

Interpreting universals in select European Poems in English Translation

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt at a thematic analysis of some less popular poems by Victor Hugo, Paul Celan, and Alexander Pushkin. Although these poems spread across spatio-temporal distance in their creative origin, they appear to address human issues of universal nature. The need to look at Victor Hugo's glorification of rustic simplicity, Paul Celan's celebration of futile human glory, and Pushkin's concern for often overlooked human frailties and feelings through his use of everyday images and symbols raising the paradox of excitement and control has often been overshadowed by concerns inspired by postmodern socio-cultural theories. Considering the need for the search for human cognitive universals, instead of the forced disconnects and artificial boundaries in thought, it is worthwhile to look at these poems from what they speak about at the first glance.

Key Words: Symbolism, Image, European Poetry, Translation, Cognitive poetics

Images and Symbols in Alexander Pushkin's "Farewell"

Alexander Pushkin's poetry during the later part of his poetic career was characterized by restrained power and controlled expressiveness. Images and symbols were used with absolute brevity and the source of intensity of effect casts upon the reader by these images and symbols is the abruptness emanating from that brevity. This effect is particular observed in the shorter poems composed in the last decade of his life. The best poems by Alexander Pushkin, one of the greatest of all the Russian poets, were composed in the later part of his life. The most creative period of his life, between 1820 and 1820, was characterized by a sparkling romantic ebullience predominantly lyrical in form. In real life too, he had difficulties with the authorities for his liberal views exemplifying his fascination with

romantic ideals in this period. After this period, he turned his attention to prose, and his poetic spirit too became more restrained. If the earlier trend in his poetry created the first chapter of the Evgeny Onegin in 1823, then the later trend gave birth to his poetical masterpieces crafted in concentrated expressiveness. He was able to create the idiom of the modern Russian poetry by integrating Slavonic, European borrowings, and the colloquial vernacular.

Pushkin's poetic creed

Although he is often regarded as the central representative poet of Russian romanticism, there is no consensus on this score among the critics of Russian poetry. Critics have traditionally shown reservation in labeling his poetry as romantic in nature unequivocally. There is more agreement on the argument among the critics that his

poetry took a path from neo-classicism through romanticism to realism. So, they are more inclined to suggest that Pushkin had a poetic temperament that could accommodate oppositional trends. Although his poetry may appear romantic in origin, it subverts all monolithic critical perspectives. His poetry has been considered a mix of romantic and non-romantic poetic ideals.

The romantic restraint

The poet expresses the pain of separation in the poem "Farewell" with a deep-seated solemn understanding of it as an incorrigible part of life. The potential excess of emotion motivated by the pang of departure and dissatisfaction is curbed by the power of restraint. The images and symbols used in the poem do not run along in abundance creating an exhibition of the magnitude of the suffering undergone by the poet. They are rather selected and placed judiciously to drive home the fact of indispensable destiny to which everybody must surrender.

Memory as a storehouse of images

The poet begins by saying that the memory of his friend will be recreated in his mind for one last time. The picture of his friend has been in his mind for quite a long time now. Seeing the inevitability of the separation that is going to take him away from his friend forever, he has decided to surrender to his fate. So, the poet declares all of a sudden- "It's the last time, when I dare/ To cradle your image in my mind". His friend has been the source of his life before the separation. Since his friend deserted him, life has been hard for the poet. The image of his friend has been the source of the pain of loss for the poet. What he has been doing

subsequent to the desertion of his friend is to keep his mind away from the thought surrounding him. He ran away from the memory of his friend as a way to prevent his heart from suffering too much pain for too long.

Image of his friend as a source of pain

But he has mustered courage to remember his friend for the last time, despite the pain that it may inflict in him. The image of his friend has been quietly sleeping in the dark corners of his mind till then. Stating the fact that he has decided to go by the memory lane, the poet says- "To wake a dream by my heart, bare,/With exultation, shy and air,/ To cue your love that's left behind." The memory of his friend is raised again in the mind of the poet. This memory has the power to revive momentarily the past happiness of the poet too. Despite the desertion of his friend, he still has a soft corner for his friend. His memory still fills him with joy. The poet is hesitant in his recollection of his friend too. He stealthily remembers his friend to check how much love he still feels. He knows that the memory of his friend will definitely revive some part of the love that he felt before the separation. In spite of the spatial distance between him and his friend, his love for his friend has been continuously present in his heart.

