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1. Introduction

It is a serious despair for a poet that he cannot write poems any more, which happened in Coleridge in his early thirties. It happened in the early nineteenth century, when European nations were drawn into the vortex of the confusion and struggle swirled by the Napoleon war.

Why did Coleridge lost his poetic genius? This is a question which has been discussed over many years by many critics. In most of their opinions, they have emphasized Coleridge's enthusiasm for German philosophy which led him to the speculation on his idealism at the sacrifice of his poetic imagination. It is true in some degree that his poetic energy rapidly decreased from 1799, when he came back to Britain from Germany, but this opinion seems to me rather short-sighted.

During the period from July 1797 to July 1798, what we call, "annus mirabilis," he made many excellent poems including 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', 'Kubla Khan', and the first part of 'Christabel'. Therefore, his "annus mirabilis" was the most brilliant year for him as a poet. Differences of his poetic activities between before and after this period are very great.

The prevailing theory, concerning the reason why Coleridge could not make profound poems any more, involves real mistakes of not observing psychological aspects of his mind. In his poem 'Dejection: an Ode', Coleridge himself deplored the disappearance of his Muse,

but it does not mean that Coleridge could not make his poems because of his mental dejection at that time. It is clearly understood that the poem itself is very excellent and never inferior to his other poems of his "annus mirabilis."

If we admit that his enthusiasm for metaphysics led him to a poor poet, we can find a contradiction in his assertion that a great poet should be a great philosopher at the same time. Therefore, it seems to be rather reverse. He was gradually absorbed in philosophy because he felt that he could make no excellent poem. He believed that the Muse left him, and this belief itself became a cause of his separation from his poetic genius. It is a crucial point of this problem that he admitted himself to have strayed out from his own framework of the poetic genius which he constructed in his mind. If we think like this, we will reach a reasonable conclusion of this long disputed problem.

2. Poetic circumstances of "annus mirabilis"

To inquire into the reason why Coleridge became unable to make excellent poems, we begin with, to the contrary, the analysis of the reason why Coleridge could write many splendid poems in his "annus mirabilis." Then, we can easily understand the former reason by comparing with the latter. To the beginning, therefore, we will investigate the cause of Coleridge's great energetic activities of poetic creation.

To make poems, a poet needs his poetic circumstances and his energy. The poetic circumstances mean his outside factors including stable everyday life, good human relation, and calm and beautiful nature around him, etc., and the energy means a inner factor, that is, the creative volition of the poet himself. Under the worst condition of a noisy, disturbed outer world, discord within a family, or troublesome human relations, he cannot focus his mind on his poetic activities. Calm and good conditions must be required for a poet, if he would

deeply concentrate on a mental activity of poetry making. We can notice that the atmosphere around Coleridge in his "annus mirabilis" is thought to be an ideal one.

The environment, which is a poet's arena of his activities, from which he obtains many poetic materials, is deeply concerned with his inner power of poetic volition. Generally speaking, if a poet has an excellent environment, his poetic power will increase, and vice versa. Coleridge's inner and outer states before and after "annus mirabilis" are totally different.

On the last day of 1796, Coleridge came to and lived in Nether Stowey with the help of Thomas Poole. There he lived with his wife Sara and his son Hartley who was only three and half months old at that time. His friend Thomas, who lived in his neighbourhood, kindly took care of Coleridge and his family. In July 1797, William and Dorothy Wordsworth paid a visit to Coleridge at Nether Stowey, and they came to like this mountainside very much. They decided to live there and rented a house for a year at Alfoxton near Stowey. Wordsworth thought that a poet should live in a countryside if he would make good poems, and never thought to live in a city. Alfoxton at the foot of Quantock Hills reminded him of his native place. As Dorothy describes in her Journals, there are blue sea, pretty streams, hidden waterfalls, and romantic views from hills, that is, there are all the beauties of nature in this area. Dorothy loved this place very much. She called this area Alfoxden not Alfoxton.

Thus in Nether Stowey, Coleridge had the most ideal conditions to make his poetical works. He had then a stable home, good friends, and beautiful nature around him, and all these brought him a mental stability.

There was no mental crevice between Coleridge and his wife Sara at that time. The affection, having showed in his 'The Eolian Harp', still continued partly supported by his baby, Hartley. Coleridge's tender thought on his baby was strongly expressed in his 'Frost at

Midnight' or 'Nightingale'. Coleridge lost his father at the age of nine, and left his native town for London apart from his family. After he spent his boyhood as a Christ's Hospital pupil, he became a student of Jesus College, Cambridge, and stayed there for about two years. He wandered here and there for a few years. Therefore, he had longed for a warm home, and at last he could have his own long-hankered home in Clevedon in October 1795, and then moved to Nether Stowey. He wished to keep this happy and warm home as long as possible.

