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Imagination in Coleridge's "Dejection: an Ode"

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to analyze the role of imagination in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Dejection: an ode". The poem that demonstrates the poet's view of the relationship between human and Nature in an artistic way. Imagination is a prominent element in the creative poetic process of the romantic poets in general and Coleridge in particular. It also considers the position of dejection as a gate to the imaginative creativity. This research also emphasizes on the great significance of nature and imagination as they are the two essential themes in Coleridge's works. It explains his frustration as he lacks the Muse, and how he resorts to imagination to enable him to have it once again. The study then shows that despite the inconsonant visions between the succession of the poet's feeling and numbness expressed in his poem, he succeeded to achieve the strong fusion with nature again. It finally illustrates how the dejected Coleridge overcomes his dejection by the impact of imagination.

Keywords: Coleridge, Imagination, Nature, Depression, Joy.

الخيال في قصيدة الكأبة للشاعر كولردج

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المخلص:

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى تحليل دور الخيال في "قصيدة الكأبة" للشاعر "صامويل تيلور كولردج" .. تلك القصيدة التي تشرح بطريقة إبداعية فكرة الشاعر حول العلاقة بين الإنسان والطبيعة. الخيال هو الموضوع الأبرز في العملية الإبداعية والفن الشعري عند شعراء الحركة الرومانتيكية بصفة عامة وعند كولردج خاصة.. أيضا يدرس هذا البحث بتأمل إحساس الحزن كإجابة إلى الإبداع الشعري.. كما يركز هذا البحث على الطبيعة والخيال لكونهما أكثر الأفكار أهمية في أعمال كولردج. وسوف توضح هذه الدراسة كيف أنه رغم تنقل الشاعر خلال قصيدته بين محاولته لإدراك ووعي ما يحدث في الطبيعة من حوله، وبين شعوره بأنه مخدر، إلا أنه استطاع أن يصل إلى نقطة الاتحاد الكامل مع الطبيعة.. وتثبت الدراسة في الآخر تمكن كولردج من التغلب على الكأبة بقوة تأثير الخيال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كولردج، الخيال، الطبيعة، الحزن، الفرح.

Introduction:

Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode' was published in 1802. The ode's stanzas are metred in iambic lines stretching in length from trimeter to pentameter. 'Ode' as one of the main kinds of poems is defined as a lyric poem in an elevated style and elaborate stanza pattern. The 'Dejection' has brought this ode into its perfect definition. From the title, the reader can

perceive that it is the emotion of grief that arouses the thoughts of this poem. The sad emotion is more influential in creating poetry than the happy one. It is proved that dejection is a fluent way to the poetic creativity. The ode is written in a dejected tone because Coleridge worries that he has lost his artistic ability.

One of the reasons behind composing this poem is the poet's distress because of his incapability to write poetry. He feels that the poet within him is dead, so he wishes the storm to be happening in order to shake his inspiration and stimulate it once again. At the end of the ode, the reader may see that the storm symbolizes the ode itself. Through this poem, the poet proves that words are still in love with him and muse doesn't betray him.

This paper is an analytical study of Imagination and its great effect on Coleridge in writing his 'Dejection: An Ode', and how he used this imagination to express creatively the relationship between him and nature.

The purpose of this study, however, is not only to explain the Ode's ideas based on imagination, but also to facilitate them in a simplified approach for the reader to apprehend. As well as to show and clarify the symbols that Coleridge used as vehicles for his ideas, then discuss their implied meanings in a simple way. Such an approach makes this study to be different from the previous studies about the topic under discussion.

Literature Review:

Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode' can be read as an resounding words of his suffering from depression when he wrote this ode. It plainly expresses Coleridge's intellectual emotional troubles. The poem is considered a cry of a miserable soul. It has proved itself to be among Coleridge's masterpieces. Actually, many critics find it the most important of his poems. Hill (1983: 189), for example, believes that the Dejection Ode is a record of great loss and partial restoration, that Coleridge's final recovery is only timid, limited, and temporary. However, his final emotional-psychological state is undeniably more relieved than his state earlier.