Image of time as all powerful

The poet realizes the fact that the love that existed between him and his friend must have lost its intensity over the course of the years after the separation. The pain of separation must also have lost much of its bitterness over the years, since- "The years

run promptly; their fire/ Changes the world, and me, and you". Life moves on and with the passage of time human beings also find different ways to overcome their grief. In spite of the pangs of disappointments and worries that make life a challenge at times, it does not remain static. As good fortune does not remain forever, times of difficulty too do not remain at one place. Change is the rule of life, and everything follows this one final rule. The tide of change touches the poet, his friend and the world around them. Time is a fire that burns everything and nothing can escape its impact. Time may erase the memory of everything from everybody. His friend must have lost most of the memories of past events shared with the poet as for him—"...you now are attired/ In dark of vaults over them who died, /For you—your friend extinguished too." As the memory of his friend is dying, the memory of the poet must also have lost its vigour in the mind of his friend over the years. The mad enthusiasm and passion of love that united the poet with his friend once upon a time is non-existent in the present time. Time has burnt the intensity of the bond between the poet and his friend. Such is the power of time that it has turned the grief-stricken poet of the past into a conscientious philosopher of the present. The poet is capable of ruminating on the memory of his failed relationship with his friend almost indifferently.

Images of a prison and a widow

Since time has given him the power to overcome the pain of separation, the poet can take the final farewell from his friend. He is able to do it despite the sadness that the thought of it brings in. He bids adieu to

his friend saying—"My dear friend, so sweet and distant,/take farewell from all my heart". He still reserves fondness for his friend, but he has overpowered the sickening bend of passionate anguish. He can calmly say goodbye to the memory of his friend. The farewell to his friend does not let off a morsel of regret and hidden anger. He sounds grateful to his friend for the good things of life that they must have shared together. His friend had been compassionate towards him and the distance separates them. He takes this opportunity to show his gratitude. Taking leave, he philosophizes on the issue of the farewell. He expects that his friend will take the farewell "As takes a widow in a somber instant,/As takes a friend before a prison/Will split those dear friends apart." The situation of the separation is unavoidable. The widow cannot resurrect her dead husband; the verdict of the court has imprisoned the accused, so they must accept the fate of their life as it comes. Wailing and moaning will not change the fate of the victims. With a heavy heart caused by the pang of the departure of the dear one, they must resolve to live without each other.

The poet attempts at putting an end to the suffering that he has been feeling after the separation from his friend. He takes heart from the fact that they must realize the fact that the separation between them is inevitable. They must learn accept their incorrigible situation of life as it is. This attitude towards the unfortunate events of life will strengthen them. They will be able to live their life in a much better way. So, the poet urges his friend who has departed to a distant land, if his friend is lamenting the

separation, to take it as an inescapable circumstance of life. Through this farewell words to his friend, the poet is providing consolation to his own anguish and pain of loss.

The Paradox of Exuberant Sobriety in Alexander Pushkin's poetry

Existing between the excess of the creative genius that was necessarily romantic in spirit and the controlled mastery of the neoclassical artist, Alexander Pushkin's poetry was a happy amalgamation of the beauty of both the traditions. The oxymoron of romantic control puts Alexander Pushkin's poetry in a box of conflicting trends as to read his poetry is to swing in paradox. Repression and freedom, excitement and reserve- the opposites situate both stylistically and thematically.

It should not be an overstatement to say that Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) was the greatest of all Russian poets. Killed in a duel in 1837, the most creative part of his life was the period between 1820 and 1830. It was in this period that he composed his masterpiece Evgeny Onegin (1823). This work was the best representative example of the sparkling ebullience of his poetic creed in the early part of his poetic career. His poetry received a restrained power and concentrated expressiveness in the last seven years of his life. Striking a synthesis between the Church Slavonic, Western loan words, and the vernacular, Pushkin managed to establish the Russian literary idiom in the language of modern Russian poetry.

