

Paradoxes in Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey: Sense, Nature, Reality

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Abstract. There are always arguments about the unadorned language and the nature in Wordsworth's poems. Some consider it as a sentimental approach to escape from the reality, while others are on the contrary. This article is going to check how the language was used, and in what aspect Wordsworth chose to depict the nature to find relationship between human and nature, as well as the society. By examining the paradoxes in the poetry, the article will explore how Wordsworth made innovation at his time, which added a new angle to perceive the world.

Keywords: Wordsworth; Tintern Abbey; Nature; Reality; Feeling.

1. Introduction

When talking about Romanticism, it is common for people to think about words like sentimental, emotional, which appear to be an extensive hold view by the focusing on the appearances in the literature works during that period. However, if we examine the work, the core of Romanticism is not purely sentimental. Take Wordsworth as an example, he had written down "To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears" in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. What does "thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears" mean? To Wordsworth, the sentimental state with tears rolling down lays shallower than the state of contemplation, which indicates that the center of his writing cannot be at sentimental layer. Even so, the concept of "thought" he referred to is still ambiguous[1]. How he presented his thoughts was not in a sheer rational way, but an intertwine of sense and rationality or something beyond it. Thus, by checking *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour*[2], this paper is going to explore the relationship between feelings, thoughts, and other factors in this poetry, and to find how Wordsworth use the form to convey his ideas, theories.

2. Language is the Incarnation of Thought

In the poem, the narrative modified with the contemplation of what he saw in the nature. In first paragraph, Wordsworth did not focus on subjective thoughts, but just depicting the scene in an objective way. However, the language implied his feeling and thoughts. Using three "five", the reptation can express Wordsworth's contemplation and grief when facing "the present state of the public taste in this country" and the revolution of literature as well as the society[3], whose failure turned Wordsworth from the supporter of revolution into the opponent. The collapse of his dream compelled Wordsworth to contemplate a new solution to the society, and at this time, the nature inspired him by connecting the scenes at present with memories, thus arouse a modification in sensation. Wordsworth repeated "again" for four times on line 2,4,9,14. He saw the connection at the same place, which enabled the time to break the linear principals to intergrade into his mind, thoughts of now.

From the language use in the poetry, Wordsworth represented the poetry in a form greatly different from the common poetic writing in 1800s. Wordsworth chose blank verse, which is a verse without rhyme, instead of using heroic couplet, a prevail rhyme scheme at the beginning of 1800s. However, the metrical substitutions in the poetry convey his intricate senses. Using iambic pentameter in the beginning of the first stanza, the emotion was infused into the rhyme: "Five years have past; 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." For instance, the changes in metrical beats like "inland", enhance a sense of murmur fading away in the mountain-springs. Thus, the contrast of

fading murmur and rolling Wye, intensifies the dejection with a sensible loss. Meanwhile, no poetry in Lyrical Ballads was written in heroic couplet, which provided a sense of order. A master in writing heroic couplet was Alexander Pope (1688-1744), the language of Pope's writing is in great balance, organization: "*All nature is but art, unknown to thee / All chance, direction, which thou canst not see; / All discord, harmony, not understood; / All partial evil, universal good: / And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite, / One truth is clear, / Whatever is, is right.*" [4]

However, the orderliness also means high requirement for personal literal writing ability and plenty of restriction on writing. Only small quantity of people could reach the high requirement, or the poetry would be unimaginative, rigid. When people are all chasing the orderliness in poetry writing, the literature creation would be in a state of lacking vividity.

Considering the situation at his time, Wordsworth's poetry broke the rules, which was opposed to the prevail rhyme. From the rhyme that was used, we could see the purpose of Wordsworth's writing, which pointed out a problem at that period and made efforts to break it with poetry. The emphasis on the order of universe showed the Neo-classical world view, focusing on the current order. On the contrary, Wordsworth dug deeper through the stable appearance, trying to find a kind of poetry that could be well adapted to human interests. Rhyme for Wordsworth is a way to make the events interesting, to put people in a state of excitement.

