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## Imagosynthesis: Poetic Photosynthesis in Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence"

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**Abstract:** Postulating a purely natural approach for the study of Romantic poetry, this study attempts to introduce "imagosynthesis" as one of those methodologies which is able to show the affinity between nature and a literary text more precisely. Focusing on nature-oriented perception of a work of art and elaborating the details of this "green" approach, this essay attempts to portray the similarity between the process of creating, reading and comprehending of a literary work and natural photosynthesis according to six metaphorical units. Focusing on the components of photosynthesis in nature, this study tries to demonstrate how a purely natural mechanism can analogously operate within the literary world. To show the functionality of this approach, one of Wordsworth's poems "Resolution and Independence" has been selected as an example and the tents of imagosynthesis have been traced in it, though the imagosynthesis, as a way of looking at literary works, is not limited to this type of poetry.

**Keywords:** imagosynthesis; photosynthesis; metaphorical parallelism; Romantic poetry; Wordsworth; Resolution and Independence; structuralism; post-structuralism; reader-response theory;

Emphasising upon the importance of poet's "selflessness" in his poem, T.S. Eliot makes use of the chemical reaction of producing sulphuric acid as an example and he compares the mind of the poet with a shred of platinum which plays the role of catalyser in this reaction. Eliot expounds that the poet has to be indulged and at the same time remains "inert, neutral, and unchanged" (18) at the end of his/her creative enterprise. Such an example of analogous utilization of scientific approach in literary studies, without going to the details of the scientific process, certifies applying these types of analogies in the study of literature and "imagosynthesis" is one of them. This approach in a broader sense compares the process of creating, reading and comprehending a literary work of art (in our case a Romantic poem) with photosynthesis according to six metaphorical units.

Though this pseudo-natural approach can be applied on various literary genres, I have applied the imagosynthetic approach on one of the landmarks of Romantic poetry, Wordsworth's poem "The Leech-Gatherer" (1802), later called 'Resolution and Independence.' Due to the fact that the poem is associated with nature, the imagosynthesis helps the reader to perceive it "naturally" too. Indeed, the imagosynthesis is a way of communicating with nature through text: a connection which is facilitated by photosynthesis, the great code of life. In this general sense, the imagosynthesis is not necessarily limited to those literary texts which potentially have ecological significance.

The term *imagosynthesis* is moulded out of the photosynthesis template and consists of the word "imago" which is the Late Latin origin of the word "imagination" and "synthesis" which in Greek means "to make with." As photosynthesis verbally means "to make with light," the imagosynthesis denotes "making with imagination." By imagination, it means the creative competency of the poet which is as crucial as the sunlight for the photosynthesis. Besides, "imago" in botany indicates the last developmental stage in the

metamorphosis of an insect, when it emerges from the pupa after completion of its metamorphosis (*Dictionary*, “Imago”). Analogously, the imagination in the imagosynthesis is in the “imago stage” where it is fully mature and has “functional wings.” Indeed, from an artist’s perspective, imagination is at the pick of its maturity at the moment of creation. In this regard, “imago” in the imagosynthesis does not connote any psychoanalytic sense; first introduced in psychoanalytic theory by Jung in 1911 to emphasize the subjective determination of the image, imago later occupied a central role in Lacan’s pre-1950 writings in which it becomes closely related to the term “complex” (*Introductory*, “Imago”).

The interweaving of the scientific concerns and human values, on the one hand, and the explanation of the creative production and reception through the metaphorical approach of the imagosynthesis on the other hand are the inevitable outcome of the common critical trend in opposition to the traditional division of literary and non-literary texts. Habib’s elaboration on Derrida’s view of the destabilization of logocentrism in deconstructionism is illustrative enough of this common trend. According to Habib, “literal” language which actually describes the object or reality can no longer be used for describing or understanding the world: metaphor which is the very nature of language is the only way. Hence, Habib continues, there cannot be a sharp distinction between the sphere of philosophy and science (which are presumed to use a reason-based “literal” language) on the one hand and literature and art (which are characterized as using metaphorical and figurative language in a manner inaccessible to reason) on the other hand. Habib concludes that “even the languages of mathematics, science or philosophy are ultimately metaphorical and cannot claim any natural or referential connection with the world they purport to describe” (651-52).