So far as friends are concerned, he was much blessed in this period. Coleridge consulted Poole, for Poole knew well about Nether Stowey and was very kind to him, Poole gave Coleridge some advices to live in Nether Stowey. William Wordsworth together with his sister Dorothy had a good friendship with Coleridge, and the two poets much stimulated each other, with a help of Dorothy. She was a very influential person for both poets, who tried to understand the essence of nature supported by her detailed observations.

In 'Lime tree Bower my Prison' which was written when Charles Lamb visited Nether Stowey, Coleridge's friendships for them are clearly expressed.

The nature of Nether Stowey is very beautiful as described in Dorothy's *Journal*. A walk though woods at the foot of the Quantock Hills is pleasant for them, and this walk was very effective for them to enhance their poetic emotions.

In these conditions, Coleridge's mind was stable, calm, and activated. Thus, all necessary conditions for his creative activities as a poet are mostly satisfied in those days. In addition to these conditions, Coleridge received a annuity of one hundred and fifty pounds from Thomas Wedgwood, and his financial aspect was greatly supported by this.

It is easy to imagine that Coleridge's poetical activities became more vigorous among these circumstances. Especially, Coleridge received a most expecting poetical stimulus from intelligent Words-

worth. Thus he made many excellent poems in this period.

If these stable conditions are broken, there will surely be a great obstacle to make poems. After he returned from Germany, this unstable state happened. Wordsworth left Alfoxton and lived in Grasmere, and Coleridge could not talk to him so easily as before. Moreover, in those days, he had some quarrel with his wife because of their different thoughts. At the same time, Coleridge came to be in contact with Sara Hutchinson, and he suffered from a gap between love and his moral conscience. At last he left Nether Stowey and wandered, and he sometimes suffered from diseases.

The radical change of Coleridge's outer circumstances made him decrease his poetic power and poetic volition as a natural result. Instead of being calm and stable, he now struggled with himself in agony and restlessness. He could no more compete with Wordsworth for making poems in a good sense, and he was totally absorbed in this change. Where there is no poetic emotion, there is no poetic creation. Warm home, good friends, and beautiful nature are three important factors for Coleridge to make poems in his best condition, and now he lost all of these three and strayed as a wanderer. If he had obtained these factors again, he could have made new excellent poems.

3. Coleridge's view of poet

Coleridge had his own view of poet. According to his opinion, "what is poetry?" is the same question as "what is a poet?" and the former is included in the latter, for they both originate from poetic genius himself, and he draws images, thoughts, and feelings out of his mind and modifies them.¹ He proposes the concept of Imagination as a harmonizing and magical synthetic power.

What Coleridge intends to state here is that the poetry is created only by a poetic genius. Just like true music is made by a musical genius and an excellent picture is made by a pictorial genius, poetry is

made by a poetic genius who can arrange words to the highest degree. In other words, a genius makes art and art is developed by a genius. Coleridge stresses an art-genius theory, and he establishes the idea of poetic genius. When a poetic genius makes poetry, he needs Imagination as a creative power. Coleridge describes thus in his *Biographia Literaria*:

But the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination; and this together with the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect, and modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling, may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learned. It is in these that "poeta nascitur non fit."²

From these facts, it is clear that Coleridge thought that a poetic genius can only create true poems by using a heavenly gifted power of Imagination. Therefore, a poet who was not gifted cannot create true poems and cannot be recognised as a true poet. When a poet, who believed himself to have Imagination, suddenly feels himself lost a power of Imagination, he can no more think himself to be a genuine poet, and perhaps cannot write any good poem. This is truly a trap or a pitfall designed by himself.

A poet idealised by Coleridge requires a power beyond human ability, and this power is defined by him as Imagination. It cooperates with intuition when it concerns recognition. Imagination is a power of synthesis but it has multiple abilities, and among them, there is a recognising faculty. It is called transcendental philosophy that intuition acts as the first principle of recognition. Therefore, a true poet should have such a philosophical power. Coleridge refers to the relationship between poetry and philosophy like this:

No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time

a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and the fragrance of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language.³

Coleridge describes here that a poet should have a philosophical power of Imagination as the necessary condition of a poet because he must use intuition together with Imagination to recognise an object in a true sense not as a mere phenomenon. A true poet should recognise the object *a priori* by intuition. By his recognising faculty, he insight into the metaphysical world, which is different from everyday world perceived by the five senses.

Coleridge mentions about the true poet:

I say then, that it is neither possible or necessary for all men, or for many, to be PHILOSOPHERS. There is a *philosophic* (and inasmuch as it is actualized by an effort of freedom, an *artificial*) *consciousness*, which lies beneath or (as it were) *behind* the spontaneous consciousness natural to all reflecting beings.⁴

It is transcendental philosophy to treat the consciousness behind the usual human consciousness, and a recognising faculty concerning it is called intuition. Coleridge explains the power of Imagination and the faculty of intuition as follows:

The first range of hills, that encircles the scanty vale of human life, is the horizon for majority of its inhabitants. On *its* ridges the common sun is born and departs. From *them* the stars rise, and touching *them* they vanish. By the many, even this range, the natural limit and bulwark of the vale, is but imperfectly known. Its higher ascents are too often hidden by mists and clouds from uncultivated swamps, which few have courage or curiosity to penetrate.⁵

To the common people, such a transcendental world exceeding our ordinary consciousness cannot be accessible, for it seems beautiful but horrible so that they never think to enter in it. But a few persons, whom we call metaphysicians, can only understand such a world.

