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Topic: Biographia literaria : Coleridge

* What according to Coleridge, is the origin of metre and what are its elements?

Ans) Metre according to Coleridge, originates from that "balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the working of passion. The critic is entitled to except two legitimate conditions in every material work. First, that, as the elements of metre over their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement. Secondly, that as these elements are formed into metre artificially, by a voluntary act, for the purpose of blending delight with emotion, so the traces of present volition should throughout the metrical language be proportionately discernible. These two conditions must be reconciled and co-present. There must be an interpenetration of passion and will of spontaneous impulse and voluntary purpose. This union can be manifested

only in a frequency of forms and figures of speech. It tends to produce a more frequent employment of picturesque and vivifying language than would be natural in any other case in which there did not exist, as there does in the present, a previous and well understood though tacit, compact between the poet and the reader that the latter is entitled to expect, and the former bound to supply, this species and degree of pleasurable excitement.

As regards the effect of metre on human mind, it tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention. This effect is produced by the continued excitement of surprise and by the quick reciprocation of curiosity gratified and yet re-excited.

It is not essential that metre should always increase our interest in and pleasure of poetry. There are thoughts which are more appropriately expressed in metrical language than in prose. But likewise there are ideas for which prose and not metrical languages will be a more suitable medium of expression. Metre in itself is simply a stimulant of attention. Its pleasure depends on the appropriateness of the thoughts and expression to which the metrical form is superadded. For all ideas cannot suitably be expressed in metrical form.

Poetry as Wordsworth truly affirms, always implies passion, which mean, "an excited state of the feelings and faculties." And as every passion has its proper pulse, so will it likewise have its characteristic mode of expressions. Since poetic composition implies and produces an unusual state of excitement, it justifies and demands a correspondent difference of languages.

Metrical language is essential for poetry for another reason also. The high spiritual instinct in man impels him to seek unity by harmonious adjustment and thus establish the principle that all the parts of an organized whole must be assimilated to the more important and essential parts. "This and the preceding adjustments," says Coleridge, "may be strengthened by the reflection that the composition of a poem is among the imitative arts; and that imitation, as opposed to copying consists either in the interfusion of the same throughout the radically different, or of the different through a base radically the same."

"lastly," says Coleridge, "I appealed to the practice of the best poets of all the Countries and in all ages as authorizing the opinion that in every important of the word essential, which would not here involve a mere truism, there may be, is and ought to be an essential difference between the language of prose and of metrical composition."