 'The World is Too Much with Us' is a sonnet. The letter one follows *ab ab* pattern in its four quatrains and the former follows *abba abba* in its first two quatrains and the last six line observe *cdc cdc* rhyming patterns. However, both the poems present passionate overflow of emotions.

'I Travelled Among Unknown Men' is about the idea of love for one's home country, especially being away from it. Like a common man, Wordsworth stresses upon the emotion that he will never be away from his home country in the line, '*Nor will I quit thy shore*'. The expression reveals that the poet has realised how dear his native land is to him. In the second half of the poem, Wordsworth's love for England becomes combined with his love for Lucy, '*she [whom] I cherished turned her wheel / Beside an English fire*'. (Presumably Lucy is engaged in the act of spinning or sewing, using a spinning wheel, in the domestic space of the hearth: even the fire is 'English'). However, in the final stanza, the introduction to the '*last green field / That Lucy's eyes surveyed*' in the past tense unearths a secret that Lucy has died long ago. Thus Wordsworth is pining for his country England, he has left behind and for the girl, who is no more living in this world. Though, Lucy is gone and the country is left behind yet, the poet's appreciation for both them revived again. The reason for this revival is that the homeland not only gave birth to Wordsworth and Lucy, but also inspired them to love to the people and places. The homeland, its people and places facilitated the poet to evolve in the ways, which enabled him to evolve as the person and poet having the wealth of peculiar sensitivities. These inextricable linkages between the poet and people; homeland and Lucy occur frequently as patterns in these poems of Wordsworth.

In the poem, 'The World is too Much with Us', the poet presents a censorious critique about the people of this world. The reason is that the morals of the first industrial revolutions have been absorbed in material pursuits at the cost of distancing from the blessings of nature. The urge of the poet is humanity must get in touch with nature to progress spiritually

(B P: 2007). Wordsworth gives a fatalistic view of the world, past and future. The words “late and soon” in the opening verse describe how the past and future are included in his characterization of mankind. The author knows the potential of humanity’s “powers”, but fears it is clouded by the mentality of “getting and spending.” The “sordid boon” we have “given our hearts” is the materialistic progress of mankind. The detriment society has on the environment will proceed unchecked and relentless like the “winds that will be howling at all hours”. The speaker complains that “the world” is too overwhelming for us to appreciate it, and that people are so concerned about time and money that they use up all their energy. These people want to accumulate material goods, so they see nothing in Nature that they can “own”, and have sold their souls.

Like the contemporary attitudes of the people, Wordsworth does not see nature in terms of commodity and material accomplishments. The verse “Little we see in Nature that is ours”, shows that coexisting is the relationship envisioned. We should be able to appreciate beautiful events like the moon shining over the ocean and the blowing of strong winds, but it is almost as if humans are on a different wavelength from Nature. The “little we see in Nature that is ours” exemplifies the removed sentiment man has for nature, being obsessed with materialism and other worldly objects. The relationship between Nature and man appears to be at the mercy of mankind because of the vulnerable way nature is described. The verse “This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon”, gives the vision of a feminine creature opening herself to the heavens above. The phrase “sleeping flowers” might also describe how nature is being overrun unknowingly and is helpless. The expression, ”I, standing on this pleasant lea, have glimpses that would make me less forlorn”, reveals Wordsworth’s insight of himself in society: a visionary romantic more in touch with nature than his contemporaries. The speaker would rather be a pagan who worships an outdated religion so that when he gazes out on the ocean (as he’s doing now), he might feel less sad. If he were a pagan, he would have glimpses of the great green meadows that would make him less dejected. He’d see wild mythological gods like a Proteus, who can take many shapes, and Triton, who can soothe the howling sea waves.

In both the poems, the poet seemed to have chosen the incidents and situations from common life to describe their experiences in the language, actually used by the common men. The imagination of the poet has given a kind of unusual treatment to the ordinary things and made the poems enticing for the readers. The selection of the characters from the rustic life have unearthed the essential passions, such as love for one’s native country and affection for the people. This flow of emotions and essential passions of the heart have found a soil to be matured and unrestrictive and at the same time to be plainer and simplistic. The emphatic language of the real men presented a condition, where in the elementary feelings are found to be co-existing in a state of greater simplicity, more accurately and forcibly.

‘T is past, that melancholy dream!
 Nor will I quit thy shore
 A second time, for still I seem
 To love thee more and more. (I Travelled . . .)

The manners of rural life produce those elementary emotions, which happen to be necessarily there in the character of rural occupations. Due to this reason they are easily comprehended by these rustic people. The language of these men is also adopted or gets purified from the defects of rational impurities because these men communicate for hours in that language. During their communication they exchange their experiences with the best objects from which that best part of the language gets derived. This context of sameness and narrow circle of their communications and interactions does not allow their expressions to be polluted with the influence of social vanity, which is conveyed in their feelings through unelaborated expressions. This language, springing from the repeated experiences and regular feelings provides permanence and in comparison to the philosophical texts of learned and trained philosophers and professors. The main drawback of the philosophical language is that it happens to be devoid of the sympathies of men and is more bent towards arbitrary and capricious attitudes of expression. Due to this reason poets desire to be a pagan rather than being 'out of tune' by indulging and wasting his powers in the 'Getting and spending' of the daily lives.

. . . Great God! I'd rather be
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn. (*The World is . . .*)

Both the poems present a life style which comes at a price. The price is that our potentials to identify with nature or to appreciate the world around us get destroyed. If we focus our powers on material objects, either the people grow unaware of their wider, and arguably more important, surroundings or they are forced to leave their native country for the sake of something else. The incident from the life of common men is often seen that they become homesick when they are to leave their native place to do some work in an alien country. In their memories, they compulsively realize the beauty of the place, they belong to. The idea of returning back to the place turns out to be a melancholic dream from the foreign land. The major themes of the selected poems are longing for the past life, missing the little things, a sense of belongingness, familiarity with the place and people, and nostalgia related to the loss. The thematic analysis and elaboration of the selected poems validates the hypothesis that the poems had a purpose to inform its readers about the manners in which our feelings and ideas get associated in the state of excitement in an appropriate language. This appropriate language follows the 'fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature'. In reference to these poems, undoubtedly, there has been 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. If the mind of a reader is sound and vigorous, it would qualify for various pleasures, preserving a state of enjoyment

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