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| **Role of Emotion and Imagination in the Poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge:**    There was a major shift in the conception and emphasis of literary art and, specifically, poetry in the 19th century.  Reason was what characterized the eighteenth century art and literature (Logic and rationality took precedence in any form of written expression).  Ideas and expressions about aesthetic beauty were basically centered around concepts such as the collective "we" and passion in human behavior was undermined.  Wordsworth along with Coleridge wrote in 1798 ‘Lyrical Ballads’ (a collection of poetry) and this collection is considered to have launched what we call- the English Romantic Movement.  Wordsworth wrote a preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in which he puts forth his ideas about poetry.  His conception of poetry hinges on two major premises:  1. Poetry is the language of the common man:  According to Wordsworth, poetry is the language of the common man. To him, poetry should be understandable to anybody living in the world. Hence, he pleaded that the poetry must not have the use of anything which is not related to the language of real life (like lofty, poetic diction). The subjects of poetry too should be understandable to all individuals regardless of class or position. Poetry should act like Nature. Nature touches all living things and inspires and delights them and Poetry has to follow this.  2. Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility:  Wordsworth says: "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility". Elaborating on it, he states that the senses are overwhelmed by an experience and there is “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" , which later triggers a transcendent moment- an instance of the sublime. It is after that transcendent moment that an emotion is created and when that emotion is "recollected in tranquility" the poet can assemble words to do the instance justice.  Thus, according to Wordsworth, till one could compose a poem, there has to be a certain personal distance from the event or experience . With this distance the poet can reconstruct the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" the experience caused within himself.  It is from this perspective that Wordsworth is continually inspired and led into transcendent moments by his experiences in Nature. These experiences bring to his mind a wide variety of contemplations and considerations.  But, Coleridge did not agree that poetry is the language of the common man. He thought that when poetry hinges upon the language of the common man, there is a lowering upon the diction and content and the poet may have to remain content with use of smaller vocabulary .  Coleridge in his theory of poetry mainly focused on imagination. To him imagination is the key to poetry. He divided imagination into two main components: primary and secondary imagination. In *Biographia Literaria*, one of his significant theoretical works, he writes:  “The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite of the eternal act of creation of the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation.”  The primary imagination is a spontaneous creation of new ideas, and they are expressed perfectly. The secondary imagination is mitigated by the conscious act of imagination; therefore, it is hindered by not only imperfect creation, but also by imperfect expression.  To further subdivide the act of imagination, Coleridge introduces his concept of fancy. Fancy is the lowest form of imagination because it "has no other counters to play with but fixities and definites" . With fancy there is no creation involved; it is simply a reconfiguration of existing ideas. Rather than composing a completely original concept or description, the fanciful poet simply reorders concepts, putting them in a new and, possibly, fresh relationship to each other.  Coleridge also writes that poetry "reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" . Through juxtaposition ideas, concepts, and descriptions are made clear. The more imaginative the juxtaposition is, the more exciting the poem becomes.  Abandoning Wordsworth's notion of poetry , Coleridge uses lofty language. The subject matter used by him in poetry is also of specialized nature. Wordsworth’ s poetry is based upon a vision of the organic relation between man and the natural world, a vision culminating in the sweeping metaphor of nature as emblematic of the mind of God. Coleridge also holds a reverence for Nature, yet, to him what is more important is Imagination. He makes use of primary imagination in his work, because it is the kind of imagination he values most, and avoids secondary imagination or fancy as much as possible.  For Coleridge that which is bizarre and improbable alone brings with it any promise of romance. He does not look at poetry from the humdrum surroundings of everyday life. So when he wishes to be wrapped in ecstasy he dreams of strange places where nothing is more natural than the supernatural, and the impossible is all- convincing. Thus he imagines of a phantom ship in the Ancient Marnier , which is quite keeping with such a scene as that which Coleridge pictures when, “without a breeze, without a tide”, it “drove suddenly/Betwixt us and the Sun”. In the poem the reader sees how often the reasoning faculties and the common sense of the poet are suspended, for the preponderance of the spell was upon him as surely it was upon the unfortunate Wedding Guest. But Wordsworth’s method is quite different. He does not seek to enslave us by the all-compelling glance of some mysterious seafarer, but serves us with an atmosphere suggestive of realism and plain truths. To him the Skylark is important because it remains faithful to home and the things of earth. That is the reason why he also makes a peasant girl or a wayside flower the subject of his poetry. |
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