

## Wordsworth's Meditative Imagination and the Other English Romantic Poets (2)

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### Wordsworth の瞑想的想像力と イギリスロマン派詩人 (2)

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The second part of the study deals with the comparisons between Coleridge and Wordsworth in connection with meditation, between Blake and Wordsworth in connection with night which is the best situation for the meditation, and between Keats and Wordsworth in connection with the other world.

By those investigations we can find that the meditation similar to Wordsworth's plays a very important role in Coleridge's "Frost at Night," and we can find the reason why Blake criticizes Wordsworth and what Blake finds in the darkness of the night, and we can find that Keats' self is different from Wordsworth's but Keats seeks the eternal world as well as Wordsworth.

#### I

In Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," the meditation similar to Wordsworth's is described. As Wordsworth finds something pleasurable by the meditation on his past experience, so the recollection of the past experience brings consolation to Coleridge. And an exertion of imagination can be seen in the poem.

The poem consists of four stanzas. In the first stanza, the poet stays in the solitude fit for meditation.

The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,  
Have left me to that solitude, which suits  
Abstruser musings: save that at my side  
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.  
'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs  
And vexes meditation with its strange  
And extreme silentness.

("Frost at Midnight," ll. 4-10)<sup>1)</sup>

The poet is surrounded by the stillness but he has a sense of alienation from the stillness. The stillness is "strange and extreme" and disturbs his meditation. And even his infant who sleeps at his side vexes his mind. On the contrary, "the sole unquiet thing," the "film" which flutters on the grate, seems to sympathize with him. By the motion of the film, he is consoled and his sense of alienation is relieved. The film brings comfort to the poet and makes him recollect the other film in his school days. The film comes to have the

deep relation with the inner world of the poet. In the second stanza, the experience of the other film in Christ's Hospital is described.

But O! how oft,  
How oft, at school, with most believing mind,  
Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,  
To watch that fluttering stranger!  
("Frost at Midnight," ll. 23-26)

The note of "Frost at Midnight" says, "In all parts of the kingdom these films are called strangers and supposed to portend the arrival of some absent friend."<sup>2)</sup> The lonely boy supposes from the motion of "the stranger" (film) that someone will visit him and he can not be at ease.

And so I brooded all the following morn,  
Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye  
Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:  
Save if the door half opened, and I snatched  
A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,  
For still I hoped to see the stranger's face,  
Townsmen, or aunt, or sister more beloved,  
My play-mate when we both were clothed alike!  
("Frost at Midnight," ll. 36-43)

This sorrowful memory awakens his affections for his infant. The poet is no longer separated from his infant but is inwardly connected with the infant by

the medium of the film. In the third stanza, he calls to the infant with love.

Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,  
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,  
Fill up the interspered vacancies  
And momentary pauses of the thought!  
My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart  
With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,  
And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,  
And in far other scenes!

(“Frost at Midnight,” 11. 44-51)

The poet spent an unhappy time in his boyhood. He was “reared/In the great city, pent ‘mid cloisters dim,/And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars’ (‘Frost at Midnight,’ 11. 51-53). Therefore, he prays that his infant may wander through various places and see lovely shapes and hear sweet sounds.

In the fourth stanza, he says, “all seasons shall be sweet to thee” (l. 65). We can see the “reconciliation of opposite” in the poem. At first the stillness disturbs the poet and his meditation, and his infant exists independently. But by the medium of the film, he is brought to the harmony with his infant. The film makes the poet recollect his past school days, and the sad experience of the film leads him to the affections for the infant. The reconciliation is made by the internal connection. And this “reconciliation of opposite” is the important function of imagination. Coleridge explains it in the following words.

This power (imagination), first put in action by the will and understanding and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, controul (laxis effectur habemus) reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities . . .<sup>3)</sup>

The connection of love between the poet and his infant is accomplished by this “synthetic power.” Wordsworth also finds that power in the mind and says,

The mind of Man is fram'd even like the breath  
And harmony of music. There is a dark  
Invisible workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, and makes them move  
In one society.

(*Pr.*, I, 351-355)<sup>4)</sup>

In case of Wordsworth, that “synthetic power” works best in the solitary meditation. When he muses on his past experience, earthly things are united with unearthly things. It can be seen in “To the Cuckoo.”

In “To the Cuckoo,” the earth is united with the heaven. If we compare it with “Frost at Midnight,” the scale of the world sung in “Frost at Midnight”

will be smaller. But the meditation similar to Wordsworth’s plays an important role in the inner unity between Coleridge and his infant.