As the following diagram indicates the imagosynthesis (fig.2) in its parallel with photosynthesis (fig. 2.) consists of six metaphorical units:



Fig.1. Photosynthesis

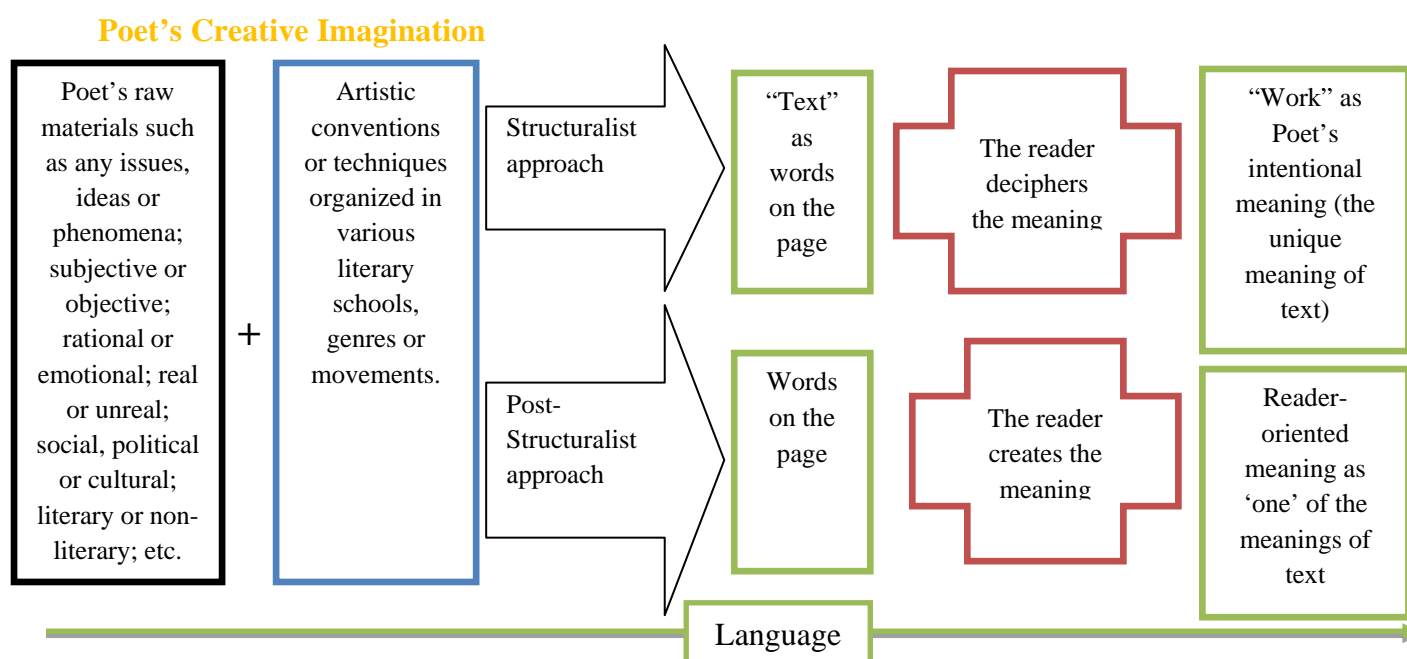


Fig.2. The imagosynthesis

As it is obvious in the diagram of both syntheses, this is the principal role of the metaphoric parallelism makes such a “natural reading” possible. Being assumed analogous to photosynthesis, imagosynthesis is an equation that moves “unidirectionally” from the abstract concepts (issues, ideas, literary convention and techniques) on the left side to the concrete thing (text) on the right. It is extremely crucial to note that metaphoric parallelism identified between these two processes is not a decorative device at the periphery of language; on the contrary it helps to explain more clearly what actually happens from the creation to the reception of a text through juxtaposing two heterogeneous phenomena—one from culture, another from nature. The metaphorical association of the imagosynthesis and photosynthesis is justifiable on the ground that metaphor is “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff and Johnsen 3).

