

Industrialization in William Wordsworth's Selected Poems

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Abstract— William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is undeniably one of the most significant Romantic poets. He is famous for his love for nature. He finds tranquility and solitude in the company of nature. For him, nature is everything, including faith and God. Wordsworth believes that God has mirrored himself through nature. The industrial revolution made life more complicated, yet productive. The industrial revolution solved some problems while it caused some others, violation of nature is among the most distressing one. As a worshiper of nature, Wordsworth has noticed this impairment and portrayed the two lives, one closer to nature and the other industrialized. This paper aims at presenting William Wordsworth's love for nature through standing against industrialization. His poetry preserves the persistence of nature without any destructive mechanization. From this perspective, three poems of Wordsworth are explained to elucidate the different ways of his approach to new technological innovations and urbanization. The poems include; "The World is Too Much with Us", "Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways" and "On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway". Prior to describing industrialization in the poems, the industrial revolution and its outcomes are generally introduced. Besides, a brief account is given to the British Romanticism due to the fact that Wordsworth is one of the key poets of the movement.

Index Terms— British Poetry, Industrial Revolution, Nature, Romanticism, William Wordsworth.

I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

It is uneasy to indicate the exact beginning date of the emergence of the industrial revolution because it occurred in various places and years throughout the world. 1760 can be indicated as the starting date of the British industrial revolution and it continued till the mid of the nineteenth century. The end of the pastoral life and mechanization are the hallmarks of the industrial revolution. With the new inventions and improvements, the industrial revolution also began. Besides, factories somehow replaced man-made goods and productions. It is the process of industrializing people and suburbanization of natural scenery (Stearns, 1998, p. 5-11).

England's structure of agriculture and transportations were altered. Machines replaced home workers and people started working at the smoky factories. They became more like robots rather than workers. That is the process of mechanizing human being. Railways, roads, and canals were also developed. Steamboats and railways were substituting other natural means of transportations such as animals.

Literature portrays life, people's emotions and attitudes at a specific time. The period of the industrial revolution changed England to an industrial country. The smoky factories ruined the source of inspiration of many writers which were the unpolluted nature. Therefore, it was uneasy to reunite the literary works with a contaminated nature. Neglecting and leaving nature behind, it became necessary for the writers to remind everyone about the lost treasure and stand against the new mechanical world. Romantic poets played a vital role in writing about urban life, which was progressively fading away.

I.2. ENGLISH ROMANTICISM

The British Romanticism, which was an artistic movement, started in 1798 and continued until 1832. It was a reaction against the Enlightenment principles, which occupied the eighteenth-century literature, poetry in particular. The poetry of Romanticism focused on feelings instead of reasons. Thus, the Romantic poets intended to move away from the restrictions of neoclassical poetry as the latter concentrated on objectivity, logic and shunning feelings. Imagination and nature were two essential characteristics of Romantic poetry. The forerunners of Romanticism consist of six influential poets including William Blake, William Wordsworth, S. Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, John Keats, and P. B. Shelly.

The Lyrical Ballads is a collection poems written by W. Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge in 1798. In its *Preface*, Wordsworth describes good poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility". He further explains poetry as "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge" and "[P]oetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man". From his description, it becomes clear that poetry can fully describe feelings that is why it is more outstanding than all the other sciences. Poetry emphasizes on nature and its relation with man (Brett and Jones, 1991, p. 251).

Furthermore, Romanticism was also a reaction against the industrial revolution. The romantic poets revolted against it. The inhuman living conditions of the factory workers and the damage industrialization caused nature were among their main themes. The modern city came to existence and life deteriorated. The psychological impacts of the industrial revolution on the people were clearly noticed and the romantic intellectuals aimed at bringing back the untainted spirit and the life they used to have. Hence, people, especially the factory workers, were the victims of industrialization. Unsurprisingly, the Romantic poets considered nature as the source of life's beauty. Consequently, one of the major anxieties of the poets was the growth of industrial advancements. William Blake, for example, evidently censures and elucidates the negative side effects of the smoky factories in his *London*.

I.3. WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Wordsworth, a Romantic pantheist, sees nature as the essence of being. His love for nature pervades his poetry. He believes that nature and humankind are closely attached. "Man and Nature, Mind and the external world, are geared together and in unison complete the motive principle of the universe. They act and react upon each other" (Read, 1991, p. 184).