As Wordsworth sees into “the life of things” by the meditation in “Tintern Abbey,” so the meditation leads us into the inner depth of things. The real unity arises from there. The meditation is indispensable for the unity of things.

## II

Night is a situation suitable for meditation as is shown in Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight.” Shelley’s “veiled maid” appeared in his sleep at night. Night is the situation best for Wordsworth’s meditation, too. Wordsworth likes wandering alone at night.

A favourite pleasure hath it been with me,  
From time of earliest youth, to walk alone  
Along the public Way, when, for the night  
Deserted, in its silence it assumes  
A character of deeper quietness  
Than pathless solitudes.

(*Pr.*, IV, 363-368)

At such a night wandering, he gets the following experience.

O happy state! what beauteous pictures now  
Rose in harmonious imagery—they rose  
As from some distant region of my soul  
And came along like dreams;

(*Pr.*, IV, 392-395)

In the daytime we are engaged in routine works and can not get a time enough for looking into the depth of our minds. But the night separates us from our routine works and makes us stare at ourselves. The sights spread before us are limited by the darkness and we can be indulged in meditating. Wordsworth’s “beauteous pictures” rise from “some distant region” of his mind at such a time. The vision fascinates him and gives him “A consciousness of animal delight” (*Pr.*, IV, 398) as the “veiled maid” does a youth in “Alastor.” But Wordsworth’s next step of response to the vision will be different from the youth’s. He will not be fascinated by the vision completely. He will not fly away from the earth.

Wordsworth’s fundamental attitude towards the vision is that the vision should be created by the combination between the outer world and the inner world. The following world is his true visionary world.

. . . a new world, a world, too, that was fit  
To be transmitted and made visible  
To other eyes, . . .  
.....  
. . . an ennobling interchange

Of action from within and from without  
 The excellence, pure spirit, and best power  
 Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.  
 (Pr., XII, 371-379)

This attitude is different from Blake's. Blake divides the inner world from the outer world completely. His main concern exists in the inner world and gives the better position to the inner world than to the outer world. From that point of view he criticises Wordsworth.

I see in Wordsworth the Natural Man rising up against the Spiritual Man Continually, & then he is No Poet but a Heathen Philosopher at Enmity against all true Poetry or Inspiration.

Natural Objects always did & now do weaken, deaden & obliterate Imagination in Me. Wordsworth must know that what he writes Valuable is Not to be found in Nature.  
 ("Annotations to 'poems' by W. Wordsworth")<sup>9)</sup>

Blake says that Wordsworth is not a poet and tells a lie because Wordsworth's imaginative world is based on the outer world or "Nature." Blake's visionary world does not rise from Wordsworth's "ennobling interchange/Of action from within and from without." Though Blake may get an inspiration from "Nature," he thinks that it comes not from "Nature" but from his inner world. Blake's fundamental situation is similar to that of Wordsworth's in which he gets "beauteous pictures" at night. The night seems to give the best situation for Blake's imaginative working.

Wordsworth's night situation is described in his words, "all was peace" (Pr., IV, 389). The same situation is found in Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, too.

The sun decending in the west,  
 The evening star does shine ;  
 The birds are silent in their nest,  
 And I must seek for mine.  
 The moon like a flower  
 In heaven's high bower,  
 With silent delight  
 Sits and smiles on the night.  
 ("Night," 11. 1-8)

Under such a peaceful situation, "the lion's ruddy eyes/Shall flow with tears of gold" (11. 33-34). If "wolves and tygers howl for prey" (1. 25), their thirst is striven away by "the angels" (1. 30). But Blake's night is not restricted to such a peaceful aspect. It has a miserable aspect, too. It is described in the following words of *Songs of Experience*.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear

How the youthful Harlot's curse  
 Blasts the new born Infant's tear,  
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.  
 ("London," 11. 13-16)

Indulging in his night thoughts, Blake hears miserable human voices. He stares at miserable human states through the darkness of the night.

And, when night comes, I'll go  
 To places fit for woe,  
 Walking along the darken'd valley  
 With silent Melancholy.  
 ("Song" in *Poetical Sketches*, 11. 13-16)

The night meditation gives Blake "woe" and "melancholy." It can make him mad. Even if it can make him mad, he won't fly away into the comfortable morning. He sings so in his "Mad Song."

Like a fiend in a cloud  
 With howling woe,  
 After night I do croud,  
 And with night will go ;  
 I turn my back to the east,  
 From whence comforts have increas'd ;  
 For light doth seize my brain  
 With frantic pain.  
 ("Mad Song," 11. 17-24)

Blake lives in the darkness of the night which makes him see pictures of unhappiness and hear miserable human voices in his meditation. He kept staring at the dark side of the world. And consequently he discovers the beauty in the darkness of the night.