Pushkin's poetry

Always in conflict with the authorities for his liberal views, Pushkin has been seen as a

representative poet of the Russian romanticism. But, this label of romanticism needs to be used carefully in relation to Pushkin's poetry. The most tradition argument taken by most Russian critics in this context is that Pushkin's poetry takes a path representing the course of his life from neo-classicism through romanticism to realism. Considering the multiple points of entry with regard to Pushkin's poetry, it should be rather stated that he had a creative genius that absorb contrarities. His poetry may seem romantic in origin, but it is subversive of all fixed interpretations. It is often stated that he situates in the paradox of definition as he may both be defined as romantic and non-romantic. In "The Cart of Life", the speaker expresses the mundane mobility of the process of life in the image of a carriage bound on a voyage. The expression of this mobility too is a paradox as it is done both with romantic excitement and realist indifference.

Morning as youth

The poet understands the fact that the journey of life is rather difficult. The challenges that life throws at people and the hardships that people need to undergo in order to overcome these challenges create all kinds of disappointments. It is a responsibility that asks for continuous labour. The load is too heavy for an easy lift and many lose their way trying to lift it, and many are broken down by the sheer weight of it. So, the poet accepts the harsh reality of life as a hazardous journey right in the beginning of the poem itself. But the poet says-"Tho' it is hard- the earthly load, /The Cart is easy in its move". Underneath this unpredictable rugged surface of life lies the

constant routine that bends for nobody. No matter who the passenger is, the cart of life moves along following its own schedule. It neither waits nor listens to anybody. It follows its own course and everybody must obey its call of routine. In terms of this constant adherence to the course and stoppage of the journey, the cart of life is unsophisticated. The outline of this journey is easy to frame and simple to understand. The coach driver of the carriage of life has a fixed schedule and he does not change that schedule for anybody as “The reckless coach—time, on road,/Will not get off his bench above.” He takes the passengers of the carriage along a familiar path. The same journey is repeated over and over again and yet the coach driver never changes the course and schedule of the journey.

Afternoon as experience

The journey starts every day in the morning. The passengers take their seats feeling elated that the journey will offer them colourful experience. Very enthusiastically the journey starts—“In early morn we take our places;/We glad to break our empty heads,/And leaving leisure for the races,/We cry, “Go on, you idler, damned!” The exciting promises of the journey augur the passengers to embark on it as soon as possible. They consider the journey a break from the mundane business of life. It is a recreation taken by them for rejuvenation to meet the challenges of life afresh. In a similar way, the journey of life too starts with lots of gusto and promises. In youth, people are optimistic and positive about everything in life. The whole world appears a rainbow then. The promise of a colourful world full of enjoyment and entertainment

makes the youth hopeful about a beautiful future. The exuberance of youth makes them courageous and desirous of the unknown. Living in the world of dreams, people in their youth, imagine a future of satisfaction and success. Life is one long spring for them and smile and laughter hardly leave their faces. So, they are not afraid of undertaking adventurous journeys.

Noon as frustration and experience

But the journey takes a different shape in the noon. The enthusiasm of the morning decreases by the afternoon. The sharp twists and turns of the roads and the narrow passages through which the cart has to move diminish the charm of the journey. So, the poet says—“At noon, our bravery’s diminished;/We have been tossed and more afraid/Of slopes, steep, and ravines, peevish, /And cry, “Be easier, you, brat!”” The hazards of the journey mellow down the excitement for the journey felt in the morning. The passengers in the cart realize that the journey is actually not as exciting as they thought about it in the first place. Instead of the comfort and romance that they expected from the journey in the morning, they experience a tiresome struggle through serpentine bumpy roads full of dangers at each turn. The passengers now realize that it is not the enthusiasm and fantasies of the morning which will help them in the journey. So, they become more and more careful and suspicious of the part of the journey that lies ahead of them. In life too, as people come of age, the mad enthusiasm and passionate spirit of the youth get subdued. People at this age have seen enough of life to realize the fact that it is anything but one long spring. The

heartbreaks and worries of life that they had to face everyday make them understand that the journey is a difficult one. They come to realize that the bravery and courage they exhibited in their youth do not always help. The hardships and the cruel exposure of their weaknesses in the event of those hardships make them apprehensive of the future. Prudence replaces passion and becomes the sole guiding principle of their life. Whatever illusion they had about themselves in the beginning slowly disappears from their mind. They begin to face themselves as they are.

