

William Wordsworth

1770-1850

A View Of The Thames At Westminster Bridge
(Joseph Nicholls, about 1730)



***A View Of Westminster Bridge,
Westminster Abbey (John Paul)***



“Energy is eternal delight”
VS

Search of repose & retreat
Desire of a timeless Nirvana

YET also
Wavering between calm and storm

POETICS AND POETRY

- 1) “The principal object ... which I proposed to myself in these poems was to choose *incidents and situations from common life* and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of *language really used by men*; and, at the same time, to throw over them *a certain colouring of the imagination*, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way”.

- New characters, themes and language
- Influence of John Locke's empiricism (rejection of innate principles and ideas)
- Influence of Étienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac
 - rejection of innate principles, ideas and abilities
 - "sensationism"
 - experience teaches us how to focus attention, remember, imagine, abstract, judge, and reason (feeling + thought)

- "Defamiliarization" technique / ethic and aesthetic value of the "common" / alert readers to the wonder of the ordinary and natural (cfr. "Resolution and Independence")
- Like a Constable painting:
 - Simplistic from a distance
 - Alive and complex if looked at carefully (both in form and content)

2) “I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from *emotion recollected in tranquillity*: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind”

- Creative process
 - Contingency (flow) versus permanence (attempt to reconcile nature-imagination; nature-Man; Man over Nature)
 - Object → poet → sensory experience → emotion → memory = recollected in tranquillity → “kindred” emotion → poem → reader → emotion (cfr. “Daffodils”)

3) Mutual relationship man-nature / Nature versus city / Nature as spirit of the universe and comfort

4) The language of sense impressions (mainly sight and hearing)

- influence of associationist philosopher David Hartley
- 3 stages of the mind – 3 ages of man: Childhood (sense perceptions) → youth (simple thoughts) → adulthood (complex ideas)

5) Childhood and memory / poetry as memory

- “The Child is father of the Man”
- Poetic inspiration and creativity derive from what the poet retains from his childhood experiences
- The poet as child – awesome wonder
- Memory as the main repository of the poet’s inspiration and creativity

- Memory acts at its highest in the “**spots of time**” (past + present + future)
- ❖ epiphany, like Blake’s notion of “a universe in a grain of sand”
- ❖ “an imaginative fusion of the familiar and the strange, the known and the unknown, the real and the ideal, the finite and the infinite, the spiritual and the material, the natural and the supernatural” (N. Fairchild, *The Romantic Quest*)

6) Natural supernaturalism / descendentalism – transcendentalism

- Double movement
 - Faith in the physicality of experience
 - Ability to transcend contingent experience
- Romantic irony
 - Infinite in the finite
 - Universal in the individual

7) *Egotistical sublime* (excessive inwardness) vs *negative capability* (“selfless receptivity” = poet’s capacity to efface his mental identity by immersing it in the subject described)

- As in Novalis, “The secret way goes inward”
- Wordsworth versus Byron’s dramatic art: poet’s consciousness always at the centre (H. Bloom: “Copernican revolution” in his poetry; internal quest)