Wordsworth did not only make the adaption of the form in rhyme, but also in the specific words. Unadorned words like something, all things, all thinking things entered the poetry, and abstract words like presence, thoughts, forms, sensations, feelings, influence were used. These words seemed too informal to enter the poetic narratives, but the artless words could be a component of Wordsworth's attempt on new form of poetry. Meanwhile, the sentences were long enough to cross several lines, which also differed from the major syntax usage at that period. The change in words and sentences also reflected Wordsworth's opinion on common life. While there was hardly a clear answer to a question, Wordsworth had to keep digging everything from the appearance. The complex layers about things that could be explored led to the long sentences. In this sense, the diction in Wordsworth's poetry like Tintern Abbey was not only a breakthrough on the form, but also a revolution on seeing things from a determined answer to the process of exploring the inner and outer world.

Wordsworth clearly stated his principals in writing poems. In Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth clearly presented a focus on how manner language and the human mind could be related. Moreover, he pointed out his principal object:

"The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by man, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement." [3]

The language used in the poetry was just an external form of Wordsworth's contemplation on writing. The words used in the prevail poems are too lofty to be used by man and associated with common life, thus, the poems would be unable to arise our human interests. To Wordsworth, poem should be laid down to the connection between elementary feeling and nature. Therefore, the language in Wordsworth's poetry could bring us more contemplation when took human's relationship with nature into account.

As a worshipper of Nature, Wordsworth praised the idyllic scenery after the French Revolution. At the end of the first stanza, "wreaths of smoke / Sent up, in silence, from among the trees" [2] implied the lives of "vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods" and "some Hermit." Obviously, the people who lived in the village, as well as the vagrant dwellers and Hermit, all of them were living in a community, which relied on the nature for survival, and infuse vitality of humankind into the nature. Also, the nature topic contained his reflection on industrial civilization, which was going to blunt the sensation of people. In cities, life was filled with repetition of the same work, people's sensations

were blunting, and they became more and more lonely with the bandwagon of industrialization. In this sense, nature is the breach of recalling sensation, because your temptation and emotion would come out and intertwine with each other, pushing them to a new stage. For Wordsworth, the sensation was not fixed, it would change with contemplation, which is aroused by nature. Nature can provide people more tranquility, thus the contemplation people would have in the serenity can revoke the series of thoughts and emotions. There is a more concrete way to illustrate how Wordsworth combine nature, meditation, and senses together by clearly depicting a flowing stream of the narrator's meditation and senses.

If we consider the first stanza as an approach for readers to indulge in a sense of solidity and loneliness, the memory showed in the second stanza helped him get out of the grief of trauma, thus to realize the living soul, which had the capacity of finding the truth. On the second paragraph, when the narrator was able to realize and explore deeper into his inner world, he started to observe things on his perspective, and formed a process of changing in his emotion. The "beauteous forms", namely, the nature rendered him three states of sensuality. First, a "sensation sweet", which is felt in blood. The usage of initial trochaic substitution in Line 28, and the repetition of felt push the poetry further to the climax. And later the sensation turned to be "felt along the heart"; then, it "passing even into my purer mind with tranquil restoration". Although it was not clear whether it was a transformation from sensation to spiritual side, or a weaving of the all the factors like senses, thoughts, we can find that there is a process started from external stimulation to inner sides of him. The external stimulation to evoke his excitement transformed from the three states and stayed at a state "of kindness and of love". The process of his sense was like sensation-feeling too of unremembered pleasure-purer mind-affection-love. The language in the poetry also reached an incredible sense of harmony and sublimity. While the first stanza used more concrete nouns to describe subjects, like "waters", "cliffs", "landscape", "plots of cottage-ground", the second stanza tended to use abstract nouns, like "forms", "absence." And the adjectives in these two stanzas also turned from descriptive ones like "long", "soft" into abstract and sublime ones like "beauteous", "purer", "tranquil". Therefore, both the form and the content reached a new state of sublimity. With the nature acted as the connector, the personal sensation was purified into a universal love of human. By contemplating, Wordsworth realized his changes in sense came with his appreciation of nature, which rendered him the ability to "see into the life of things."

3. Nature with Spiritual Tranquility

It is clear that nature can be a major theme in Wordsworth's creation, but what is the nature in Wordsworth's poetries? In Wordsworth's poetry, there seems always a binary opposition of industry and nature, due to his reflection on industrial civilization. Industrial civilization led to the specialization of work, which means, in cities, people repeated stereotyped actions every day. Thus, people longed for unusual things to happen, and this desire could only be satisfied by instantaneously released news. The literature and dramas had attempted to cater to the trend, which caused declined popularity of the precious work from former authors. Regarding this situation, Wordsworth thought nature is the way to resist the industrial civilization. The inborn quality of us human has the capacity of eternal purity.

