**Wordsworth theory of Poetic Diction**

**Poetic Diction : Defined and Explained**

“Poetic diction” begins to assume importance in English literature about 19th century. Poetic diction generally means “choice of words” which then leads a unique style for each individual poet or author. Owen Barfield in his book defined poetic diction as “When words are selected and arranged in such a way that their meaning either arouses or is obviously intended to arouse “aesthetic imagination” the result may be described as “poetic diction”.

**Wordsworth’s Theory of Poetic Diction: Its Background**

The theory of poetic diction of Wordsworth was a result of revolt against the “gaudiness and inane phraseology” of Pope. We know Wordsworth, in his earlier days, supported the French revolution, but very soon, his hopes were shattered by the French invasion of Switzerland. By 1802, he had kept himself aloof from practical politics. But his democratic sympathies were still strong, which found expression in the sphere of poetry. Wordsworth didn’t write to please a corrupt society, nor did employ its language. He wrote poetry in a simple language that cottagers and children could understand. He says “**It may be safely affirmed that there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition”.** He selected the language of common men “**because such men hourly communicate with the objects from which the best part of language is originally derived”.**

**Wordsworth’s Theory of Poetic Diction: Its main points**

1. The language of poetry should be a selection of the language really used by men.

2. It should be “the language of men in a state of vivid sensation”.

3. It should have “a certain coloring of imagination”.

4. There is no essential difference between the language of prose and language of metrical composition.

**Language of Prose and Metrical Composition: No Essential Difference**

In the preface Wordsworth emphasis that good prose and metrical composition have everything in common. He says “**there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition”.** This statement has been criticized by almost every critic. It seems that Wordsworth is arguing a weak case.

**Criticism of Wordsworth’s theory**

Coleridge’s objection to Wordsworth’s views is three-fold.

1. These views are applicable to some kinds of poetry.

2. Even to these classes they are not applicable, except in such a sense, as has never been denied and doubted.

3. As a rule they are useless if not injurious and , therefore, either need or not need to be practiced.

Coleridge objects to the statement that the rustic’s language is formed by hourly communion with elemental nature. Firstly, the distinct knowledge of the rustic would furnish a very scanty vocabulary. Secondly, Coleridge denies that the words and their combinations, derived from the objects with which the rustic is familiar. The best part of human language is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself, and the best elements in rural language have come from universities and the church. Lastly, Coleridge finds that matters are not improved by adding the words in a state of excitement, for the tendency of excitement is not to create new ideas and images but only to arouse those that are stored up in mind. If there is paucity of ideas there will only be repetition which would be ludicrous.

**Use of Meter: Its Merits and Demerits**

Wordsworth points out that the use of meter in poetry should not be confused with the use of poetic diction. Wordsworth has defended meters on the grounds

1. It adds charm and pleasure to language.

2. Poems written upon humbler subjects give pleasure from generation to generation.

3. The end of poetry is to produce excitement.

4. Pathetic and painful situations can be rendered more effectively in rhyme and in prose.

5. It imparts passion to the words, and makes the reader experience appropriate feelings of pleasure.

6. We derive pleasure from perception of similarity in dissimilarity. The use of metre provides this element of contrast.

**Wordsworth’s practice of his theory**

Wordsworth was led to two divergent ideals of style-the one prompted by his instincts as an imaginative poet, the other by his prepossessions as a lover of nature. In the Preface, he professes to have sought to use ‘ a selection of the language really used by men’, and his chiefly ‘in humble and rustic life,’ and at the same time to throw over a certain color of imagination.’’