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PIF (India) = 1.940
IBI (India) = 4.260
OAJI (USA) = 0.350

SOI: [1.1/TAS](#) DOI: [10.15863/TAS](#)

International Scientific Journal Theoretical & Applied Science

p-ISSN: 2308-4944 (print) e-ISSN: 2409-0085 (online)

Year: 2021 Issue: 04 Volume: 96

Published: 12.04.2021 <http://T-Science.org>

QR – Issue



QR – Article



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RECURRENT IMAGES IN WORDSWORTH'S POETRY

Abstract: *The article deals with recurrent images in Wordsworth's poetry. The employment of recurrent images in Romantic poetry shows great mastery. Powerful emotions manifest themselves in the undulating flow of images, with their rise and ebb or rhythmic repetition. Their quick succession marks the movement of the emotion, for they vary in their power, intensity and frequency and run as a bright fibre, symbolic of the whole. The mastery of creating poetic imagery is shown in the use of recurrent images, through which the imagination is stirred without even realizing the presence of any symbols. These images are symbolic of the whole, repeated as a leitmotiv, running as a nerve, carrying essence of the passion, which manifests itself in its frequent overflow. Wordsworth's poetic style is under the influence of an emotional and imaginative predominance, and the images we meet are more often described not for themselves, but for the feeling and idea they convey.*

Key words: *poetry, recurrent images, symbol, imagination, image, leitmotiv, gradation, associations, philosophical point, ideas.*

Language: *English*

Citation: *Balyasnikova, M. A. (2021). Recurrent images in Wordsworth's poetry. ISJ Theoretical & Applied Science, 04 (96), 104-109.*

Soi: <http://s-o-i.org/1.1/TAS-04-96-22>

Doi:  <https://dx.doi.org/10.15863/TAS.2021.04.96.22>

Scopus ASCC: *1208.*

Introduction

Romantic imagery represents a gradation from the closest union of emotion and image to a certain divergence between them, which at its farthest approaches allegory. The images studied here are those that arise from emotion, suggestive and symbolic.

Visual images may be used as directly arousing an emotion, as for example those in natural scenery, yet have no further suggestion.

The Romantic Poetry of the early nineteenth century abounds in suggestive images, which spring from intense emotions and rich imagination, from vague associations and undefinable yearnings characteristic of the Romantic spirit. Another important link is with the idealistic philosophy of the period. According to this philosophy the ideas present to our minds are realities, and not the material world. We perceive nothing but ideas, which are a series of sensations, perceptions and emotions. These ideas are dependent upon our minds[15].

Materials

The article deals with the analysis of recurrent images in Wordsworth's poetry. The subject of the Romantic images has not been treated in a way which can bring out both the typical Romantic view of life and the individual character of each poet. Wilson Knight in his study of some Romantic images has an entirely mystic approach [15:305]. He becomes aware not of the images themselves but of the background, on which he confers a purport of mysticism: the caves in *Kubla Khan* the starlit dome in *Queen Mab*, the womb of the earth in *Prometheus Unbound* and in *Endymion* are all linked together by the author on moment of darkness before birth. This shows an interesting point of view, but a mystic apprehension of the world can hardly be said to dominate Romantic poetry[15].

Studies of the Romantic poets and movement have not been infrequent, yet the emphasis in these is not on the imagery, and therefore their rhythmic recurrence has not been brought out as essential and inherent feature.

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Elistratova in her detailed work on the heritage of English Romanticism and modern times lays stress on the source of all fantastic visions, myths and pantheistic animation of nature in contemporary philosophic and aesthetic concepts, representing a definite stage in their historic development [10:728]. The importance attached to their historic relevance shows the role of images in this particular period of English poetry and literature [10].

The symbolism of many poems has been interpreted in studies and analyses such as C. Baker's *Shelley's Major Poetry*, approaching it from a philosophical point of view [3:432]. The concrete images, however, have not been shown to have sprung with the conception of the poem, and the thought and ideas alone would mean much less if we did not reveal their motive power, supplied by the freshness of the Romantic imagery. Professor Mincoff's *Survey of English Literature* convinced readers of primary aesthetic value of the Romantic poetry [18:367]. Also we can mention such authors as J.R. Barth who worked on the symbolic imagination and analyzed Coleridge's poetry and the Romantic tradition, C.N.Coe who analyzed the poetic works by Wordsworth and the literature of travel, Mc Farland who wrote about Romanticism and about Wordsworth's and Coleridge's creative work, L. Newlyn who analyzed the language of allusion in the poetry of the Romantic Period, T. Rafan, whose interests concerned especially the discourse of Romanticism and others [3:259, 6:248, 17:692, 19:400, 21:125].

