

Wordsworth's Poetry: An Undertone of Psychic Synchronism

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Abstract

Humans are consciously torn in the binary opposites; they are not aware that there lies some dark power or psychic twilight working beneath the surface of apparent sharp contradictions that binds the opposites and reconcile them into one organic whole. Wordsworth's poetry, if read from a psychological perspective, manifests such scenes and sights symbolizing these psychic opposites and their psychic integration. This paper is an attempt to psychologically throw light on how these implicit manifestations of psychic integration effectively work in Wordsworth's poetry which carry a message of psychic wholeness for the readers so feverishly involved in outer conflicts and rigid differences disintegrating a vast empire of human society.

Keywords: William Wordsworth, Poetry, Psychic synchronism

Introduction

Life is beset with binary opposites as opposing aspects leading to differences at conscious level in all walks of human drama. But to the undiscerning eye and to the conscious mind the apparent opposites are absolute and rigidly poles apart. For the less insightful or the extroverted individuals these opposites never seems to have tendency to meet at any stage. To them they always appear as rivals, foes, enemies, competitors, adversaries and contenders. They fail to see them as friendly, coordinating, supplementing and complementing each other. Humans, with this antithetical approach to life, stick themselves to one side of the coin and completely ignore the other which is less in sight or not seeable to them. Holding hard and fast to only one side of the picture and ignoring the other is what makes these individuals lopsided, rigid and extremists which leads to otherization of things, ideas, and humans. Worldwide humans are suffering from this

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psychological disease of one-sidedness; they fashion their personalities and shape their lives in a culture which is one-sidedly biased. This one-sided attitude of individuals, communities, societies, nations and countries has led to the murder of the other which has put the world's peace at stake. We experience chaos within and without. But if we look at such opposites from a deeper psychological angle, we can experience that the sharpness of these apparent differences vanish. Jung says, "True opposites are never incommensurables; if they were they could never unite. All contrariety notwithstanding, they do show a constant propensity to union, and Nicholas of Cusa defined God himself as a *complexio oppositorum*".¹ Wordsworth hits the same idea while saying, "So meet extremes in this mystical world and opposites thus melt into each other."²

By looking at such situations, images landscapes, sky-scapes, which Wordsworth's synthetic imagination captures, with a critical gaze, these opposites seem intermingling and merging into one another. This experience, which the poet cherishes in his poetry, yields not only an aesthetic pleasure but also reveals some psychic implications to the readers. After savoring sensuous pleasure of the scene and situation, the reader's imagination is tickled to go beyond its physical fabrics and gather some undertones of psychological connotations. The 'Hail, Twilight' is one of such poems of Wordsworth which, in addition to its aesthetic pleasure, is loaded with psychological meaning.

Twilight conceals the symbolic meanings of psychic integration in the sense that it emerges out of interplay of darkness of the impending night which symbolizes the unconscious, and daylight of the sun, which is associated with the conscious.³ Referring to Jung, Spoto says, "twilight state [is] analogous to middle transition." He further states that "The rays of the sun as twilight and darkness takes over actually withdraw back into the individual's inner life, to his or her own soul, in order to now provide illumination from within".⁴ The wonderful interpenetrating scene of light and darkness is analogous to what Jung calls a "transcendent function"⁵ of opposites embracing and complementing each other. Wordsworth poetry is laden with imagery of twilight which helps the reader to take the symbolic message of psychic integration, slough off one-sidedness, and acquire psychic balance in order to become a whole. Which is why, Wordsworth hails the twilight with great zeal and fervour frequently throughout his poetry. He says:

"Hail, Twilight, the sovereign of one peaceful hour!"