Holman and Harmon (1992: 329) think that "Dejection: An Ode" is a remarkable document for reading Coleridge from a psychiatric point of view. It vividly depicts the symptoms of major depression that he has suffering from, and it further depicts him breaking the vicious cycle of clinical depression through a cognitive, behavioural and interpersonal act.

The role of imagination in Coleridge's poetry had been discussed by almost all the critics who viewed the Ode and perceived it. M. H. Abrams (1958: 68) sees that Coleridge gives two reasons for the diminution of his imagination. The first is the so many 'afflictions' that he has been through. These have not only deprived him of his 'mirth', but also, and more importantly to him, suspended his 'shaping spirit of Imagination'. The second reason is his abstruse research into philosophy, theology and metaphysics, which has influenced on his poetic talent.

Barth (1988: 98-99) asserts that, with the aid of his re-activated imagination, Coleridge hears that inner sound that wafts his spirit above apathy, ennui and imaginative paralysis away from his self-obsessed confinement.

Beer (1959: 90) claims that Coleridge's lamented dejection is gradually overcome through the poem by virtue of his revived power of 'Joy'. This dejection changed into graceful selflessness, whereby Coleridge manages to become one more time awake to love and beauty.

M. H. Abrams (1957: 39) shows (through the examination of such natural symbols as Coleridge's wind) how metaphors of the wind are not only a stimulating aspect of the landscape, but also an outer correspondent, a vehicle for radical change in the poet's mind.

In corresponding with the complementary connection between Coleridge's inner voice and the sound of the wind, Muhammad (2017) states that the Ode brings into play reciprocity between Coleridge's inner light and the natural lights beyond. Due to the darkness of his grief, he fails to respond emotionally to the moon light. Although he is actually still capable of perceiving the beauty of natural objects, he complains that he fails to respond to them feelingly.

A number of critics have found the end of 'Dejection: An Ode' a fully victorious one. J. R. de J. Jackson (1980: 960), for one, calm even hymn-like in its final lines, and we are made to feel that the fit of despondency, like the storm, has passed.

E. Kessler (1979: 13-14) finds that what Coleridge himself undergoes in the conclusion is projected onto another person who stands for Coleridge's ulterior conscience, in the instance his Lady, for whom his wish is, at the moment, true of himself.

Thus, most of the previous studies focused on the power of Imagination and its impact upon the romantic Coleridge. They also concentrated on how the poet expresses his philosophical views about the relationship between human and nature.

The Analysis:

The poet expresses his dejection illustrating that he is hopeless, frustrated, and feels as if he were numb. When a human is in such a mood, he loses the passion of life, and the world seems narrow, vacant, and colourless. Coleridge here resorts to the power of imagination in order to make life look bright and meaningful.

As a romantic poet, Coleridge spends a long time meditating the night, wandering whether this peaceful quiet evening will pass without being troubled by the rough winds. He thinks that all the pleased moments are threatened by the upset ones. The happiness passes as a vision for a while then it fades away behind the distress for a time.

The poet of 'Dejection an Ode' uses natural images frequently; in the first stanza, for instance, the view of the moon predicts a coming storm "For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!". The poet is waiting for the eruption of the tempest hoping that the fierce of the roar might shake his soul, quiver his numbness, and evoke his emotions and interactions.

Moon can be portrayed as a symbol of the road; Coleridge here gazes at the moon asking her to guide him to a soothing way that could enable him to get rid of the weariness. The terrifying sound of the rough winds and raindrops that fall heavily awakened the still pain in his spirit and aroused the emotions of fair and sorrow.

Moreover, the mood of fear and sorrow is extended to stanza Two. The poet asserts that he is suffering from a grief; it is a sort of grief in which no help "finds no natural outlet, no relief". It is empty, dusky and dull pain. It is a heavy type of grief that does not enable him to enjoy nature. He describes it as a "drowsy unimpassioned grief". When the despair seeps into the depth, the human feels as if he were lumpish.

The evening is peaceable and sweet, but the poet is in a lifeless mood. He feels sad that he couldn't get along with nature's temper. He gazes at the motion of the clouds and the brilliance of the stars. When they are hidden by the clouds, their shining becomes dim, and when they appear, they look bright. The shine of the stars behind the clouds in that pleased night represents the shine of hope behind his dark mood.