Methods

Descriptive, structural, and linguostylistic methods were used while analyzing imagery in Wordsworth's poetry. The present study of the Romantic suggestive imagery might be one of the ways to penetrate to the core of Romantic art, to reveal by what means the Romantics succeeded in moving our imagination so irresistibly. In noting and studying the imagery and the emotions they convey, we are inevitably drawn nearer the world which was more concrete to the poet. The tasks of the research include analysis of recurrent images in the poetry of the Romantics, classification of the recurrent images into groups, according to the associations they evoke, proving the fact that Romantic imagery represents a gradation from the closest union of emotion and image to a certain divergence between them, which at its farthest approaches allegory, identifying the images that recur constantly in the poetry: light, wind, water, moon; analyse the peculiarities of the images which reflect the poet's mind, his visions and outlook on things which stir in him powerful emotions.

Results

Wordsworth distinguishes between 'imagery', which, he says, represents objects really existing or

felt to exist, and may form the material of a descriptive poem, and 'imagination' which for him is a term referring to images blended with emotions and given as they appear to the mind of the poet. In the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* he states the object, method, and aim of the new poetry presented in the revolutionary volume. 'The principal object, then', writes Wordsworth, '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 men, and at the same time throw over them a certain colouring of imagination' [24, 62]. In the statement that the language used is that of conversation, and further that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition, he obviously means that the new style proposes to cast off 'the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers' [24, 62], and adopt that of truth and sincerity. The old diction of the classical school became powerless to convey new emotions and the various abstractions made by the use of capital letters were incapable of exciting and imagination.

The difference between a symbol and allegory is in the degree of their association or closeness to the idea, rather than in the nature of the image. The same is true of a purely symbolic image and a suggestion, the latter being so intricately, subtly and inseparably interwoven with the feeling, that we only feel its power but hardly notice it at first.

Most of Wordsworth's recurrent images tend to create an atmosphere, and they take the reader's imagination directly into the mood of his poems.

Discussion

Wordsworth, being the first of the Romantic poets one might start with following up the variety of the recurrent images in his shorter and longer poems. They can give picture of the poet's associations and working of the emotions colouring what stands on their way. Recurrent images exist in his best poems, yet they have not the exuberance of Shelley's or Keats images, so in a way there is a clear development in the employment of these images as poetic devices. This connects Wordsworth with the other poets of the period and distinguishes him from earlier poets of the Romantic revival.

In *An Evening Walk* the scenery of the **sunset** in the country impresses the poet not only with its beauty but also offers associations with the bright appearance of the world when seen with hope and in the years of youth.

The splendor of the world is conveyed by the repeated images of brightness and gorgeous hues. The green colour is rich, the meads are seen as 'emerald', the moss is 'of gloomy green', the leafy shade-illumined with 'sparkling foam' and the light itself is green on the moss. The sinking sunlight casts a colour of gold, purple and fiery red, the seen appears with an

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'edge of flame', it spreads 'golden tides', and touches 'the purple steep', while the valleys show gleams of gold and purple. Further, the brooks are 'liquid gold', and the latest rays 'of the seen are of burning red'. These repeated gorgeous colours and the sparkling lights of the sunset and the moon later, convey an impression of brilliance and glory, associated with hope and youth. The intensity cast over the usual colours turns the yellow and green to gold and emerald just as youth and hope change the world to a happier place.

In a poem *To H.C.-Six Years Old*, the images of clear **water** are associated with the purity of a child. The poet's young fancy travels, far, and he calls the child a voyager, whose boat floats 'in such clear water' that it seems 'suspended in a stream as clear as sky'. The child in its frailty is also 'a morning dew drop' and 'a gem that glitters while in lives'. All these images call up the idea of crystal purity, associated with the taintless innocence of the child and convey the poet's delight in its happiness and fear for the future.

The Longest Day, addressed to the poet's daughter, has recurrent images of **water**, connected either with the flow of life, which the young girl would have to pass, or with the eternal flow of time, where all human beings are borne as in a common stream. Water appears not only in the real torrent nearby, but also in the associations with life and eternity:

Summer ebbs each day that follows

Is a reflux from on high,

or:

Fix thin eyes upon the sea

That absorbs time, space and number;

Look than to Eternity.

The he devices his daughter to follow the flowing river, her end will be 'the mighty gulf of things'. These water images show clearly the way objects act on the mind of the poet, and how they become modified by his contemplation. The objective image soon becomes blended with the poet's thoughts on life and eternity.

