


Healing Power of Wordsworth's Romantic Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Poetry has immense potential to soothe the senses and heat the wounds. Through poetry, mental health and peace of mind can be maintained with pace immeasurable. The waves of passion that runs through poet's sensibility, soothes the senses of the readers. Poetry reading, writing and listening casts good therapeutic effects. Poetry provides peace, calmness, and comfort to the minds by elevating mood in distress and duress. Studies show that poetry therapy proves a boon to patients suffering from serious ailments and augment their emotional resilience and brings joy in their life. Our brains are electrified with rhyme and rhythm of the poetry to give emotional reaction to joy and sadness both. Like sweet melody of music, poetry heals our emotional hurts. The metaphors embellish the poetic lines with magical brilliance, and they glitter with astute meaning and message. Diction plays a very emphatic role in discerning poet's leanings.

Reflection, perception and attachment are interwoven in diction so inextricably that they turn poet's mouthpiece, and roar and rave with perfect resonance to poetic experiences. Through the intoxicated taken-for-grantedness of the laidback reading public will take somersault by the melody of the tone and exquisiteness of diction. The paper, however, explores how poetry can be a natural tool to heal mental stress, trauma, and agony and maintain mental health well. We will examine some poetic utterances of great romantic poet William Wordsworth and see how they can be a tool to heal the emotional hurts and wounds. Moreover, we will too examine that how the nature can extend peace, purpose, poise to mind.

Keywords: *Poetry, Poetic therapy, Imagery, Landscape, Stress, Medicine and Nature.*

Poetry is the healer of hurts and emotional wounds. Since time memorial, the world has witnessed humans undergoing mental trauma, and poetry has played a remedial role to cure it. Since ages, literature is serving as a tool to absolve the patients of their mental and psychological disorders. The paper, however, explores the healing and therapeutic potential of poetry in general and literature composed to address the people's pain, plight and psychic problems.

Art and literature has resolved the issues of solitude, depression, agony, anguish and many issues related with mental health invariably. The poems hovering around the themes like serenity of nature and mind,

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hope, love, aspirations, forbearance and redemption, etc. showed readers miraculous effects to combat with scathing pain, agony and anguish. The lines of Earnest Harms is quite worth quoting here:

If we turn our view back into History, we find in the world of primitive men, as in the other cultures, knowledge of and time adapted practices of applying art and aesthetic elements as means of healing (Harms Ernest, 241).

People believe that poetry reading, writing and listening can have a good healing and therapeutic effect. It has very soothing, quietening, analeptic and redemptive attributes. Soothing words pirouetted in silky rhyme and sweet rhythm diminishes depression. Poet can vent inner feelings, which is impossible in plain saying. Studies establish that patients suffering from serious ailments improved their emotional imbalance by listening to the poetry. Poetry elevates mood during time of stress and duress. Our minds are very much attuned to rhyme, rhythm and meter of the poems. Like music, it electrifies the hearts of the readers. Melody of the verses stimulate the cerebrum of the readers to find their voice of joy again. In India, Shamans, and saints used the poetry therapy to maintain mental health.

They were of the view that poetry imparts a kind of realisation and expression of the natural interconnectedness of reality and thereby a healing effect. The melody of the verses heal the hurts of the people fast. Poetry has the power and potential to trounce the trauma of its readers, writers and listeners, poetry can be a remedy to heal readers' mind, heart and soul, diminish the agony, and end our woes. Brian E. Wakeman in his book *The Poetry as Research and Therapy* (2015) says, "the idea, that there can be a therapeutic power to poem, is at the heart of the poetry pharmacy. But the therapeutic power only exists if you can find the right poem for the right state of mind." (27)

Poetry has the potential to substantiate mental health and therapeutic usages. Words, symbols, imagery, rhyme, and rhythm can stimulate the senses to sublimate thoughts and emotions with an evocation of positive energy. Poetry imparts aesthetic delight purifying the emotions and ultimately giving cure and relief to our trauma. Poetry rejuvenates the mood of depressed readers to a healing height. Poetry therapy is in vogue these days. Poetry serves two purposes first, it purges the angsts, ennui, and stress of the writers and the readers who are on the same boat of emotions as the poet.