"I see, not feel how beautiful they are", addressing the lady, Coleridge proclaims that he is incapacitated, and all what he can do is just to hear the birds musical voice, and consider the yellow-green heaven "the western sky / And its peculiar tint of yellow green". Coleridge here describes the blue sky as green-yellow; for the green colour in nature symbolizes renewal, rebirth and resurrection. As well as, the yellow colour –in many cultures- symbolizes brilliance or delight. This refers to the poet's hope for renewing his dead passion and retrieving his lost pleasure.

The poet here proves that he can see the sky, the clouds and the moon, but he can't feel their beauty. Despair and depression made him numbing. He feels sad for the gap between him and nature; that he can't perceive, taste or touch the charm of nature as before.

In stanza three, Coleridge is still looking for his lost happiness. He claims that my joyful spirits keep falling. He asks If there is anything to help him to lift his genial mettle once again. Also, he wonders what can take the heavy burden out of his head. Then he answers himself: nothing! 'It was a vain endeavour'. Even the attractive natural objects that he loves can't attract him anymore. Nothing can aid him to forget his troubles. He just keeps gazing at the green sky, but it would be fruitless attempt to cure the wounds or reduce the stress.

Furthermore, the poet stares and stares in vain. Then he concludes that the true effect comes from the heart which is the real source of interest and pleasure. When the internal cause is absent, no external object can support him; he needs an inner guide. The outside factors would never lead him to the happiness. It is something that formed inside; the essence of change is made in the heart. And obstacles are also inside.

In addition, Coleridge in stanza four, is still addressing the lady claiming that "we receive but what we give". He asserts that we receive from the outside world just what we have sent to it. What we gain is obtained from our hearts; nature becomes full of life when our hearts are full of ecstasy. It is our mood that impacts on nature, not the opposite. The poet here believes that nature can't make us glad or sad, but our hearts can do. However, nobody can deny the effect of nature.

Similarly, to recognize the outside light, the human must take its origin from the soul herself "from the soul itself must issue forth". Nature's tender splendour is seen by the inner eye. For this beauty is not gifted for those who lack love and beauty in themselves, "To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd".

In stanza five, Coleridge continuous talking to the lady "O pure of heart" declaring that you don't need to ask me what is that strong voice in the soul? It is Joy which is endowed to us by Nature. Joy is the source of life's relief, and the essence of human's comfort. It is the main reason behind spirit's sweet music and light. Joy can release the spirit from her sorrow, "Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power".

Moreover, it is not an ordinary joy; it is a distinctive kind of joy. The pure joy felt by the pure people who live their pure life. The bliss of nature welcomes only those whose hearts are still full of purity. It is the joy that enables humans to feel a new sense of "new earth and new heaven". All the bright light that hearts feel and all the lovely voice that souls produce are caused by joy.

Then the poet metaphorically portrays joy as life through the use of clouds, "Joy the luminous cloud", as the rainy clouds are the primary source of life. Besides, the poet here capitalized Joy to confirm that she is great.

Subsequently, in stanza six, Coleridge states that even when my way was full of obstacles and difficulties, there was time for imagining happiness. There was time for hope during the miserable moments "Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness". It is his heart's joy that enables him to lighten his gloom paths. Even his misfortunes could avail him since they work as an evoke for his imagination to portray images of pleasure in his mind.

Moreover, the poet assures that there was time for hope to grow around him like a twin of thick fruity trees. "hope grew round me, like the twining vine and fruits". Using this simile, the poet proves that hope can grow and increase just as plants do.

However, now he is no longer able to bear the thorns of reality. The burdens of life overcome him and press him down, "bow me down to earth". He falls down from the sky of hope to the ground of despair. He is frustrated that suffering deprives him of his joy.

Furthermore, what makes him feel sad deep down is that he is lost and depressed; he becomes unable anymore to take care of anything. That is a deep sense of woe. Now he does not mind nature and the pleasure she endowed to him "Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth". And this carelessness worried him entirely.

Every time he faces these miserable feelings "each visitation", they obstruct nature to give him the spirits of Imagination. The use of the capital letter here refers to the great value of Imagination for Coleridge as a Romantic poet.