Some people may argue that the nature in Wordsworth's poems is not the nature in a broad sense, which has a sublime, overwhelming quality that can bring fear to people. The nature in Wordsworth's writing is limited to sceneries that presented mostly rural life that people experienced. Wordsworth had pointed out that his purpose on creating poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to use language really used by men. To some extent, Wordsworth shared the same interest of nature scenery with some former masters, for example, Roman poet Virgil, Sidney, Spenser, and Milton. Instead of holding illusory ideal of life, Wordsworth focus on the miserable reality to think and criticize it, due to the realistic problem of farmers' poverty in the stream of industrialization. The realistic element with his descriptions of human and nature added a new form into the traditional

nature in literature. When Wordsworth took elements of senses and thoughts into the consideration, the people in his poetry still lack the meaning of themselves. The nature recalled their inborn spirit, turn their sensation into purer mind and love. In this poetry, when nature did show perfect tranquility, the meditation was so passive, which seemed driven by the scenes but not presented in a process of self-finding.

However, if we start our thinking from another way, to put ourselves into the position Wordsworth stood, and to have the same goal Wordsworth had in the chaotic environment. Even if we cannot know what he was considering at a certain time, but the dilemma he was in can be clearer to us. When the industry was growing at a tremendous speed, and the people became dull and divisive in a state of Savage Torpor, cruel reality was hid behind the innocence, what method is the one that can bring people out of Savage Torpor? When everything was declared in an affirmative tone, can a mild expression be the panacea? Wordsworth's published poetries did arouse plenty of dissenting voices, but the contradictions did have the function of shaking the root of savage torpor, by calling for a different state of tranquility. When considering the common nature sceneries in Wordsworth's writing, the attention should not only put on the lack of self-awareness in the work, which must appear with the artless form of language and content, but put on other factors that applied by Wordsworth, for example, the beauty in daily stuff, the exploration of one's mind. In a state of almost savage torpor, whether the nature is magnificent or ruined, it always has the eternal beauty for us to feel, contemplate, thus, to find the truth, which has nothing to do with the appearance. Thus, it is hard to assert that Wordsworth's poetries only stay in the appearance, which has a sublime spirit beyond the form of the poetry. For example, although the story of Margret in *Ruined Cottage* was miserable, the great spirit of Margret still blooms at the ruined cottage (Ruins is a common image in Wordsworth's poems, and there are arguments around why Wordsworth tend to write ruins when praising the nature. In *Tintern Abbey*, an interpretation of using the Tintern Abbey, which was not shown in the poetry, as the title was: Tintern Abbey served as a holy place for people to escape from the society and historic moment for people to contemplate, to seek tranquility in their souls. Also, Tintern Abbey was a shelter for the homeless, who lost their jobs in the stream of industrialization. (See Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth Great Period Poems*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.33) [5]). By focusing on the nature, we can see that Wordsworth provided a method to face the cruel lives. The nature itself is a therapy for all our trauma, which can place our soul into tranquility. At the same time, the serene mind is able to see the intrinsic spirit of things through the appearances, along with his kindness and love.

It is obvious that the sense the narrator had was described directly. For example, in the second stanza, the sensation came to be "felt along the heart," then "passing even into my purer mind with tranquil restoration," the "serene and blessed mood, in which the affections gently lead us on," eventually, become "a living soul." The emotion he represented here is clearly stated and emphasized but is not for arousing the sentimental feeling like touch, relief, or enlightenment, but an intertwine of natural emotion and thoughts, which cannot be separate. For example, from Line 51 to 57 in the third stanza, by directly pointing out the change of his mind from grief to tranquility, as well as repeating and emphasizing "how often", the spiritual value of Wye in his heart connected his subjective world with nature and human society. The following lines depicted his first experience of seeing Wye, and then turned into the reality, which push his contemplation of subject and object, self and nature further.