Both pass through the stage of purgation, curing their emotional sickness through catharsis. Metaphors play a significant role in splicing the consciousness of both, the poet and the reader in an ebullient way. The poem with a positive message can extend readers a reprieve from agony and anguish. Dr Kirti Sen Gupta, a dentist, aptly feels the healing power of poetry. See her words:

The importance of healing and the power of the spirit can never be hyped or ignored, for it is as integral to our living as breathing. In times of crisis, one may approach the issue(s) in more than one way: we can demand remedial measures, or we can opt for a therapeutic course that will alleviate our sufferings (Kirti Sengupta, v)

William Wordsworth is one of the pioneers of Romantic Movement in English poetry. William Wordsworth saw a communion between nature and humans, and observed their psyche with his observational eye. He explored various dimensions of poetry in healing the psychological and emotive loss. After French revolution, like most of his acquaintances, he became depressed at the turn out of events in the aftermath thereof. In order to restore the calmness of mind, he, along with sister Dorothy and his poet friend S.T. Coleridge, started writing poetry, and he found some images with symbolic significance having a therapeutic effect. He inferred that he could heal the psychological damage with poetry. The poet is puffed up with joy seeing the beautiful sights of nature. He wants to give a perfect image of a place which is entirely harmonized by the senses. In the poem “Lines Composed a Few Miles Away Above Tintern Abbey”, Wordsworth avers that his buoyant youthful raptures give him a vision. He expresses his beliefs and faith in a subtle way. Here, he is at the zenith of his poetic craftsmanship. His poetry proves a balm to the festering sores of the people. His poetry is a source of joy and is imbued with healing power. See the following lines, how they can heal the mental turbulence4:

With tranquil restoration:-feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man’s life
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love (Introduction to Poetry, 158).

William Wordsworth is a high priest of nature. He acquired the stature of a physician: healing the hurts of the readers through his poetry. A correlation has always existed between medicine and literature. John Keats saw a physician as a poet. P. B. Shelley establishes that Poetry connects, animates, and sustains the life of all. Mathew Arnold considers Wordsworth a model of poetic healing power. Hazlitt says that healing power which was attributed to plants and herbs, are found in his poetry. He avers in his essay *The Spirit Of The Age*, “If he can assuage the pain or close up the wound with the balm of solitary musing, or the healing power of plants and herbs and ‘skyey influences”, this is sole triumph of his art (William Hazlitt, 149)”.

Nicholas Mazza is highly appreciative of Wordsworthian poetry as a panacea to human hurts and mental sickness. Mazza avers: “Romantic perceptions have a long and unique place in the history of psychology, including the romantic influence on existential –humanistic, narrative, relational, and ecological psychologies.” (Mazza, 4) Wordsworthian romantic poetry has immense therapeutic power as it is an outburst of power feelings that originates from emotions recollected in tranquillity, his own definition. Geoffrey Hartman, a famous poetry therapist, finds his poetry imbued with therapeutic quality and concludes, “Wordsworth’s verse guides readers through the lapsarian wreckage of self-consciousness to a restored holism, an anti-self- consciousness in which the wound of self is healed.” (Romanticism, 55)

Wordsworth's famous work *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) describes three basic therapeutic tenets of romantic poetry: Prevention, cure, and reprieve. Thus, nature provides huge corpus to heal the hurts of the people. Wordsworth opines that poetry relieves soothing thoughts stemming from human sufferings. Like local healthcare charter, *Lyrical Ballads* procures natural health in wealth of plain language.

In the Poems "Lines composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey", and "Tables Turned", the poet is at his simplest best: through simple diction, sonorous rhyme, and sweet healing voice addressed to a friend, he instructs to find communion with nature. William Wordsworth prescribes nature to restore and maintain our health. Mark the following lines of the melody of the poem "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" serenading the senses of the readers:

The beauty of morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky:
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air,
Never did sun more beautifully steep,
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill:
Never saw I, never I felt, a calm so deep (Introduction to Poetry, 163).

William Wordsworth finds healing power in nature throughout the *Lyrical Ballads*. In the treatise, he finds an equivalence relation with natural healing and poetic healing. He transfers his healing thoughts to sister Dorothy. He seems to advise his sister Dorothy to use nature and memories associated with it to keep pain, angst, despair and grief at bay.

Dorothy finds a remedy in steady bonding with nature for every malady of the world. Wordsworth gives medical attributes to poetry rather than nature. He exhorts her to derive a healing elixir from the romantic poetry of his brother. He wants her sister to honor his advice, and depend on her own feelings and memories of natural landscapes to heal herself. Mark the following lines from the poem *Tintern Abbey*:

Let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee: and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be mansion for all lovely forms,

Thy memory be as a dwelling place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts (Introduction to Poetry, 161)

William Wordsworth, a harbinger of nature, propounded that landscapes have miraculous healing power on humans' minds, bodies, and souls. Finding a relation between men and nature, he depicts a pictorial and panoramic view of serene and scintillating landscapes in his nature poems like "Tintern Abbey", "Immortality Ode", "Prelude" and "Michael" etc. Wordsworth paints a serene and sound landscape in the poem "Immortality Ode" that electrifies and spellbinds the humans trouncing their full fury of minds.