To Wordsworth, nature is enough to teach all that is necessary for a person: "let nature be your teacher." As a Romantic poet, it is predictable that he has devoted most of his poems to praise and describe the beauty of nature. William Long states that "[O]f all the poets who have written of nature there is none that compares with him in the truthfulness of his representation" (382). P. B. Shelly and Wordsworth are regarded as "prophets of Nature". Besides, he has also condemned the industrializations that distract man from the unharmed nature (Mukherje, 2010, p. 20).

As other romantic poets, Wordsworth saw the beauty and divinity of God in nature that is why most of his poems appreciate and celebrate the beauty of nature over the industrialized cities. Nature was his treasure where his happiness was hidden within it. He wrote, "Because we are insensitive to the richness of Nature, we may be forfeiting our souls" (Berry, 2018, p. 8).

II.1. "THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH WITH US"

It is a sonnet written in iambic pentameter. Though it is one of his short poems, yet it conveys a momentous message. It is written roughly in 1802. This short poem is compared to the poems of the other prominent English poets, "[T]his sonnet is thoroughly representative of Wordsworth's poetic genius. It is worthy of Shakespeare or Milton, unsurpassable, perfect, equaled only by Let me not to the Marriage of True Minds and its few compeer[sic]" (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 193).

Readers easily recognize the poet's contemplation and genuine emotions towards nature in "The World is Too Much with Us". The grandness of nature is shed light on in the sonnet which is contrasted to the manufactured society. The focus of the first four lines is on man's deserting the beauty of nature and embracing a smoky and polluted world in which all that is observed is "Getting and spending". Nature does not seem as

the sort of nature that people once had and it is distorted: "Little we see in Nature that is ours."

Apparently, the serious connection between the materialistic things and the absence of nature distract anyone from nature even farther in a way it can be said we do not belong to nature. Thus, people is in tune with a worldly society rather than a simple and purely naturalistic one that is "out of tune" with nature and in a deep engagement with a manufactured society.

If we scrutinize the title, it becomes clear that the title refers to a world which is too much with us and the reader does not have a clear idea of which world is too much with us. However, throughout reading the sonnet, it gradually clarifies that the industrialized world is too much with us. In other words, the poem presents a materialistic world over a natural world.

Moon, sea, flower, and wind are representatives and essential elements of nature. Wordsworth has made use of these beautiful elements to convey his message that he is a lover of nature. In the poem, he shows a wonderful poetic image to emphasize the beauty of natural scenery. He mentions the fact that the reflection of the moon in the sea is overlooked and the wind is merely heard rather than listening to its song.

"This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon
The winds that will be howling at all hours
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers".

In other words, man has ignored and overlooked the beautiful reflection of the moon in the sea and in the same manner the song of the wind is not heard although its mere wind is heard. Sea, moon and, wind represent all the other natural elements which are neglected. Due to the nature of poetry which economizes words, the poet has only chosen a few natural aspects to represent the whole: "For this, for everything, we are out of tune". Wordsworth further elaborates the power of urbanization upon natural beauty and states for all that mentioned and pointed to, man is not in harmony with nature. The scales of natural scenery and views are lighter than those of industrialization. There is definitely a connection between man and nature, man's life is cheerless without the existence of that essential relationship.

By the end of the sonnet, the poet presents a wish to the readers stating:

*"Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn".*

He prefers being a pagan of the natural world rather than being a nobleman of the mechanized city. This is a wish to go back to the time when nature was ruling everything and everywhere was not industrialized. The inclination of paganism is not to prioritize it to any other religions but to indicate the fact that he wishes to choose to be closer to nature. The plainer man's life, the closer he is to nature.

The poet concludes the poem with another wish depicting it through a classical theology which again shows his preference to be close to nature:

*"Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn".*

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary "Proteus" is defined as a Greek sea god and "Triton" as the son of Poseidon, a Greek sea god (1000-1340). The poet obviously states his predilection for the past as opposed to the present.

II.2. "STEAMBOATS, VIADUCTS, AND RAILWAY"

It is another poem of Wordsworth that is written in the form of a sonnet. It combines nature and industrialization but prioritizing the former to the later. The three words used in this title are representations of technological innovations that were mainly caused by the industrial revolution. Undoubtedly, these scientific advancements were useful but something had to pay the price for the development and it was nature. The vivid titles helps the readers to have a shallow understanding of what might it be about. The title is the consequence of the industrial revolution, the machines and its useful, yet annoying results. The poem opens with an intriguing line that one may think the poet is praising industrialization, but it rather conflicts it:

*"Motions and Means, on land and sea at war
With old poetic feeling, not for this,
Shall ye, by Poets even, be judged amiss!"*

It is both "land" and "sea" that the industrialization has reached, literally everywhere. The poet explains that the "motions and means" will not be misjudged even by the poets. There is a nostalgic feeling in the above lines "with old poetic feelings", this is an ample example of the distortion of nature of what it was like before the industrialization. These lines imply a "war" between the industrialization which refers to "motions and means" and nature that is "old poetic feelings". Unquestionably, the innovations solved some problems but they also caused some others, harming nature in particular .