Tyger ! Tyger ! burning bright  
 In the forests of the night,  
 What immortal hand or eye  
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry ?  
 ("The Tyger," 11. 1-4)

Blake finds something divine in the tyger into which the darkness of the night and the terrifying qualities of the world are condensed. It is what other romanticists seek, and Blake can get it through the darkness of the night.

### III

In "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," two Wordsworths are described. One is Wordsworth who finds "the visionary gleams" (1. 56) around him. The other is Wordsworth who gets "the philosophic mind" (1. 190) instead of the gleam. The state of the former is described in the following words.

... these obstinate questionings  
 Of sense and outward things,

Fallings from us, vanishings ;  
 ("Ode: Intimations of Immortality," ll. 145-147)<sup>6)</sup>

In the note, he explains about it.

I was unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature; Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from the abyss of idealism to the reality.<sup>7)</sup>

This state is very similar to Keats' abstraction. In Keats' letter to Bailey (Oct. 1817), we can find the words about his abstraction, "my nature must be radically wrong, for it will lie dormant a whole month."<sup>8)</sup> Keats' abstraction is not the experience of childhood.

In the letter to Bailey (Nov. 1817), he wishes "for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts"<sup>9)</sup> and says that those "who would exist partly on Sensation partly on thought" will have "the philosophic Mind."<sup>10)</sup> Wordsworth moves from "a Life of Sensations" to "a Life of Thoughts" as he grows. Keats considers "a Life of Sensations" best through his life. In the same letter, he says,

I beg now my dear Bailey that hereafter should you observe any thing cold in me not to but (for put) it to the account of heartlessness but abstraction-for I assure you I sometimes feel not the influence of a Passion or affection during a whole week-and so long this sometimes continues I begin to suspect myself and the genuineness of my feelings at other times.<sup>11)</sup>

This experience of abstraction is developed into his respect for passiveness. In his letter to Reynolds (Feb. 1818), he says, "let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive."<sup>12)</sup> This attitude is the same as Wordsworth's "wise passiveness" ("Expostulation and Reply," l. 24). In youth, Wordsworth also thinks much of "sense." In "Expostulation and Reply," he says,

That time is past

And all its aching joys are now no more,  
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this  
 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts  
 Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,  
 Abundant recompense. For I have learned  
 To look on nature, not in the hour  
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
 The still, sad music of humanity,  
 ("Tintern Abbey," ll. 83-91)

Keats does not like later Wordsworth who values "thought" rather than "sensation." Keats would

rather be in uncertainties. Keats thinks that "negative capability" is the most important for the poet and says, "I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."<sup>13)</sup> Keats says that the poetical character is not "the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" but the negative capability. He explains about the negative capability in the following words in detail.

it is not itself-it has no self-it is every thing and nothing-it has no character-it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated-It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen . . . A poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity-he is continually in for-and filling some other Body.<sup>14)</sup>

Wordsworth would not lose his individuality but Keats has not any individuality and any determined character. Wordsworth can play no part except himself but Keats can play every part. Keats' mind is dramatic like Shakespeare. Keats learns the negative capability from Shakespeare. Shakespeare's character is explained well in Coleridge's comment on the difference between Shakespeare and Milton.

While the former (Shakespeare) darts himself forth, and passes into all forms of man character and passion, the one protens of the fire and the flood; the other (Milton) attracts all forms and things to himself, into the unity of his own Ideal. All things and modes of action shape themselves anew in the being of Milton; while Shakespeare becomes all things, yet for ever remaining himself.<sup>15)</sup>

The explanation of Shakespeare is similar to that of the negative capability. Milton resembles Wordsworth. Wordsworth's mind is meditative. He "attracts all forms and things to himself" and when he amuses on them, the ideal appears from the inner depth of Wordsworth. When he is filled with the ideal in his own meditative world, he can be called the egotistical sublime. In "Tintern Abbey," he gets something "more sublime" (l. 37) by the meditation on his past individual experience.

. . . the breath of this corporeal frame  
 And even the motion of our human blood  
 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.  
 ("Tintern Abbey," ll. 43-49)

This state is similar to Keats' abstraction. He becomes "a living soul." It would be better to say that he has his own self and the self is filled with the sublime rather than that he has no self and becomes the other thing. There is a little difference between Wordsworth and Keats. But the world which they seek is the same eternal world.