But in all ages there have been a few, who measuring and sounding the rivers of the vale at the feet of their furthest inaccessible falls have learned, that the sources must be far higher and far inward; a few, who even in the level streams have detected elements, which neither the vale itself or the surrounding mountains contained or could supply.⁶

Thus Coleridge describes that only a few geniuses can recognise the object *a priori* by intuition, that is, a true poet should be a true philosopher who is able to have intuitive knowledge. According to his theory, the true philosopher must have the conditions of the true poet. A necessary and sufficient condition of a great poet is to have true intuitive knowledge.

This intuitive knowledge arises in a poet's mind but its procedure is very difficult to understand for an ordinary man. Coleridge mentions this process of acquiring intuitive knowledge in the chapter twelve of *Biographia Literaria* after referring to Plotinus:

Likewise in the fifth book of the fifth *Ennead*, speaking of the highest and intuitive knowledge as distinguished from the discursive, or in the language of Wordsworth,

“The vision and the faculty divine;”

he says: “it is not lawful to enquire from whence it sprang, as if it were a thing subject to place and motion, for it neither approached hither, nor again departs from hence to some other place; but it either appears to us or it does not appear. So that we ought not to pursue it with a view of detecting its secret source, but to watch in

quiet till it suddenly shines upon us; preparing ourselves for the blessed spectacle as the eye waits patiently for the rising sun.”⁷

If an intuitive knowledge comes to a poet, he will be able to have true recognition, and will create excellent poems.

Thus Coleridge defines the true poet, and confines the poet in a framework of poetic genius. When Coleridge still stayed in the framework of poetic genius which was constructed by himself, he could make poetry as a poetic genius. But once he felt himself stepped out from this definition, he could no more make poetry, and thought himself not to be a true poet. In other words, a man, who has such a concept of the framework and feels himself that no intuitive knowledge comes to him, might think that he is no more a true poet. In the case of Coleridge, the situation was just the same with this.

In 1802, he expressed his sentiment in the ‘Dejection: An Ode’ like this:

My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
It were a vain endeavour.
Though I should gaze for ever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.⁸

Here we can notice Coleridge’s lament on the loss of his Imagination. Here is a suffering figure of Coleridge himself as a poet. But when we think of the effect of disrupted poetic circumstances of his mind, it may be true to some degree that his poetic volition had slightly withered. But it is more likely that he stuck to his obstinate thought that he had no Muse any more. When Coleridge thought himself that

no Muse came to him, his situation changed radically, and he really had no "inner sense" and no intuition. Thus, when Coleridge thought that his intuitive faculty decreased, he destroyed his poetic nature by himself at the same time, since he had placed himself in his own framework of poetic genius.

4. Conclusion

Perhaps Coleridge defined his poetic genius taking Wordsworth into account. According to Coleridge's words, as he read Wordsworth's poems for the first time, he recognised that a great poet was rising from literary horizon.⁹ Therefore, Coleridge might keep Wordsworth in his mind, as an object of his consciousness. Coleridge judged Wordsworth to be a great poet from the same point of view, that is, the same criteria of himself, that a great poet should be a great philosopher.

The relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge is very similar to the relationship between Goethe and Schiller. Schiller thought that there are two types of poets, a naive poet and an emotional poet, and he defined Homer and Shakespeare as the naive poets who coincide with nature itself, while the emotional poets seek nature and make poetry depending on their direct experiences. Schiller took Goethe into account as a naive poet and he tried to justify his position as a poet by establishing a new idea of emotional poet. Nietzsche also thought Goethe as an Apollo type and himself as a Dionysos type, and he could establish himself as a Dionysos type philosopher. As the result, Schiller never lost his poetic mind, and Nietzsche never lost sight of his own existence. For both men had their own safety positions.

On the other hand, Coleridge thought himself as the same category as Wordsworth in spite of their differences of types. Coleridge and Wordsworth are totally different in their characters and styles, but

Coleridge pushed himself into the same framework of the poetic genius designed by himself.

Therefore, when Coleridge felt himself that he had no poetical Imagination and intuitive insight, he soon decided himself to be no more a true poet, and could not write excellent poems any more.

This is just the reason why Coleridge could not really write his own profound poems.

Notes

- 1 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), II, 12.
- 2 *Ibid.*, II, 14.
- 3 *Ibid.*, II, 19.
- 4 *Ibid.*, I, 164.
- 5 *Ibid.*, I, 164–165.
- 6 *Ibid.*, I, 166.
- 7 *Ibid.*, I, 166–167.
- 8 *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1912), I, 365.
- 9 *Biographia Literaria*, I, 56.