The poet continues:

*"Nor shall your presence, howsoe'er it mar
The loveliness of Nature, prove a bar
To the Mind's gaining that prophetic sense
Of future change, that point of vision, whence
May be discovered what in soul ye are".*

Clearly, Wordsworth is calmer in this poem than the previous one. He acknowledges the goodness of technological innovations but he fears the "future change" that man-made innovations would undermine and distort the beauty of nature. He, as a poet has this feeling of terminating of nature, "prophetic sense". He worries that these advancements would continue and replace nature instead of fitting itself. Thus, he is not only concerned about increasing the industrialization but also about the replacement of nature fully with mechanization. One can notice the prophecy in this poem, all the bad things which may happen to the beauty of nature.

He further explains the nastiness of industrialization and writes:

*"In spite of all that beauty may disown
In your harsh features".*

It is industrial development which has "harsh features" and it causes the renunciation of the beauty of nature, "all that beauty may disown." Beauty is the main quality of nature, once it is distorted, it does not own it anymore.

All in all, the poet admits the necessity of the technological advancements" by Poets even, be judged amiss!" Yet, he is disturbed by the continuity of these advancements to an extent, which would cause the ultimate disappearance of the untouched beauty of nature.

II.3. "ON THE PROJECTED KENDAL AND WINDERMERE RAILWAY"

Wordsworth admired nature to an extent that saw himself as a social activist and environmentalist to shun the technological advancements and harming nature. In 1844 when it was decided that a railway will be established between Kendal and Windermere, Wordsworth strongly stood against it and started campaigns, writing poems, letters to the Board of Trade and the House of Common to stop violating the beauty and purity of nature. Here the focus is on his poem that was written against industry and backing nature entitled "On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway". In 1844, Wordsworth published this poem in the Morning Post to give voice to the demands of all who loved nature and feared that the progress would harm the beauty of nature.

The poem begins with a question:

*"Is there no nook of English ground secure
From rash assault"?*

He believes that the security of England, Lake District, in particular, is in danger. The industry has invaded nature and the loss of nature implies the loss of beauty, simplicity, purity and old values. If "no nook" of England does not escape from the "rash assault", then it is the ending of the natural world and the beginning of the industrialization.

The poet continues on revealing his fears regarding industrialization: "Schemes of retirement sown/ In youth, and mid the busy world kept pure/ As when their earliest flowers of hope were blown./ Must perish; - how can they this blight endure?" Here, the poet intensifies his uncertainties that technological advancements may intrude the prettiness of life in nature. It is railways, factories, smokes, noises and mass tourists and populations that will violate nature.

Railway, which represents industrial developments, is linked with "blight", a disease that troubles and burdens plant life. Ultimately, industrialization functions as cancer to the whole body of nature. This disease will grow more and become intolerable, "how can they this blight endure"?

Wordsworth concludes the poem with an angry tone and appeals to nature for fighting against the industrialization :

*"Baffle the threat, bright Scene, from Orrest-head
Given to the pausing traveller's rapturous glance:
Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance
Of nature; and, if human hearts be dead,
Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong
And constant voice, protest against the wrong."*

Here, Wordsworth considers the railway as something "wrong", that is why he is pleading nature to act against it with its "strong and constant voice." Nature can be violent only when it is protecting itself. Thus, nature should be cruel to the innovations to maintain kindness for all. A poet is usually a harmless and sensitive person who never wants to cause anyone pain. However, in this poem, the poet is ready to call upon nature to be violent to those who encroach it .

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Wordsworth was an influential Romantic poet who adored nature. Most of his poems reveal his obsession with nature. Nature was his source of inspiration and joy. He evidently reflects this passion in his poems. When the industrial revolution began, Wordsworth's striking nature was in danger. The industrial revolution brought dilemmas with its productivities. As a poet, he found it crucial to oppose the industrial advancements. William Wordsworth celebrates the technological advancements, however he is concerned about their misuses. He loaded his poetry with a rich poetic diction to fight against the ugly world of mechanization. He was distressed by the unseen concerns. In his poetry, he condemns and criticizes the world of the industrial revolution for being captivated in worldly matters and isolating itself from nature. He also prioritizes rural life over the mechanized cities.

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