In *Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known*, the repeated image of the **moon** in five of the seven stanzas of the poem, is a symbol of something fateful, something terrible that is going to happen, sharpening our expectation.

The poet, riding to the cottage of Lucy, has his eyes fixed on the moon, until the anxiety, created by the image of the moon, reaches the rhythmic movement of hoofs-

Hoof after hoof

He raised and never stopped.

And with this accelerated motion as if trying to speed up the breath of expectation on into fear the emotion rises, when at once the moon 'dropped' behind the cottage. The abrupt sinking of the moon corresponds to the strange and dreadful thought that comes to the lover's mind-that Lucy might be dead.

The recurrence of the image becomes parallel with a certain heightening of the feeling, until the moment of the moon's dropping.

Another image of the **moon** appears in *The Idiot Boy*, where it recurs throughout its length, stressing the insanity of lunatic condition of the boy. Being sent to call for the doctor for a sick neighbor, the boy is led by his feeble mind astray and roams the whole night under the bright moonshine. In this scene the moon appears as a motionless, frozen sphere, shedding its cold light as if being fixed in the sky:

The moon is up-the sky is blue,

The owlet in the moonlight air,

He shouts from nobody knows where,

and further:

The moon that shines above his head

Is not more still and mute than he.

Mistaking the moon for the sun, the boy says that 'the sun did shine so cold', and this suggests again that the moon is unusually motionless and shedding light in a lifeless atmosphere. Through its immobility it conveys sense of mingled stillness, stupor, even dullness and coldness, freezing the mind into morbid inertness. Together with the owlet's hoot, the images express distraction and lunacy. They speak to us of human suffering.

Recurrent images are something presented as a **vision. Light and twilight** in the poem *She Was a Phantom of Delight*, are related to Wordsworth's first deep impression of his wife and his later admiration of her. The vision of mellow light is produced by the interchange of brightness and shade. At first she 'gleamed' upon the poet's sight, and later she appears as darkened or gentle light:

Her eyes as stars of twilight fair;

Like twilight's, too, her dusky hair;

But all things else about her drawn

From May-time and the cheerful dawn.

These and the 'angelic light' in the last line create a feeling of gentleness and calm, coming from the woman whom the poet loves for her beauty, wisdom and tenderness.

The vision of golden **daffodils** (*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*) produced a picture of an extensive, endless plain, sprinkled with numerous flowers. This infinity of sight is created by recurrent images suggesting numerousness. The poet sees the daffodils as a crowd, a host, stars, ten thousand seen in a glance, all adding life or beauty to the flowers. Along with these images, the daffodils are shown as fluttering, dancing and tossing their heads and then the poet's heart dances to the rhythm of their movement. This is an example of the complex reactions between poet and objects, which mark Wordsworth's poetry more frequently. For the images, presented through the delight of the poet, take on themselves that life which makes them look as a crowd or toss their heads and dance; and this vitality falls back on the poet,

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whose heart dances with the daffodils thus adding active joy to the delight.

The sensations which Wordsworth has in the open air are felt as physical experience in *Tintern Abbey*, and this is conveyed by images connected with the **human body**. The beauty and quietness of the poet's favourite woodland scenes and mountains are 'food' to his spirit and the moment of contemplation has 'life and food for future years'. The colours and forms of the mountain are to him 'an appetite' and nature 'feeds' with lofty thoughts. Nature is also a nurse, its pleasures are healing when grief appresses the mind. These images stress the close, almost physical link between poet and nature, and show the intensity of his sensations, which stir his whole being and which are 'felt in the blood and felt along the heart'. They likewise speak of the way the poet responds to the beauty and objects around him - through direct perceptions and sensations they create lasting emotions, felt with physical intensity.

The thronging, thunderous clouds in *To the Clouds* are animated by images picturing the clouds as an army, suggesting their unburst power and the poet's thoughts awakened by them. At first the clouds come as an army and 'winged Host of troops', marching to overtake the enemy. Their movement and crowded numerousness speak to the poet of coming thunder, which he associates with the violent collision of armies. They are also 'a caravan', pausing in their 'hasty pilgrimage' to utter a devotion with a thunderous voice. This procession, appearing further in the poem again, reminds one of the poet's own adoration of the majestic sight. Meanwhile he addresses the clouds as 'children of the sea', ready to sink on their mother's lap and rest; the squadrons become 'an endless flight of birds' and both of these restful images create a feeling of calm, so that they come to balance the hidden, unburst power of the thunderous clouds. The life added by the other personifications - 'fleet as the generations of mankind', a procession coming from a 'fount of life' - together with the preceding images, convey the final impression that the clouds are alive, thronging, possessed of majesty and solemnity and the anticipation of coming thunder is balanced by their present pomp and calm.