*Not dull art Thou as undiscerning Night;
But studious only to remove from sight
Day's mutable distinctions,--Ancient Power!
Thus did the waters gleam and the mountains lower.*"⁶

In the above passage, the image of 'undiscerning Night' symbolically refers to the invading unconscious which does not show any respect for the conscious demands of the ego or outer reality in the conscious/outer world. It seems as if the 'inward eye' has gone wild which is symbolically associated with the uncaring and aggressive unconscious. On the other hand, the 'day' symbolizes the conscious which overtly and keenly pursues to show dazzling 'mutable distinctions' or temporary personas⁷ in which humans are distinctly wrapped causing cultural discrimination, racial prejudice, religious bias and social differences. Both day and night are not bicameral but display one-sidedly contradictions symbolizing two extremes, responsible for "mighty barriers, and the gulf between"⁸ humans. But the natural phenomenon of 'Twilight' is capable enough "to remove from sight" these 'mutable distinctions' and disdain extreme attitudes of either side which we thrust on others, because it rests on the balanced mix of both – day and night – symbolizing the synthesis of the conscious and the unconscious. Which is why perhaps "the waters gleam and the mountains lower" (qtd. in the above passage). The 'Ancient Power' seems to be functionally equivalent to Wordsworth's muse or the Self which is really leveling one in terms of equalizing and balancing the two extreme attitudes of the conscious and the unconscious which leads us into one harmonious whole. De Quincey while talking about this poem of Wordsworth remarks:

*"Twilight, again –who before Wordsworth ever distinctly noticed its abstracting power,? – that power of removing, softening, harmonizing.... In the dim inter-space between day and night, all disappears from our earthly scenery, as if touched by an enchanter's rod."*⁹

The functional position of Wordsworthian 'Twilight' is in line with that of what Jungian concept of harmonizing and synthetic power which reconciles mutable distinctions and discordant elements in order to hold them to one society. The poet, in this context, becomes an 'enchanter' and the imagination, his 'rod' or tool whose aim "is to find a middle position [like that of twilight] between the conscious and the unconscious, having "a quality of conjoined opposites".¹⁰ This reconciliatory middle position

between the conscious and the unconscious is what Jung called 'the Self'.¹¹ Let me refer to another full description of the sunset in 'An Evening Walk' symbolizing the 'softened' descent of the conscious into the unconscious 'deep':

*Just where a cloud above the mountain rears
An edge all flame, the broadening sun appears;
A long blue bar its aegis orb divides
About breaks the spreading of its golden tides;
And now that orb has touched the purple steep,
Whose softened image penetrates the deep.*¹²

Many such other images related to the sun's 'stealthy withdrawals' at the end of the day that leaves its final beautiful glow by harnessing the day's dim light and the night's slight shade of darkness, and 'interminglings mild/Of light with shade in beauty reconciled'¹³ symbolizing the integration of the conscious into the unconscious. Moreover, images, like "By stealthy influx of the timid day / Mingling with night, such twilight to compose" ("To the Same"); "Like Twilight's, too, dusky hair" ("She was a Phantom of Delight"); "Where twilight glens endear my Esthwaite's shore"¹⁴; "orange sky of evening" ("Influence of natural objects") and the 'purple eve' are all symbolic scenes of psychic integration where the blending of the sunlight and the darkness of the night interpenetrate which symbolizes the descent of the conscious into the unconscious. John Fraim, while talking about 'Day and Night' symbolism, further elaborates the idea. He says:

*"There are two twilight states: a morning twilight state before sunrise and an evening twilight state after sunset. The day begins with the gray twilight state between darkness and night, between black and white. It is a boundary time which contains elements of both night and day within it and is not dominated by either one".*¹⁵

Light and darkness meet half-way with equal measure to build up an in-between dim twilight state which symbolizes the integration of the conscious and the unconscious. It is exactly like the Tao's "primordial pair"¹⁶ which gave birth to two opposing principles: yang yin, the light and dark respectively, in which the white and black colors are mingled in equal proportion which symbolizes integration of the conscious and the unconscious, and which is the secret of 'the Golden Flower' representing wholeness or the Self.¹⁷

Conclusion

The seminal lesson that we get from the whole analysis is that Wordsworthian poetry magnum opus of such scenes and sights like 'Twilight' which psychologically function as a mediating principle to bridge the gulf between contending opposites in order to create inner and outer peace and harmony. In this conflict ridden world where we blindly promote 'mutable distinctions' and apparent differences of caste, colour and creed leading us to the extent of waging wars with one another, reading of such scenes of psychic integration from Wordsworth's poetry can help us think deep in our inner selves that we need to act as parts but with a vision of the whole. And instead of converging on the casual distinctions and personas of caste, colour, creed and ethnicities we need to have a sight of the bigger whole – humanity – in order to be more tolerant and empathic individuals of the society. We can strengthen our bonds and reach harmony and peace only if we become conscious of our temporary differences which are for mere adjustment in the society, and that we are essentially one as integral parts of the bigger whole. Our psychological revival and survival stays in celebrating diversities with a holistic vision – something like