Likewise, the image that portrays the analogy between the poet and vegetation is extended here; the plants and flowers that were full of life. Now they are withered and curved to earth. Equally, the poet felt down to earth because of the heavy burden upon his back.

Then the poet proclaims that all what I can do now is to be silent and patient under the impact of depression. And just to think how to use my poetic creativity of imagination to work on my emotions and express them in a poetic way.

Coleridge wishes to be able to express his thoughts now after the intensity of the difficulties that influenced on him and ceased him to be in touch with the nature's pleasure. He misses his former self, and hopefully seeks to rescue it.

Moreover, the poet at the beginning of stanza seven talks about his poisonous thoughts that coil his mind about the wicked dream of reality "Reality's dark dream! / I turn from you, and listen to the wind". The poet then turns away from "you"—the lady he was addressing- and listens to the wind that moves violently without taking the attention of the poet.

Thereafter, he speaks to the wind herself asking her about the great cry of pain caused by life's distress of the lute that extends out. This sound of agony is spread out and heard clearly now. This cry resembles that one of human being who is suffering from misery.

The personified wind is claimed here; O wind, instead of blowing here violently and terrifying me, it is much better to blow over a mountain's peak, or a blasted tree, or a far place

which no man would arrive to. Or an abandoned house that has been dwelled only by wicked spirits. The imagery here denotes to the loneliness of the poet's imagination.

O wind, you are a wild musical instrument playing upon the lute. The voice that you are producing is tougher than that which is heard through the dreary months of winter. O crazy lute player "Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers / Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers". You play on storms making the gardens look dark and the flowers glancing fairly behind the leaves.

Continuously, Coleridge is still addressing the wind proclaiming that you are an actor who performs the role of misery in the depressed nights "Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds". You can produce the sounds of agony and suffering. You are like the influential poet who reveals the voice of anger and change.

Then the poet goes further to describe the voice of the wind saying that the sounds you are making are similar to those made by the frightened flight of an overcome army, with shouts of woe of the crushed men, squeaking in pain and shaking with cold.

However, now there is a fatal pause of that loud voice; there is a break of the deepest silence "But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!". All that noise which is similar to the crushed army with the cries of the compressed militaries has ended.

Now the wind creates different tales which are less deed, lower voice, and with a less impact of terror, and more delightful, as if it were written by Otway himself. (Thomas Otway) is a 17th century English poet and dramatist. That tragic tale is about a little child who gets lost lonely in the wilds not far from home.

The wind now produces a sound of grief and fear which is like the sound of that child who shouts loudly hoping that her mother would hear her. The author proves that this wind is a violent scary might!

In stanza eight the poet ends explaining about the wind and talks about himself. He claims that it is midnight, but I have no thought of sleeping. He wishes that his friend does not face the same sleeplessness. Besides, the personified sleep here is demanded to visit her, to make her forget her troubles. He also wishes that the storm that he was describing to take only a brief duration.

The poet then hopes that all the stars shine above her home; shine quietly as they watch and guard the personified sleeping earth. Coleridge, as well as, declares that he wishes for his friend to get up with a carefree heart, bright spirit and lustrous eyes. "Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice", he implores joy to embrace her soul and please her voice.

Additionally, Coleridge wants that all the living things in the world are offered with the purpose of satisfying her. She is the honest friend of his choice. He wishes her to be protected from above. Although he is in deep melancholy, he still wishes her happiness forever.

Conclusion:

"Dejection: an Ode" is an English romantic poem expresses Coleridge's meditation of imagination, depression and joy. The poem shows the deep sense of Dejection as a result of the poet's incapacity to create poesy or to enjoy nature. This faded creativeness makes him to resort

to the power of nature in order to evoke his sleepy inspiration and to renew his lost passion for poetic writings.

At the beginning of the poem, the poet illuminates his melancholy, loneliness and disappointment. As well as he considers the natural objects consulting them to supply him with an outlet. The moon in the first stanza directs him to a peaceful way to get rid of tiredness. Besides, he considers the rough wind and the heavy storm as a means to shake his dead thoughts and drowsy mood.