The poet balm and soothes the senses by beautiful descriptions of rainbow, moon, sunshine, stardust, sunlight, waterfalls, rocks, mountains etc., healing the wounded minds of the people. In the poem "Michael", the poet gives a very vivid, vivacious and vibrant description of Michael's abode in a valley studded with lush green trees, stones, mountains, and small rivers calming the mind and yielding romantic medicine, tilting to put agony and anguish behind and to be absorbed in the paradise of nature. Michael, a Shepherd, has suffered a lot of nature's fury. The patients suffering from the brunt of losses finds affinity with Michael's fate. It produces a cathartic effect on the minds of poetry readers and listeners, thereby healing their emotional injuries.

Wordsworth poetry offers joy, happiness, tranquillity, peace and healing power. "The Solitary Reaper" is one of the charming pieces of verse, enthuse the readers with aesthetic delight keeping anguish at bay. The poet was awed by the carefree, buoyant and jubilant disposition of a young girl who was so much in harmony with her work as a reaper. In the beautiful hills of Scotland, the girl was singing a song with exquisite melodious tone cutting and binding sheaves of corn.

The poem entralls us by the scenic beauty of the hills and lulling melody. The metaphors 'nightingale' and 'cuckoo bird' takes the readers into breeze of imagination trouncing all earthly psychological trauma. The lass's voice was melancholy, but her harmony with nature was eclipsing it and healing her hurts. Mark the scintillating lines of the poem:

No nightingale did ever chant
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling never was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,

Breaking the silence of the seas. (Introduction to Poetry, 171)

He is a poet of optimism and finds a silver lining even in clouds of despair. He utters with the spirit of peace, joy, and happiness. Another luminous metrical composition is “She was a Phantom of delight” where Wordsworth idealizes the beauty of a woman as well as of nature. The poem shows his advocacy of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The poem gives space to personal freedom requisite for emotional and spiritual growth, intellectual spirit, and to develop harmony with nature. Wordsworth employs diction reflecting emotional urges. The poem is addressed to his wife, whose sight is so much healing and harmonious. The spirit that activates and animates all weal and woes of his spouse shows her conscious harmony with marital piety. The metaphors ‘ornament’ and ‘twilight’ provide quietening and healing effects on readers’ minds. Mark the exquisite charming, and soothing lines of the poem:

She was a Phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight
A lovely Apparition, sent
To be moments’ ornament;
Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair;
Like Twilight’s, too, her dusky hair;
But all things else about her drawn
Form May-time and the cheerful Dawn:
a dancing Shape, an Image gay,
To haunt, to startle, and way-lay (Introduction to Poetry, 169).

Wordsworth’s romantic poetry has implicit implications, whereas the effect of the medicine is explicit. Lyrical Ballads establish that poetry gives relief to the minds of the readers. At his age, medicine was synonymous with pain alleviation or suppressor. Wordsworth’s poetry fulfills one of his age’s unrecognized medical objectives and goals. Notwithstanding, analgesics are very effective in diminishing pain, but they have side effects too.

His poetry extends relief to the pains of the sufferers sans any side effects. Wordsworth passes on to the readers the idea of a reverie that he ensconces in the poem Tintern Abbey concurring Erasmus Darwin’s medical theory that poetry can sustain relief. Poetry can redeem humanity’s sickness. Wordsworth’s living soul as reverie resembles to Darwin’s theory. The poet studied Darwin’s theory to propound a panacea for mental health.

The Medical practitioners of his time Goody Blake and Harry Gill opine that muscular exertion can alleviate pain. The device also works in mental sickness and can subside pain, concurs with physicians like Francis Fuller. The same remedy for mental maladies is found in Darwin’s Zoonomia. Darwin

validates Wordsworth's notion that reverie can relieve pain Wordsworth picks and molds aspects of Darwin's theory to suit his purpose. Mark the following lines from *Zoonomia*:

When we are employed with great sensation of pleasure, or with great efforts of volition, in the pursuit of some interesting train of ideas, we cease to be conscious of our existence, are inattentive to time and place, and do not distinguish this train of sensitive and voluntary ideas from the irritative ones excited by the presence of external objects, throughout organs of sense are furnished with their accustomed stimuli, till at length this interesting train of ideas becomes exhausted, or the applauses of external objects are applied with unusual violence, and we return with surprise, or with regret into the common track of life. This termed reverie or stadium (*Zoonomia*, 161).

Throughout the cross-section of *Lyrical Ballads*, we observe Wordsworth exploring aesthetic as well as medical applications of poetry. Wordsworth targets readers' pain straightway through his poetic prescriptions. Some poems externalize nature's holistic cure and adjure other medical poetic remedies simultaneously. *Lyrical Ballads* also foster a feeling that poetry can diminish the pain of the world. He prescribes the poetry relief through the poems like "Ode on Intimations" and establishes the fact that relief is the most profound and humanistic genre of art therapy offering therapeutic uses. Wordsworth emphasises fortifying passion for poetry for relief, no matter, the course may be painful or full of joy. Soothing thoughts can make spring back in minds and enlighten human predicament.