Indifferent Time

But the cart of life rolls on. It continues its journey in the same way that it began in the morning-“The cart rolls in the former fashion,/By evening, we have used to it”. The passengers of the cart are habituated with the hardship of the journey by the time the evening approaches. The day-long suffering of the journey makes the passengers sober and wiser. The excessive enthusiasm of the morning and the acute frustration of the afternoon get smothered in the evening. A calmness of temper settles on the minds of the passengers. The passengers-“Wait for night lodgings, doze, patient,-/And Time tends horses to full speed.” The passengers are too tired to complain by now. What they look for after the long journey is a place to retire. The cart gathers full speed taking the passengers to their destination. The cart receives a universal significance with the personification of time placed in the driver’s seat. The cart is the embodiment of life that takes the passengers to their destination as life takes human beings to their inevitable

destiny of death. Till the end of their life, people travel on the cart of life. The progress of life from the youth to the old age is one long journey. The poet uses the metaphor of the cart to describe the nature of this progress.

At the end of the poem, the poet leaves a sense of routine and pre-determined destiny with reference human life. No matter what path you take, the poet seems to say, the general course of the journey of life will take the same beaten track leaving very little scope for innovation and novelty. This sense of the inevitable doom is cast on the reader with surprising abruptness and brevity by the poet.

Greek Myth in Paul Celan’s “The Triumph of Achilles”

Expressing the pain of loss born out of the moment of victory, Paul Celan in “The Triumph of Achilles” gives an account of the legendary friendship between Achilles and Patroclus. Foregrounding this relationship in the context of the Trojan War, the poet proclaims that material victory is not true victory and no war, howsoever great can, has ended in victory in the true sense of the term. It is only a victory on the surface and the agony of the frustrated souls runs along at the subterranean level. Greatest of the achievements during a war can be overshadowed by an equal amount of anguish caused by an important loss.

German poet Paul Celan’s “The Triumph of Achilles”, is a description of the pain of loss suffered by Achilles for the death of Patroclus in the Trojan War despite the victory of the Greeks over the Trojans. In Homer’s Iliad, Patroclus was the beloved

comrade and brother-in-arms of Achilles. He was also the son of Menoetius and Philomela, Menoetius' third wife. As per the epic, the Trojans threatened the Greek ships when there was being fought at Achaeans. Patroclus persuaded Achilles to allow him to lead the Myrmidons to save the ships wearing Achilles' armour. Achilles gave him the permission to combat the Trojans but warned him not to continue the combat once the ships were rescued. But Patroclus pursued the Trojans up to the gates of the Troy city killing 53 Trojans on the way. Eventually he was stunned by Apollo, wounded by Euphorbos, and killed off by Hector.

The enraged Achilles retrieved Patroclus' body kept in protection by Menelaus and Ajax. He returned to the battlefield and took revenge of the death of his companion by killing Hector. Achilles desecrated Hector's body by dragging it behind his chariot. Achilles was so deeply pained by the death of Patroclus that he refused to dispose of Patroclus' body. Later, the apparition of Patroclus appeared before Achilles and it persuaded him that unless the body was cremated, Patroclus' soul would not be able to enter the gates of heaven. Before placing Patroclus' body on the funeral pyre, Achilles sheared off his hair and sacrificed horses, dogs, and many Trojan war captives. He also organized an athletic competition in the honour of his dead friend.

The mysterious bond

In Homer's Iliad, the emotional relationship between Patroclus and Achilles receives a close attention. The demonized or deified image of Achilles is added the vital touch of

humanity with this emotional aspect of Achilles' life. Although Homer's epic itself is silent about the true nature of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, later critical attentions have been on potential romantic dimension of this relationship. The relationship is viewed as a model of romantic affair by Socrates in Plato's Symposium.