The **vision of light as the glory of youth and childhood** is most clearly and systematically repeated in the *Ode an Intimations of Immortality*. F.W. Bateson in his interpretation of Wordsworth regards the process of recreating within oneself the experiences of childhood as a cure of melancholia, brought on by the difficulties and complexities of human relationships. "The poem is moving however "he says "because of the intensity of Wordsworth's longing for the impossible" [4,102]. In another place of the same study he notes that in Wordsworth 'immortal' and 'immortality' usually mean 'infinite' and 'infinity', and this clue can be applied to the *Ode*,

in which Wordsworth utters a strenuous yearning for the infinite that only half slakes the Romantic zeal and sense of the irrevocable [4,115]. The child sees the world in splendour: the earth and every common sight seems to him 'apparelled in celestial light'; the spirit of man comes as a star, or a trailing cloud of glory from God - its infinite home, bringing light from there. Soon, however as the boy grows up this primary radiance is shaded by worldly cares, taking man into darkness. Yet, the recollections of infancy and youth spread this bright influence in later life. Images of **light**, Wordsworth's symbol of infinity, are shown in contrast with the gloom of mortal toils, which accompany man in his search for truth. When the years bring on man heaviness, something 'broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave'. In old age, this longing for the infinite is represented in the more subdued light of embers, suggesting that what had once been radiant and strong is still alive and a source of inspiration. The recollections of childhood have their influence on man because of the fresh perceptions and imaginative response to the world in the years of youth:

*Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing.*

The poet sees this primary splendour as irrevocable. He finds comfort, however, in what remains behind - in the ever lingering influence of youth, the time when man bends his imagination to the far-away Romantic. The poet sees this primary splendor as irrevocable. He finds comfort, however, in what remains behind - in the ever lingering influence of youth, the time when man bends his imagination to the far-away Romantic ideal with greater fervour. The systematic repetition of images in the figures of celestial light, glorious birth of sunshine, May-morning, clouds of glory, our life's star, light, glories, embers, fountain-light, radiance, splendor and the brightness of a new-born day, marks the development of the emotion and emphasizes the idea of infinity and intense yearning.

Another recurrent image of **light** appears in *The White Doe of Rylstone*. The image of the doe is clothed in light; she is an incarnation of a mother's grief. Lady Eliza has lost her noble son, drowned in the Wharf's abysses. When all is hushed in the chapel and the priest recites the liturgy, or when no living creature is seen in the open fields, the solitary doe passes in light: 'Comes gliding in with lovely gleam'. Further, she appears still brighter in the sunshine and even her presence fills the damp, obscure recesses 'with lustre of saintly show', sheds sunny liveliness on the flowers. She is called also 'a radiant Creature' or simply 'bright', often seen to glide over the earth 'like an angel of light'. The recurrent images intimate that some supernatural power presides over the forests of Rylstone. It can soothe the sorrow of people. It speaks

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of something legendary, of noble deeds and feelings which leave a trace for future generations.

In *The Excursion* along with the passage, describing of running stream, associated with the course of human life, there are a number of **water images**, exhibiting a ceaseless and regular motion, which for the poet is the essence of life. Here are some examples: the troubles of this world seem '*as vain billows in a tossing sea*' (Book II, *The Solitary*); the Solitary, accompanying his guests to some distance from his cottage, wishes to retire to his home '*as a billow, heaved upon the beach, rolls back into the sea*' (Book V, *The Pastor*). The pastor further in the same book says that man shall

*float over the billows of this troublesome world
To the place of everlasting life.*

In another place life is associated with a **flood**, in which man launches his bark; or it is like a *stream*, bearing man forward to the calm waters of a lake or the depths of a gulf. Wordsworth is extremely sensitive to the movement of water and the motion, presented in his images is regular, harmonious and rhythmic. It is displayed in the heaving and tossing waves or in other images, and everywhere it is felt to be the essential motion of the universe.