The application of the imagosynthesis, for example, on Wordsworth’s poem “Resolution and Independence” can be presented in the following diagram:

### Wordsworth’s Creative Imagination

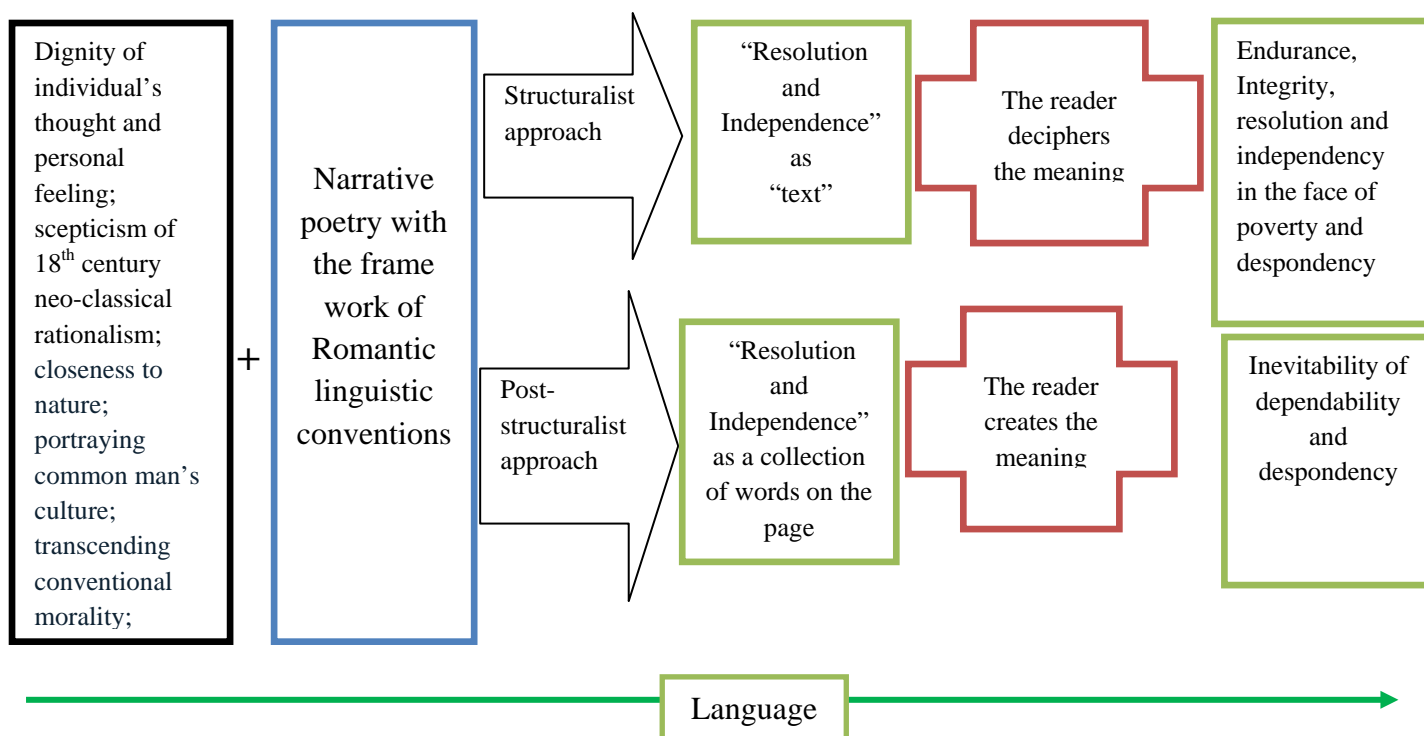


Fig.3. Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence” in the process of imagosynthesis

The first unit in the set of six metaphorical clusters, poet’s creative imagination, is comparable to sunlight. As the most essential part of photosynthesis which is the building block of the whole ecosystem on earth, sunlight fuels the reaction between water and carbon dioxide and provides the energy for splitting off the molecules of CO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O to be recombined into new entities. Metaphorically, it is the power of poet’s (here Wordsworth’s) creative imagination which runs the process of the imagosynthesis. “Creative imagination” is what Coleridge differentiates from “fancy.” In *Biographia Literari*, Coleridge argues that imagination is the faculty of mind that after dissolving “fixities and definitives,” the mental pictures or images received through the senses, is able to “create” a new whole out of them

rather than merely reassembling them. Unlike the simply “mechanical” role of the sunlight in the photosynthetic process, author’s creative imagination is “vital” and, as Hegel puts, it can use the formations of nature but can also go beyond them in its free activity (6). To underpin the notion of author’s creative imagination in the imagosynthetic process, Abrams explanation of Coleridge’s famous statement on the “synthetic” power of imagination sounds relevant: “the faculty of imagination assimilates and synthesizes the most disparate elements into an organic whole—that is, a newly generated unity, constituted by an interdependence of parts whose identity cannot survive their removal from the whole” (“Fancy and Imagination”).