Similarly, Coleridge continues contemplating the sky searching for a hope, then he catches that the real change is revealed from inside; from the heart which is the main origin of joy. Hope is formed in one's inner sense. The author proclaims that "we receive what we give", the heart's pure light is reflected on the objects that surround us then it returns brilliantly back to the heart himself. The poet assures that it is his heart's joy that aids him to shine his darkness.

However, the poet can't stay long in the bliss of the imaginative world. He is obliged to come back to the real one occasionally. He has to face the tough reality. The weights of life press him down to earth. So, he seeks to soar away to the ideal imaginative world through such a friendship with the tender natural objects.

This paper illustrates Coleridge's merging of the themes of Imagination and Nature as they are the two primary ideas in the period of Romantic Movement. In this golden age of Poetry, nature and imagination are the principal motivations of the poetic inspiration, creativity and beauty. The romantic poets' intense love and care towards these two concepts has created immortal poets. The remarkable effect of Imagination and the great power of Nature play a vital role in writing "Dejection: An Ode" in this attractive way.

Some notes concerning the topic.

- The role of Imagination:

Coleridge emphasizes on imagination as a lively factor in the romantic poetry. According to romanticism period, imagination is an active effective power that impacts evidently on the creative poetic process. Romantic poets believe that the imaginative world is important for humans' understanding of the real one. Imagination is a helpful way to see life with a different eye. As well as, the healing power of imagination is primarily emphasized in Coleridge's poetry. It helps the poet to recapture his creativeness and then recapture his contact with nature.

- The significance of Nature:

Besides imagination, nature has the same care in Coleridge's works. According to him, she is the most sublime entity. The poet uses her as a force to strike his dull mind. The natural symbols in the dejected ode show the poet's belief in the impact of nature. The natural objects help Coleridge to scatter his thoughts.

- The reason of Dejection:

The main reasons behind the poet's dejection here are his incapacity to write poetry and his feeling about the gap between him and nature.

- The change of mood by the end of the ode:

The poem is written in the mood of grief, however, at the end the reader will notice a change in the mood. The poet becomes more hopeful and more joyful. His ability to write and his tender friendship with nature are the motives behind that change.

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Appendix: (Dejection: An Ode)

I

Well! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made
The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
Upon the strings of this Æolian lute,
Which better far were mute.
For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!
And overspread with phantom light,
(With swimming phantom light o'erspread
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
The coming-on of rain and squally blast.
And oh! that even now the gust was swelling,
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!
Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
And sent my soul abroad,
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!

II

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear—
O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood,
To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

III

My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
It were a vain endeavour,
Though I should gaze for ever

On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

IV

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

V

O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me
What this strong music in the soul may be!
What, and wherein it doth exist,
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making power.
Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,
Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,
Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
A new Earth and new Heaven,
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud—
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud—
We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms the ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.

VI

There was a time when, though my path was rough,
This joy within me dallied with distress,
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
But oh! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination.
For not to think of what I needs must feel,

But to be still and patient, all I can;
And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man—
This was my sole resource, my only plan:
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.

VII

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,
Reality's dark dream!

I turn from you, and listen to the wind,
Which long has raved unnoticed. What a scream
Of agony by torture lengthened out
That lute sent forth! Thou Wind, that rav'st without,
Bare crag, or mountain-tairn, or blasted tree,
Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,
Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,
Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,
Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers,
Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers,
Mak'st Devils' yule, with worse than wintry song,
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.

Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!

Thou mighty Poet, e'en to frenzy bold!

What tell'st thou now about?

'Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,
With groans, of trampled men, with smarting wounds—
At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!

But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!

And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,
With groans, and tremulous shudderings—all is over—
It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!

A tale of less affright,

And tempered with delight,

As Otway's self had framed the tender lay,—

'Tis of a little child

Upon a lonesome wild,

Nor far from home, but she hath lost her way:

And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,

And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear.

VIII

'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:

Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!

Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,

And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,

May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,

Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!

With light heart may she rise,

Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,

Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;
To her may all things live, from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of her living soul!
O simple spirit, guided from above,
Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice,
Thus mayest thou ever, evermore rejoice.