*"...fellow travellers in this gloomy strait,
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light –
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end."*¹⁸

Notes & References

¹ C.G. Jung, *On the Nature of Psyche*. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1960), 117

² "The Borderers," 1529-31

³ Jung's psychological theory is based upon the primary assumption that the human psyche has two aspects — the conscious or an outer realm and the unconscious or an inner realm. Jung believes that the unconscious is an essential part of the psyche which, being a hidden counterpart is compensatory to the conscious. It is an infinite storehouse of contents which cannot be all known to the conscious. Only its parts can be accessed, illumined and integrated into the conscious attitude. The qualities Jung attributes to the unconscious are freedom, flexibility, vastness, immensity, irrationality, disorder, chaos, darkness, primitiveness, infiniteness etc. He further says that the conscious and the unconscious are complementary to one another and form a totality which he calls the self. For further detail see C.G. Jung, "The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious," *The Portable Jung*. Trans. R. F.C. Hull. Ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 70-138. Also see C.G. Jung, *On the Nature of Psyche*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Princeton University Press, 1960); and Frieda Fordham, *Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953).

⁴ Angelo Spoto, *Jung's Typology in Perspective* (Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1995), 147

⁵ C.G. Jung, "The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious," in *The Portable Jung*. Trans. R. F.C. Hull. Ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 273

⁶ This and all other subsequent textual references are to William Wordsworth, *Wordsworth: Poetical Works, 1904*, Eds. Thomas Hutchison and Ernest De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1936, Rept., 1974), and are shown in the text of this work by title and line numbers in parenthesis unless otherwise indicated.

⁷ Jung believes that persona is only a mask of the collective psyche. It is not the real face but an outer covering exposed to the outer world which a person puts on in order to adjust himself/herself to the social environment or norms. He says, "It is a compromise between individual and society as to what a man appears to be" (C.G. Jung, "The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious," in *The Portable Jung*, op.cit.). A well-known Jungian, Marry Ann Mattoon, says:

"Persona, the Latin word for mask, designates the part of the personality that one presents to the world to gain social approval or other advantages, and to coincide with one's idea of how one should appear in public. Thus the persona reveals little of what the person is; it is the public face, determined by what one perceives to be acceptable to other people. An example of the persona is the polite behaviour of most adults; we go through the motions of consideration for others, saying, "Excuse me" and

“Thank you” even if we do not feel apologetic or grateful. The persona is composed primarily of positive behaviours that conceal the negative qualities of the shadow. Hence the persona, more than the ego, is the “presentable” alternative to the “unpresentable” shadow”.

⁸ Hail, Twilight,” 12

⁹ Mohit K. Ray, ed. *British Studies on Wordsworth* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2003). 84

¹⁰ Aniela Jaffe, *The Myth of Meaning*. Trans. R. F. C Hull (New York: G.P Putnam’s Sons, 1971), 77

¹¹ M.L Von Franz, “The Process of Individuation,” in *Man and his Symbols* by C.G Jung (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), 161

¹² An Evening Walk,” 168-74

¹³ Composed by the Sea-Side”, 7-8

¹⁴ An Evening Walk,” 15

¹⁵ John Fraim, “Day and Night” Symbolism of Place: The Hidden context of communication. Available at:

<http://www.symbolism.org/writing/books/sp/4/page3.html>

¹⁶ Watts, 45

¹⁷ Allen W. Watts, *The Two Hands of God: The Myths of Polarity* (London: Penguin, 1979), 54-55. In this book Watts says:

“The familiar Chinese symbol of the primordial pair is the circle composed of what seems to be two stylized fishes, one black and one white, each with an “eye” of the opposite color.... The symbol is known as the t’ ai chi (Supreme Ultimate) or simply as the yin-yang” (54-55)

¹⁸ The Prelude vi, 635-40