Of course, comparing imagination to light has a reliable history. Scrutinizing the development of various metaphors of the mind in psychological writings from Hobbes to William James and in fiction from Defoe to Henry James, Kearns in the fifth chapter of his book *Metaphors of Mind in Fiction and Psychology* focuses on “mind-as-entity” in the fiction of Charles Dickens and Emily Bronte. Surveying the history of “light” as a metaphor of mind, which is the seat of author’s imagination, Kearns explains that the origin of this metaphor goes back at least to John Locke who considered light as “both something that the mind could direct and something that flash forth on its own”. Furthermore, he remarks that the comparison “remains as a standard metaphor for mind as late as the middle of nineteenth century” and refers to some of the novelists such as Charles Dickens who explicitly makes use of the mind-as-light metaphor in his description of the shattering of Eugene’s mind in *Our Mutual Friend*, as well as in his reference to David’s associational complex with morning light and evening light as its crucial components in *David Copperfield* (175-77).

Among the high modernist novelists, Virginia Woolf also makes use of light as a metaphor for the author’s creative imagination. Patricia O. Laurence argues that Woolf often refers “light” or “light beams” as the representation of the “searching, creative mind” (114-16). This metaphor illustrates the vital role of Wordsworth’s creative imagination in the whole process of reading of the poem. Without him, the whole equation is just an unrealized dream.

The second metaphorical unit in the imagosynthesis is the “poet’s raw materials” which act as the tenor for CO<sub>2</sub> with availability, enormity and ubiquity as the grounds of comparison. “Poet’s raw materials” encompass the whole range of subjects, objects, issues, events, ideas, phenomena, etc.; these materials can be real or unreal, factual or fictitious, scientific or artistic, social, political or moral; these issues form the internal and external world of the poet who intentionally tames them to run the chariot of his imagination in his self-constructed world. A literary work or in broader sense an artistic creation does not come out of “the vacuum of nothingness” (epics and sacred books which are considered to be inspired either by Muses or divinities are exceptions). The only difference between a poet and others is the former’s acute sensitivity to what compromise the basis of their artistic expression. This ability to transform the available raw material into an artistic whole makes a poet resemble to an ecologist who aware of the existence of CO<sub>2</sub> in the air knows how to distil it from the air when necessary.

Wordsworth’s poetry deals with various issues of the Romantic period in England such as emphasizing on the rights and dignity of the individual’s thought and personal; legitimizing the individual imagination as a critical authority which permits freedom from classical notions of form in art; looking sceptically to the eighteenth century Neo-classical rationalism; adoring intuition and emotion over Enlightenment rationalism; centralizing marginal, dispossessed common man’s culture; transcending conventional morality, etc.

Analogously, these are all the crystalized molecules of CO<sub>2</sub>. These are the vital issues within the Romantic period among which Wordsworth in “Resolution and Independence” prefers to concentrate on the moral lesson of encountering the narrator of the poem to a self-sufficient, resolute Leech-gatherer who is runs a kind of independent life while the narrator is obsessed by pennilessness and despondency of his artist friends.

The third metaphorical component is the artistic techniques and conventions (narrative stanzaic poetry in case of “Resolution and Independence”) which function in the imagosynthesis as water in photosynthesis. The ground of metaphor is the mutability, sublimity, and the dissolving power of both the artistic conventions and water. It is through the application of certain artistic techniques on the avail “raw materials” that the resultant outcome can be categorized under relevant artistic genres and literary schools. Just as water purifies, dissolves and fertilizes in nature, art is unanimously believed to fulfil the same substantial roles in the sphere of human culture and civilization. All the artistic achievements of the human being from the dawn of history are the results of dissolving his social, individual, physical or metaphysical aspects of his life into fresh and innovative artistic forms which, accordingly, fertilize human culture and civilization to produce the seeds of subliminal transcend. Zimmer in his *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* remarks that water represents “the beginning and the end of all things on earth” pointing out to water is a symbol of limitlessness and immortality. The attribution of such features to any form of great art underpins its association with water.

