# Wordsworth’s Theory Of Poetry And Poetic Process

Wordsworth wrote a “**Preface**” to the second edition of Ballads, which appeared in 1801 in defence of his unconventional theory of poetry. His premise/basis was that the source of poetic truth is the direct experience of the senses. Poetry, he asserted, originates from “**Emotion Recollected in Tranquility**”. Rejecting the contemporary emphasis on form and intellectual approach that drained poetic writing of strong emotion, he maintained that the scenes and events of everyday life and the speech of ordinary people were the raw material of which poetry could and should be made.

The theory of poetry involves a detailed discussion of the subject matter of poetry, the language suitable for poetry, the function of a poet and poetic pleasure. His theory of poetry is all the more interesting because it comes from a practicing poet. Wordsworth`s definition of the nature of poetry as propounded in the 1802, preface is important, and has to be quoted at length before we go on to discuss the various facts of the theory he states;

“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”

It takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility; the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility disappears and an emotion is gradually produced. In this mood composition generally begins and in a mood similar to that it is carved on.

When Wordsworth says **"That Poetry is the Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings"** it is clear that poetry is the matter of mood and inspiration. There is a spontaneity in the expression of the feeling poetry`s source is the feeling in the heart, not the ideas of the intellect. Deep emotion is the basic condition of poetry. We see that the emphasis on feeling and emotion is a definite departure from the neo-classical stress on `wit` and intellectual effort.

But Wordsworth add a corollary that the origin of poetry is from **“Emotion Recollected in Tranquility.”** At first glance the two contentions seem contradictory. The poetic process has four stages for successful composition to take place. The four stages of the process are "**Recollection, Contemplation, Renewal of the Original Emotion, and Composition**".

**Vernon Hall** traces the pattern behind Wordsworth`s theory of the nature of poetic creation. He observes,

**“The poet looks at nature his emotions are aroused. In tranquility he recalls his emotions. These emotions are made into a poem with the help of images of those things in nature which aroused the poet`s emotion in the first place.”**

In the process of poetic composition, the mind is on the whole in a state of enjoyment. There will be a reflection of this pleasure in the poetic composition. The poet`s function is to share this joy with his readers to communicate this over-balance of pleasure to his reader or audience.

According to Wordsworth the end of poetry is to import pleasure. Pleasure is the great elementary principle, which makes man feel, live, move and gain knowledge.Wordsworth`s concept of poet is also exalted one. He is to communicate the joy and the over-balance of pleasure through poetry. Wordsworth stresses on the fact that the poet differs from other men not in kind but in degree of sensibility, passion and power of expression. Poets have greater `**Organic** **Sensibility**` than other people. The beauties of nature excite in them powerful emotions, which they feel an urge to communicate.

A poet must have sensibility as well as powerful feelings, which, however, are not enough. He must also be the one who has thought long and deeply. Further, he is able to communicate his feelings and joy. He is blessed with an ability of expressing himself. He should also have the powers of observation, reflection, judgment, invention and imagination. He is a man among men and he speaks to his fellow men.

Then Wordsworth states his object of choosing **“Incidents and Situations from Common Life”.** His purpose was to trace the **`primary laws of our nature`.** Wordsworth felt that the subject of poetry had been too long restricted to the upper strata of society. He wanted to extend the range of poetic subject. These people living as they did in close proximity/closeness with nature absorbed the beautiful and permanent grandeur of nature. He believed in the innate goodness of the simple country folk.

Wordsworth considered feeling and emotion to be of a greater importance than situation and incident. He discards Aristotelian principle.

Strongly critical of the artificial poetic diction of the eighteenth century, he proposed to use simple and natural language as used by the rustic and common folk. In this advocacy of the real languages of men, he declares that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.

Wordsworth also emphasizes that poetic language must be a language of man in a state of vivid sensation. Such a language, if selected judicially, and variegated with metaphors, can give pleasure which is peculiar to poet.