In "Ode to a Nightingale,"<sup>16</sup> he feels "a drowsy numbness" in the beginning. He stands at the entrance to the other world. While Keats hears a nightingale sing of summer and feels too happy in the bird's happiness, the other world seems to come near him. He wishes "for a draught of vintage" that he may drink to "leave the world unseen" for the other world. He wants to forget "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" and cries, "Away! away! for I will fly to thee." When he says that he is "already with thee," he wishes even death.

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!  
("Ode to a Nightingale," 11. 55-58)

The nightingale belongs to the other world and is called "immortal Bird" (l. 61). When Keats feels himself to be one with the nightingale, he tries to eternize the moment of an ecstasy by his own death. But he is forced to return to this world with the words, "Forlorn! the very word is like a bell/To toll me back from thee to my sole self" (11. 71-72). He awakes from his dormant state and asks, "Do I wake or sleep?" (l. 80) He asks, "Which is the true world, nightingale's world or this world?"

In "To Autumn," Keats describes an eternized moment and autumn comes to belong to the other world. In the first stanza, Keats emphasizes that autumn is the season for "fruitfulness" and maturity. Autumn is a temporary season which lies between summer and winter and stands "tip-toe" ("I stand tip-toe upon a little hill," l. 1). But Keats brings it near to eternity by the emphasis on ripeness. In the second stanza, the ripeness of autumn is expressed as a stationary state.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
Thy hair soft-reap'd furrow sound asleep  
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep  
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:  
("To Autumn," 11. 12-18)

In this scene there is no fear which we feel when we face temporary things. It is due to Keats' attention to

"a moment." In the third stanza, he says,

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, Where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,  
("To Autumn," 11. 23-24)

He insists that we should keep our eyes only on autumn. In other words, we should keep attention to "a moment." If so, eternity appears in "a moment." The eternal moment is the most important in Keats. In "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the urn belongs to the other world. He says,

Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
("Ode on a Grecian Urn," 11. 1-2)

Though the urn exists in this noisy and changeable world, it transcends the noise and change. The urn keeps a distance from the ordinary world and remains "unravish'd." It is not a real child but "a foster-child" of the ordinary world ("slow time"). It takes its origin from the other world and keeps silence until we know the way to commune with it. The sound from the urn is different from the ordinary sound.

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:  
("Ode on a Grecian Urn," 11. 11-14)

Keats hears the unheard music of the urn not by his "sensual ear" but by his imagination. The music which is caught by his imagination is the ideal music which is sweeter than any other music heard in the ordinary world. The world of the urn is the imaginative world.

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!  
When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st  
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' -that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.  
("Ode on a Grecian Urn," 11. 44-50)

Such a work of art as the urn "teases us out of thought" and makes us leave the ordinary world. We can not understand the world of the urn by our analytical intellect. We can reach it by the imagination. The romanticists try to get at the ultimate reality. Keats calls the reality "truth." The truth is equal to "beauty." When he is transported with the beauty, he feels as if he reached the reality or the other world. Wordsworth also seeks the other world.

But his attention is paid to the transformation of his own meditative world. The other world appears in his individual world. On the other hand, Keats' attention is paid to the object itself. He wants to inform us of not his own voice but the voice of the object itself. The figures on the urn that keep their motions in stationary states, tell us the eternity or the other world very well.

#### References

- 1) "Frost at Midnight" is quoted from *Coleridge Poetical Works*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (Oxford Univ. Press, 1969)
- 2) *Coleridge Poetical Works*, p.240.
- 3) Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross (Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), I, 12.
- 4) Wordsworth, *The prelude or a Growth of a Poet's Mind* (Text of 1805), ed. E. de Selincourt rev. H. Darbishire (Oxford Univ. Press, 1960)
- 5) Blake's poems are quoted from *Poetry and Prose of W. Blake*, ed. G. Keynes (The Nonesuch Library, 1967)
- 6) Wordsworth's poems are quoted from *Wordsworth Poetical Works*, ed. T. Hutchinson (Oxford Univ. Press, 1936)
- 7) Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of W. Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), IV, 463.
- 8) Keats, *The Letters of J. Keats*, ed. M. B. Forman (Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), p.55.
- 9) *Ibid.*, p.67.
- 10) *Ibid.*, p.68.
- 11) *Ibid.*, pp.68-69.
- 12) *Ibid.*, p.103.
- 13) *Ibid.*, p.71.
- 14) *Ibid.*, pp.226-227.
- 15) *Biographia Literaria*, II, 20.
- 16) Keats' poems are quoted from *Keats Poetical Works*, ed. H. W. Garrod (Oxford Univ. Press, 1972)

(Received January 30, 1985)