In this narrative poem of Wordsworth, the rhyme royal stanza, *ababbcc* (sometimes called the Chaucerian stanza), that is associated with ceremony and seriousness with a tone of solemnity and ritual encounter can be considered as the metaphorical “water” in the imagosynthesis; what Wordsworth achieves by recombining the available raw materials under the influence of his imagination and using literary device is one of the products of the imagosynthetic equation. Indeed, the reactants in the aesthetic process are in an one-to-one correspondence to those in the natural one; in the same way that the molecules of CO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O are split off at the presence of sunlight, the “poet’s raw materials” are broken off with the implementation of art and the artistic conventions or devices at the presence of artist’s creative imagination. This aesthetic reaction crystalizes “text” which is first and foremost. The “text” of the poem is the fourth metaphorical unit in the equation that functions as the hydrocarbon (the fruit) in photosynthesis. Interestingly enough, it is only through photosynthesis that the combination of CO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O produces a “sweet” hydrocarbon; otherwise, the reaction between these two substances without sunlight produces carbonic acid (H<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>): a product of the mass media; metaphorically, the product of the mass media (particularly the Press) parallels this non-photosynthetic product. Employing all the issues, ideas, events, etc. that a poet or a novelist utilizes for literary creation, what the Press “cooks” has neither artistic quality nor aesthetic merit: it is mostly tasteful for the masses with their popular culture.

Tracing the “sweet” production line not the acidic one, there are two ways of looking at the tenor of text-as-hydrocarbon metaphor: the structuralist view as well as the post-structuralist perspective. Etymologically, the word “text” comes from the Latin word *textus* ‘style or texture of a work’ which derives from *tex-ĕre* ‘to weave.’ *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word “text” as “the wording of anything written or printed; the structure formed by the words in their order; the very words, phrases, and sentences as written” (def. 1a). Accordingly, text encompasses both the written words and a meaningful combination of them. That is to say, it may be just a singular word or symbol or a structure interwoven out of them. Both the fruits in the elaborated parallel process are textural. As the

hydrocarbon in photosynthesis can be seen as a web or texture made of the molecules of CO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O, Wordsworth's poem is a "text," that is woven out of certain ideas, issues or events and it can be combined with the conventions of romantic poetics under the imprint of the poet's creative imagination. Besides, both the created poem and the produced hydrocarbon have textured physicality.

From the structuralist perspective the poem is a "text" of twenty stanzas (140 lines): a closed, finished product whose poet's-encoded meaning(s) has to be "deciphered" by the reader. Such a structuralist notion was popularised by Saussure when he announced that language is not merely "a list of words, each corresponding to the thing that it names," but a "system" of arbitrary linguistic signs that, when viewed in relationship to one another, creates a universal, fixed system of meaning" (65). Indeed, the belief in the singularity of meaning of a text comes from the assumed fixity of binary oppositions which is one of the basic premises in the structuralist thought. For the structuralist critics, the text just houses the intentional meaning of the author codified by means of the fixed relationship between signifiers and signifieds in a system of language that can be cracked by any reader. Competent in that language, such a unified, stable meaning is the fifth unit of the imagosynthesis which corresponds to the O<sub>2</sub> in photosynthesis. As the production of hydrocarbon invariably occurs with the release of O<sub>2</sub>, meaning gets inevitably born when a literary text is created.

The very title of Wordsworth's poem "Resolution and Independence" is precisely his intended meaning. The message of the poem has not been encrypted and it is overtly expressed after the narrator's portrayal of rejuvenating sense of rebirth in nature after a storm. The ecstatic happiness among the creatures in an animated landscape and the beauty of things depicted through five opening stanzas proceeds with a mood of deep melancholy descended on the narrator and he is perplexed about his strange sorrow: "Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty" (Line 35). Indeed, the poet adds the partial nature of this bliss and the immaturity of the portrayed paradise, by referring to the despondency and penury of other artists like himself: an obsession which hangs over the rest of the poem till he meets a Leech-gatherer in the eighth stanza. The Leech-gatherer searches for leeches in pools of water and sells for medical uses. Encountering the Leech-gatherer becomes a monument to endurance, integrity, and resolution, the poet rebukes himself for not being more resolute and independence.