Death and destruction in wars

The poet says that the story of the great warriors of the Trojan War, including the greatest Greek warrior, Achilles, is the story of pain, loss and death- "In the story of Patroclus/ no one survives, not even Achilles/ who was nearly a god." Hundreds and thousands of soldiers died during the war. A godlike warrior, Achilles, who was considered invincible, also dies a mortal death notwithstanding his greatness. The story of Patroclus is the story of a war and war serves no greater purpose other than death and destruction. War leaves no one victorious and those who are designated as victorious win the battle but lose the war. Both the vanquished and the victorious lose something precious in the battlefield. The memory of that loss leaves the victorious with the pang of an incorrigible sorrow and loneliness. The sickle of death ultimately reaps down everybody. Those who came back alive from the battlefield also die one day. Those already dead are missed forever by their loved ones. But those who come back victorious from the battle field live the rest of their life with the pain received during the war. So, in the story of Patroclus, nobody lives, and even those who are garlanded with the medal of victory and greatness have to follow suit.

Bloodshed followed by bloodshed

Remembering the day on which Patroclus was killed by Hector in the battlefield, the poet compares Patroclus with Achilles. It was by mistake that Patroclus was killed. Despite the warnings from Achilles, Patroclus insisted on having a battle in his name. Achilles had been the living icon guiding Patroclus all his life. Achilles was the dream man that Patroclus always aspired to be. Patroclus wanted to be Achilles as "Patroclus resembled him; they wore/ the same armor." Living near greatness, Patroclus developed an illusion about himself. The greatness that Achilles possessed was the result of a combination of a life-long hard work and the gift of destiny. But Patroclus wanted to be famous like Achilles within a day. That desire made him wear Achilles' armor so that he could fool the Trojans. But he did not realize that the armor did not make what Achilles was. Wearing Achilles' armor could not give him the war skill, courage, and strength that Achilles possessed. So, he had to face the inevitable in the battle field. He discovered what Achilles had and what he did not have. But he realized that truth at the cost of his life.

Nature of the bond

The friendship that Patroclus had with Achilles was an exemplary bond between the strong and the weak. One was the master and the other was always mastered. It was not a relationship on equal terms as—"Always in these friendships/one serves the other, one is less than the other:/the hierarchy". The relationship between Patroclus and Achilles is representative of a power hierarchy. In

such relationships, the bond gets stronger when the need of the one is supplied by the other. They turn out to be the alter-ego of each other. Because of this mutual dependence, the bond grows stronger by the day.

Stories of greatness unreliable

But the poet does not completely trust this account of the friendship between Patroclus and Achilles- "...though the legends/cannot be trusted—/their source is the survivor,/ the one who has been abandoned." After the long disappearance of the victorious and the vanquished of a great battle, the stories of the war get narrated by the ones who are left out of the myth. Those who manage to survive the battle become the minstrels of the myths. But the problem that arises is the lack of credibility in the stories that they relate to people. Since they did not participate in the war themselves, the accounts of the war they offer may have many missing links and they tend to create imaginary episodes to fill these gaps. Such things often happen in the accounts of great incidents that affect the lives of many over the ages. So, the truth of the relationship between Patroclus and Achilles will remain a mystery.

The intensity of the loss

But the intensity of the relationship between Patroclus and Achilles is beyond doubt. The spiritual loss that Achilles suffered after the death of Patroclus is greater than any tangible material loss. The immediate cause of the combat which resulted in the death of Patroclus was the burning of the Greek ships by the Trojans led by Hector. Patroclus was on a rescue mission of those ships, but his

mission went overboard costing him his life. Achilles lamented his death in such magnitude that the poet asks-“What were the Greek ships on fire/ compared to this loss?” No amount of material loss and destruction of property can be equal to the pain of loss and the pang of loneliness that Achilles underwent after the death of Patroclus. The number of ships that were burnt in the war on that day was nothing in comparison to that loss. The entire world collapsed for Achilles with the death of Patroclus.

Achilles went back to his tent after the funeral and succumbed to such acute suffering that he was almost on the brink of losing his mental equilibrium. The magnitude of his grief was felt by each and everyone in the camp. Everybody understood that the war would not remain the same after the killing of Patroclus. The agonized Achilles turned more violent and vindictive, cruel and exacting. He was dying to avenge the killing of his dear friend. In this bout of pain and suffering, the godlike image of Achilles received the dent of mortality as “...the gods saw/he was a man already dead, a victim/of the part that loved,/the part that was mortal.” With the physical death of Patroclus, Achilles suffered a spiritual death. There was nothing left for him to live for. Although he was physically alive, his soul was already dead. Going in search of a material victory, he squandered the most important thing in his life. Despite the jingle of victory sounded by the war historians at the glorious end of the battle in favour of the Greeks, Achilles was, the poet thinks, vanquished by the war in reality. The triumphant war confiscated the

most valuable gift of his life leaving him with nothing but hollowness thereafter.