While at that time, the world was not considered as a whole. People were evaluated by the wealth, class, which isolated people and made them lonely to some extent (Wordsworth's work *London*, 1802 and *Lines Written in Early Spring* show his desire of finding equality between the rich and the poor.). At the same time, the opposition of human and nature aggregated their lonelinesses. Not only external evaluation, but the internal spirit of people was also split into rationality and sensuality were divided inside of an individual. Thus, people were inundated with numerous appearances, being unable to see the life of things. However, to Wordsworth, the relation among everything was falsely separated by the so-called rationality, which he tended to emphasize in his writing. The categories were set on the

basis of what our eye's could see, namely, the appearances. Everything in nature and people's minds had the inner relationship with each other. To dive deeper into the intrinsic association between things, it was necessary to suspend our sensory organs, to use our soul to see into the life of things: "Almost suspended, we are laid asleep/ In body, and become a living soul:/While with an eye made quiet by the power/Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / we see into the life of things." (This excerpt could also be seen as a whole of Wordsworth's life from 1793 to 1798.) Sensuality and rationality alone could not generate the ability to "see into the life of things," because the sensory organ could only grasp the appearance, and the reason also process based on appearances. For Wordsworth, the mind's eye, namely, the creative imagination was the key for human to grasp the connection with things.

Through the mind's eye, Wordsworth was able to stand at any angle to experience the nature, and to feel the beauty behind an artless spot, like the ruined cottage. The characters in his poetry were also common people, who would never be recorded in the history. But Wordsworth could discover the beauty in their personalities, thus to find the common beauty in ourselves.

4. Care for Reality behind the Form

When people may criticize that Wordsworth's work was too bland and too close to life, there is a point that should be noticed: The appearance of lacking thoughts about one's specific life should not be criticized in an assertive way, because his multiple ways to see things, and the complexity he noticed, also with his inspiration and imagination, his reflections could not be delivered in a forceful way, but in a process of his exploration. We should not focus on the form of the language, which has the potential to deceive people by the meaning of the word itself. If Wordsworth express his contemplation in doubtless tone as Pope did, the purpose of revoking people's living soul could not be achieved. The definite elements in the poet's language like the words, the structure of sentences, is rendering people an absolute truth, which give instructions on individual's actions, at the same time, making sure that people can receive and influenced by the value in the poetry. However, Wordsworth's aim was opposing that. At that period, when people believed in science and evaluated things with reason, everything should have a clear definition, the uncertainty could be a sign of his reflections. Using his language in the poetry, Wordsworth was going to guide us to explore the truth by ourselves. Only investigating and seizing the truth by oneself can the possibility to understand the truth in Wordsworth's mind be realized. Wordsworth could not explain the truth in his mind directly, because the truth itself cannot be restricted by any specific word, and everyone could have their own interpretation of the poetry. When the physical eyes could be tempted by certain appearances, and when any truth could restrict, misinterpret, or distort the reality, is there any way for people to approach the reality? The nature in Wordsworth's mind, which the truth lies in, showed the universal and eternal aspect of the life.

Apparently, Wordsworth's poetry was not to trigger sentimental feeling, which may be a misunderstanding of his language and content, which was using the daily words to describe the flow of his senses and thoughts. But Wordsworth was just choosing a understandable form of language, which is artless, to express the abstract stuff like senses and thoughts, to ask us to use our human nature to grasp the universal, eternal truth he realized by immersing himself in nature. Instead of delivering the truth in his thoughts in an incontrovertible tone, which is to compel people to receive unconditionally. His esthetic view could arouse people's nature from the Savage Torpor. In this sense, maybe the paradoxical explanation of Wordsworth's poetries, could be examined out of the opposition. If we see how Wordsworth used the form, namely the words he chose and arranged to present his poetries, to propagate the abstract, metaphysical idea to the public, the incredible care of him is everlasting, which can be delivered without time limit. We are still able to arouse our acute senses and minds to discover the beauty of nature, of human, of life, of the world. Except for the permanent revival it can bring to us, Wordsworth's poetry played a vital role in the history, which was a significant part in Romanticism. The Romanticism is just a concept we defined after that period,

but should we do not consider the Romanticism as a part of the development of art, of history, it is an incredible way to observe the world, to explore and understand ourselves and our surroundings, which grew out of nothing. Every classification of art or history we gave could be understood as general recognitions of certain periods, which not only show the past, but also a ubiquitous aspect to see the world, that could be added to our perceptions to provide multiple ways to approach the real world beyond the limited appearances we could grasp as an individual.

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