From the post-structuralist perspective, the essence of the fourth and fifth metaphorical components of the imagosynthesis that is "text" and "meaning" significantly alters. Questioning the structuralist major tenet that language is a stable signifying system producing a unified meaning, Jacques Lacan asserts that the relation between signifier and signified is not fixed; on the contrary, it is extremely unstable and precarious. In his book *Écrits*, Lacan argues the "bar" between signifier and signified in the Saussurean algorithm (S/s) does not represent a bond but a rupture, a 'resistance' to signification (164). As he explains in his book *The Language of the Self*, in a signifying system, signifier (which is logically prior to the signified and floats above it) creates a structure under which the signified constantly shift and slide. For a brief moment which Lacan calls *points de capiton*, 'quilting point' or 'anchoring point' the signifier is pinned to the signified and creates the illusion of a stable meaning (39). Later, in his elaboration on "symbolic" order, the last stage in the triple orders of symbolic, real and imaginary which in his eyes form human subjectivity, Lacan stresses that language, instead of controlling a stable system of meaning, controls the user. Regarding language a destabilized system, he insists that an author is not only controlled by language but is created by it. Hence searching for an authorial intention

behind a text is baseless since the structure of language slides out of the hands of the author (Carroll, "Text").

Dismantling the fixed structure of meaning within text, Roland Barthes, who leaves the structuralist for the post-structuralist area, also assaults structuralism on another level and substitutes "texture" for "text." For Barthes, the text is not a fixed system of meaning, but it is open and incomplete. In other words, a text is always waiting for the input of an engaged reader to weave his "own meaning". This is the central view among a group of post-structuralist theorists such as Derrida and Kristeva who concentrate on "textuality" instead of text and discuss that any text is an unfinished work capable of producing a plurality of meaning ("Roland Barthes."). In his essay "The Death of the Author," Barthes, like Lacan, argues that it is language, not the author that controls a text. That is to say the author is not providing "the final signified" hence is not the final authority over a text by creating its textual unity. Instead, according to Barthes, the author is, in actuality, a mere scripiter who produces a text that speaks for itself and requires a reader to interpret its speech on various levels (Barthes 146-150).

In the imagosynthetic mechanism, any reader with an appropriate literary competency is able to extract some sort of meaning out of literary text. The term "reader" is used in its narrow sense developed in Stanley Fish's notion of "informed reader" which differs from other types of readers explained by other theorists: "the 'Actual Reader' (Van Dijk, Jauss), the 'Super reader' (Riffaterre), the 'Ideal Reader' (Culler), the 'Model Reader' (Eco), the 'Implied Reader' (Booth, Iser, Chatman, Perry), or the 'Encoded Reader' (Brooke-Rose)" (Rimmon-Kenan 122).

In his reader-centred approach to text, Fish highlights the salient features of an informed reader in his book *Is There a Text in the Class?*:

[The 'informed reader'] (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up; (2) is in full possession of the 'sematic knowledge that a mature ... listener brings to his task of comprehension,' including the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of the lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, and so on; and (3) has literary competence. That is, he is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalized the properties of literary discourses, including everything from the most local of devices (figurative speech, and so on) to whole genre. (48)

As far as "Resolution and Independence" is concerned, the inevitability of dependability in man's life even in the case of the Leech-gatherer here in this poem can be considered as "one" of the intrinsic meanings which totally turns Wordsworth's poem "Resolution and Independence" into a palimpsest for the "informed reader" to plumb into. Although, highlighting the beauty of an independent life can be the tentative meaning that the poet has assumed for this poem, the informed reader may read perceives the poem differently: need and dependency are an inseparable part of human being's life and they can neither be avoided nor evaded. This unpalatable fact inferred by an informed reader can severely affect that beauty that the poet has attempted to portrayed in the independency of the Leech-gatherer. This different meaning which can be assumed as an example of Lacanian "quilting points" which means the moment when a distributed and disseminated meaning is finally stabilized by the intersection of the warp interlaced by an informed reader among the



wefts of the poem. Of course, these readers do not force the meaning on the text; it has the potentiality for that kind of interpretation.