Glorification of Rusticity in Victor Hugo’s “Letter”

Rural settings have often been cited as an abode of peace and happiness by poets across different poetic outlooks. It has been particularly viewed as the only escape route from the deafening and deadening noise of the life in the cities by the romantic poets. Victor Hugo, the most significant writer and poet who established the foundation of romanticism in French literature viewed rusticity and rustic life in the typical romantic fashion.

Highly respected for his contribution to literature, Victor Hugo is credited with the honour of spreading romanticism in French literature. His poem “Letter” is a French romantic poem glorifying the calm and quite nature of country life. The poem is written in the form of a letter to the poet’s “lady fair”. With the help of the epistolary mode, the poet eulogizes the countryside where he decides to stay for a while away from the tumult of the city. The poem bespeaks typical romantic concern for the forgotten glories of country life wherein actually lies the solution of the feeling of boredom often encountered living in the concrete jungle of the city.

Description of the village

The countryside where the poet lives is not a particularly beautiful place. It is a village very much like any other village in France. Since farmers live in this village, most of the land in the village is ploughed. Lines of furrow are visible across the village like

most of the villages in France in the nineteenth century. The farmers living in the village do not have big houses. They have built houses with “ground-level rooftops hidden by the shrubbery”. The roofs of the houses are so low, unlike the houses in the cities, that the shrubs and hedges surrounding the houses could hide them. In the open fields, there are haystacks here and there. The only thing that disturbs the calm and serenity of the village is the smoke that comes out of the rooftops of the houses. The smoke is presented as “tarnishing the landscape” otherwise peaceful and clean. The village has a river too on the right side of it. The river is not a mythically significant river like the Ganges and the Cayster. It is a commonplace river that flows in the Normandy carrying the salty waters of the sea to the inland. Neither is it an exceptionally large river like the Ganges and the Cayster. It is “a Norman salt-infested watercourse”. It is a small river with not much water in it. To the north of the village is a “...bizarre terrain/All angular...” Contrasting with the free flow of the river to the right side of the village, here is an angle-shaped hill that stands still overlooking the village.

The chapel in the village

There is an old chapel in the village as well. The old chapel has an old spire that bequeaths it an ancient appearance. The old chapel is surrounded by “A few gnarled elms with grumpy silhouettes”. The elms have lost their original shape as they have been twisted by the strong winds that blow across the village. The poet imagines that the strong wind has made the elms morosely irritable since they appear worn out and

withered. The elms have been shaken by the continuous onslaught of the current of the strong “frisky breezes” so much so that they “carp at every gust that stirs them up.” The old chapel is situated in such a place that the strong breeze can shape and re-shape its surroundings. The rigidity of regulations which is a hallmark of religious decrees is missing from that village as the establishment is vulnerable to outside whims. The elms surrounding or protecting the boundary of the old chapel have been twisted and withered by the “frisky breezes.” But then, the elms refuse to give in to the current of the wind so easily. Despite the defiance of the elms, the “frisky breezes” keep coming back to the place to reshape its contour.

The poet’s lodging in the village

The house where the poet lives is a commonplace house in villages. At one side of his house, there is a big wheelbarrow. But that wheelbarrow has not been in use for some time now, so it is rusting. The house is situated in front of an open field and the poet can see to the edge of the horizon- “...before me lies the vast/Horizon, all its notches filled with ocean blue”. The horizon is brushed with the blueness of the ocean. The sky colour of the sea in the horizon and the open field exposing the horizon to the house where the poet lives represents the openness and largeness of sympathy in the hearts of the people living in the village. The banality and narrow concerns of city life which confine people within tight compartments blocking the vision of the blue horizon do not reach to the people living in the village. Life in the village incorporates every living thing. Beneath the

house where the poet lives, he finds cocks and hens “converse” spreading their beautiful feather. The poet listens to the birds that sit and “Now and then, toss me songs in dialect”. So, the poet is surrounded by nature and natural objects in the house in which he lives in the village. He is in communion with nature and nature provides him peace of mind.