The awareness of **motion** is obvious in other poems, but it is strongest in *The Prelude* where the poet catches the subtle movement of things which appear solid and stable to the ordinary felling. The recurrent images in the poem are those of **light and motion**. **Light** is symbolic of the poet's communion with nature and his longing for the infinite, as in the *Ode*. The poet pursues his way '*beneath the mellowing sun*' which sheds mild influence on him (Book I); he sees the woods, hills and rocks '*bronzed with deepest radiance*' (Book II); as a boy he loved the sun not for its bounty, but for the beauty it laid on hills and mountains. For the same reason the moon, too, was dear to him. Being with nature, he feels some light coming over his mind -

*An auxiliary light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendor,*

(Book II)

Some other images of light are connected with the brightness of a summer noon (Book IV) or the splendor of the moon '*couched among the leaves of a tall ash*' (Book IV), or the glory of the morning -

*Magnificent
The morning rose in memorable pomp
Glorious as e'er I had beheld*

(Book IV)

As a boy the poet felt an overflow of happiness when '*Life's morning radiance hath not left the hills*' (Book IV). The rest of the 26 images of light in the poem have a similar radiance, connected with the poet's fresh perceptions of the world in his youth and his striving to reach the sphere of the infinite. Even more striking are the images of motion, which occur

in 18 different passages, sometimes together with those of light. They all reveal a regular motion which for the poet is a manifestation of the universal spirit pervading man and nature bringing harmony and order to the world. This harmony reconciles the discordant elements in nature and finally leads to the creation of a calm and sensible life. Even the miseries and sufferings of the poet have their part in this complex whole and assist in making up the ultimate calm. In sounds, too, the poet notices first the motion rather than their music among the solitary hills he hears sounds of '*undistinguishable motion*'.

One evening, the poet taking a boat on the heaving waters of the lake, looks at a huge peak, and striking the oars, the black shape of the peak impresses him like a living thing, following in a measured motion (Book I). Wordsworth becomes aware of a universal spirit breathing '*an everlasting motion*' and believes that this very motion has helped him to from his passions. In his remembrance of childhood he has noticed a wheeling and rolling motion in what seems still and stable to the ordinary eye. The passage of the poet's sliding and hissing over the ice '*shod with steel*' and the trees and icy crags around him twinkling '*like iron*', depicts a movement conferred on solid elements. It gives a sense of regular and measured motion, recalling the swing of a heavy pendulum. Further in the same passage the universe is shown as moving with a swifter motion and its speed forms a contrast to the nature of the elements which move: the star flies before him, the banks come '*sweeping*' with a rapid motion, and the poet reclining back from its sliding, feels the cliffs wheel by him, while the earth rolls visibly before his sight. **Time** too, has for the schoolboy a kind of rolling motion:

*The year span round
With giddy motion.*

(Book II)

On summer nights, the poet watching the moon in splendor, sees it '*rock with every impulse of the breeze*' (Book IV), where the swinging movement adds some heaviness to the moon and measure to its movement. The poet himself, too, moves along with the other elements of nature -

*I passed
In motion without pause,*

or another time: like a breeze, or as a bird, or fish, or simply moving from '*day to day*'. The world around him moves in an endless stream of images, everywhere exhibiting the same continuous and regular motion. This continuity and order confer on Wordsworth's poems their typical calm. They speak of the poet's balanced emotions, where even his grief is considered to the part of a perfect harmony, where the turbulence in man and nature is soon engulfed by a higher law of regularity that reigns in the world. The idea of '*emotion recollected in tranquility*' formulated in the *Preface* to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 applies to *The Prelude* rather than to the poems

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of the first volume, and Wordsworth's reconciliation with the world as it was in his later life, in conflict with his earlier revolutionary enthusiasm, seems to be the main spring of emotional tension and images of motion in the poem.

Conclusion

Wordsworth's recurrent images produce an impression of harmony and balance. This is felt in the vision of the golden daffodils, in their movement of tossing and dancing, in the images of the clouds creating a lively calm, in the movement of waves, and most clearly in the regular motion of solid nature. Light appears in splendour, the radiance is magnificent and glorious, without being dazzling, and this, too, has something of Wordsworth's tranquility. All these images, particularly those of light, are

symbolic of infinity; they express the Romantic longing for the infinite and at the same time bear the poet's individual stamp. Recurrent images show the working of the poet's mind, his visions and outlook on things which stir in him powerful emotions. Wordsworth's images impress us with their harmony and balance, felt most in the regular and measured motion which he perceives in the universe. This feeling is part of Wordsworth's usual tranquility in his recollections of emotions, especially in his later poetry. His earlier poems have more of the Romantic dissatisfied longing for infinity, but on the whole the passages marked by the recurrent images are also some of Wordsworth's best poetry, since they all exhibit his participation in the life going on around him.

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