This type of deconstructive reading is originated from the paradox embedded in the poem itself: the blood-sucking leech itself is a prototype of dependency. The significant point in this post-structuralist reading of the poem is that how a blood-sucker insect which predominantly feeds on blood from vertebrate and invertebrate animals can be associated with man in order to connote the theme of independency. In fact, this fundamental paradox gets highlighted when the inform reader roughly aligns the life of Leech-gatherer with leech whose life is a symbol of parasitic life-style. Such a central paradox would have not come into existence if the Leech-gatherer had involved another profession, for instance, collecting herb for an herbalist.

This paradox is not resolved even by other types of reading done by many critics. For instance, Rzepka expresses “it has by now become part of the consensus interpretation of ‘Resolution and Independence’ that the Leech-gatherer somehow represents the poet himself, figuratively burdened by his poetic responsibilities” (240). With this image in mind, Essick argues that the leeches are the analogy of the poet’s “memories of childhood and youth,” “a non-renew able resource” (100-101). Even these types of analogous interpretations underline the theme of dependability (of the poet to his memories for his literary career) rather than resolution and independency.

To return to the metaphoric elements in the imagosynthesis, language as plant leaf is the fitting finale, the sixth unit. There is of course a rationale to claim a parallelism between them since at least two associative relations can be identified between them: a metonymical relationship in which the translations of the word *leaf* in various languages denote a page or double pages of a book as in Persian *barg*, French *Feuille* or German *Blatt*; that is it refers to the potential template for the written words. And a metaphoric relationship in which, as illustrated in Ferber’s *Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, plant leaves stand for the very words themselves. Attributing the origin of this metaphor to “Horace’s simile likening the changing words (vocabulary) of a language to the shedding and regrowing of leaves,” Ferber refers to Du Bellay who imagined “his verses as dead leaves (feuillards) scattered by the wind” and to Alexander Pope who in his *An Essay on Criticism* remarked “words are like leaves; and where they most abound, much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found” (“Leaf”).

Here, however, language is like a plant leaf since as the entire process of photosynthesis takes place in plant leaf, the matrix in which the imagosynthetic process takes place is language. To put it another way, it is language which constructs the unconscious of the poets (according to Lacan’s theory of human unconscious) then later enables them to communicate with other people what they think is worth sharing by providing them a common means to shape the “raw material” from their inner and outer life through the framework of literary techniques and conventions of various genres into codified artefacts. The created art objects are open to immortality since their text is in constant interlacing with various historical, cultural, and individual texts. This leads to their multi-signification. Carrying the intended meaning while facing the reader’s conscious, it does not take language long to be absorbed in to the reader’s unconsciousness by the enormous power of the gravity of its “black hole.” Such a contextual role of language emphasized in the imagosynthetic process is what Ferdinand de Saussure believes and later becomes the foundation of structuralism: “language constitutes our world, it doesn’t just record it or label it. Meaning is always attributed to the object or idea by the human mind, and constructed by and expressed through language: it is not already contained within the thing” (Barry 43).

The metaphor of language as leaf can also be supported by Wordsworth's remark, for instance, in Tintern Abbey, when the poet is pleased to recognize:

In nature and the language of the sense,  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being. (line 108-111)

Indeed, the "greenhouse" of language in Romantic poetry prepares a resource for moral and intellectual quest of the poet. Diverging from the neo-classical conviction that language is the dress of thought (cf. Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, "expression is the dress of thought"), Wordsworth centralizes language as the very medium in which thinking takes place and he puts, "if words be not . . . an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift" (line 84-85); the elaboration on the language as the platform on which the entire imagosynthesis occurs completes explaining its metaphorical essence. In sum, Wordsworth's remark, "poetry is the language of nature" can be considered metaphorically as a support for the ground of comparison set between language and plant leaf.

The metaphorical parallelism between photosynthesis and the imagosynthesis which has been substantiated based on those six metaphorical unites can open a passage for other types of the scientific reading of various literary texts. As it was expounded earlier, the imagosynthesis can be assumed as a mechanism which covers the entire process of creating, reading and decoding a literary text and it is not necessarily limited to certain literary work or specific genre. Indeed, the imagosynthesis brings together all the elements which constitutes a work of art.

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