The rope-maker in the village

The poet is spiritually enriched by his contact with the villagers. There is a rope-maker in the neighbourhood where the poet lives. The rope-maker is an old man highly respected by the villagers. He is completely engrossed in his work as he “...makes his wheel run loud, and goes/Retrograde, hemp wreathed tightly round the midriff.” What is of interest to the poet, beside the fact that the rope-maker works very hard at his job, is that he is “a patriarchal rope-maker.” He is not somebody who is neglected and humiliated like the common manual labourers in the cities. He is a respectable man who heads the villagers on various occasions in the village. The old man not only earns his living by rope-making, but also receives social recognition from his work. Achievement of venerability through one’s work provides a spiritual satisfaction. The rope-maker is a fortunate man to live in the village in such spiritual contentment.

Life in the village

The poet likes to stroll in the streets of the village. The waters in the river that flows by the village are caressed by the “frisky breezes” that blow across it. The poet likes to walk by that river when the waters of the river dance in the rhythm of the breeze.

There is a school in the village to where the villagers send their kids. The children come to the school very ruggedly dressed. They are not the neat and clean school children in the cities. As they come to their school- /“The little village urchins, book in hand,/Envy me, at the schoolmaster’s (my lodging),/As a big schoolboy sneaking a day off.” Such is the beauty of the landscape in the village that children like to stay outside their school. Since the poet is touring the village at leisure and stays in the privileged house of the schoolmaster, the children are envious of him. They desire the freedom and prerogatives that the poet enjoys. The poet is viewed as a person escaping the routine of the school and having fun at home. The poet enjoys that innocent envy he imagines about the children. The surrounding of the school adds more freshness to its location. Besides the innocence of the schoolchildren, the village is clean as “the air is pure” and it is naturally happy as “the sky smiles” there. In keeping with the happy mood of nature embracing the village, the sweet music of children’s voice reaches to the house where the poet is residing as-“there’s a constant/ Soft noise of children spelling things aloud” -in the school nearby. The poet’s mind is filled with peace and tranquility living in an atmosphere of such serenity.

Poet’s communion with nature

The poet does not desire for anything more than what he achieves in the village. His life in the village offers him an opportunity to live close to nature as “the waters flow” and “a linnet flies” in the village. His communion with nature in the village bequeaths him the peace of mind that he always aspired for in the past. He is grateful

to god for that gift and expresses his gratitude passionately—"Thank you!/Thank you, Almighty God!" He is grateful because he gets to live the life that he always dreamt about. He strongly feels the sense of being alive and declares—"Peacefully, hour by hour, with little fuss, I shed/My days, and think of you, my lady fair!" The quietness and calm that the poet feels in the village give him plenty of time to think about his beloved. The serenity of village, the love in his heart for his beloved and sweet memories that fill his mind give him the best that life can offer to him. Ruminations on the sweet memories of the past provide him spiritual pleasure.

The image of the resting ship

As he listens to the "children chattering", he sees—"at times,/Sailing across the high seas in its pride, /Over the gables of the tranquil village,/Some winged ship which is travelling far away..." Since the village is by the bank of an ocean, the poet can see ships passing by speedily to unknown destinations. The swift passing of the ships is a reminder of the busy life in the cities. The ships are bound on some important errands and they have no rest until the consignments are delivered. But the poet can

see a ship which was on one of such errands lying motionless by the port. Tired and burn out of the hazard and destitution of the journey, the ship "slept in port beside the quay." The ship is resting beside the bank. The condition of the ship is a reflection of the poet's own life. The crew in the ship undertook a long journey on the call of duty despite the pain of separation from their loved ones, the beauty in nature that waited for their attention, and the omens of the difficult journey ahead. They were headstrong in their journey as they were prevented by "No tears of relatives, no fear of wives,/ Nor reefs dimly reflected in the waters,/Nor importunity of sinister birds." The care and obligation to duty for material gain blinded the crew in the ship.

The true wealth that resides within the spirit of man which can be ignited by communion with nature had been neglected by them. The poet too had once in the past committed the same mistake. But he has regained his wealth of inner happiness living in the village by the ocean. The poet ends the poem on a hopeful note that the crew of the ship may also discover that wealth as they are taking rest by the port in the village stalling the ship for a moment.

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