He and other physicians of the time averred that cures were only palliative parameters unless other ailment strikes. He lost two of his children and himself experienced bouts of illness knew it well. He wrote in a letter to his poet friend, "Considering the slender knowledge which circumstances have yet me of the characteristics of your malady. But this I can confidently say that poetry and the poetic spirit will either help you, or harm you, as you use them." (Letters 2, 168)

John Keats highly appreciates Wordsworth's poetry and sees a great potential underlying to heal aching hearts. Wordsworth's poetry is soaked in his life's large experiences that pour out in his metrical utterances. His lyrics have the music of the lyre that soothe the hurts of the human hearts. When the readers go through his melodious poetry, they get spellbound by the exquisite charm of it, and thus sublimate the smoke of worries and woes. John Keats elaborates the healing and holy power of Wordsworth's poetry to his friend Reynolds in his letter to him, and thus opens the vista for the readers to know about wealth and worth of his poetry. Mark his lines of the letter:

Sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man- of convincing one's nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression... (he goes on to compare investigating these miseries to exploring "dark passages")...to this point was Wordsworth come ...and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages. Now if live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore...here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton (Letters: 125)

William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge, two pioneers of Romantic Movement in English poetry shared a healthy relationship lying between a physician and his patient. Wordsworth closely observed Coleridge's mental state when both stayed together at former's house. Coleridge always referred Wordsworth as his mentor and wished to have his poetry books by his bedside as they worked as pharmacopeia for him. The ethereal quality of his poetry soothed his ailing mind. Coleridge's mind and body was obsessed with his poetry. Wordsworth's poetry boarded him on plane flying high in the sky, giving balm to his wounded soul. His poetry uplifted his imagination.

Coleridge always paid reverence to Wordsworth by calling him fondly as a friend, guide and physician. Wordsworth suggested to his friend that man can build the strength of mind and lies within. Wordsworth forbids his friend not to rely on medicines' high doses as it will aggravate his sickness. Wordsworth in his letter to Coleridge written in May, 1809, elevates his morale and advises him not to be dependent on the medicine. He wants to say in the letter that poetry can heal his dilemma. He enthuses verve in his friend's mind, imagination can spring him from ashes of doldrums, and poetry can exert a healing effect on body, mind and soul.

William Wordsworth is a great healer. He serves as a physician cum therapist for luminaries. The poet balm the hurts of the minds of his readers. His lyrics directly address the body and mind of the readers. The conscious and unconscious mind operates through images; the images occur in dreams. The mind reacts and responds to the message of images and reflects on our psychological state, venting our inner lava of emotions. Images activate our minds with sweet sensations giving a thrust to unconscious feelings to conscious or subconscious.

Thus, therapy helps sufferers become conscious of unconscious feelings, relieving the pain and strain. So, images of his romantic poetry purify emotions to give flow to hampered feelings and consequently extend healing relief. William Hazlitt is highly appreciative of him as a poet of soothing thoughts:

He delivers household truths. He sees nothing loftier than human hopes, nothing deeper than the human heart. This he probes, this he tampers with, this he poises with all his incalculable weight of thought and feeling in his hands, at the same time calms the throbbing pulses of his own heart y keeping his eye ever fixed on the face of nature (149)

J.S. Mill visited Wordsworth in 1831 to find a remedy to his mental crisis. Wordsworth's poetry imparted a medicine for his state of mind: it procured states of feeling pirouetted in the oomph of beauty. His poetry gave a panacea to the feelings that he was searching for. He found perennial joy and ecstasy in tranquil thoughts and feelings. Wordsworth gave Mill a landscape where imaginative joy is to replenish his mental loss. Like romantic physicians, who found their medical knowledge and skills inadequate to cure completely the mental dilemmas.

William Wordsworth propounded an alternative method of poetic therapy to be adopted as a palliative tool to heal the mental sickness. William Wordsworth's poetry evokes healing and restorative vibes. The tranquillity of mind can bring back the lost enchantment of spring. Thus, we can conclude that Wordsworth's poetry is the best remedy to the maladies of depressed mind, his sonorous lyrics fluttering like waves of the ocean serenading senses, images soothing minds, and landscapes enticing to absorb in its serenity and get eternal bliss. We can sign off with the tranquil tribute of Mathew Arnold to Wordsworth in the following words:

Spirits dried up and closely furled,
The freshness of the early world...
Time may restore us in his course
Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force;
But where will Europe's latter hour
Again Wordsworth's healing power?
Others will teach us how to dare,
And against fear our breast to steel;
Others will strengthen us to bear (Memorial Verses, 63).

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