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RESEARCH ARTICLE

"He dwells alone:" The Image of Completeness in the Self in Cowper's "The Snail"

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Abstract

Following the critical lines of Psychoanalysis and Existentialism, the present study aims at conveying how William Cowper, the much acclaimed English poet of the 18th century, presents in his 1799 poem "The Snail" the image of an individual possessing completeness in the self. Not only is Cowper's snail content with life in seclusion, but also abhors the intrusion of an outsider in its private domain. The article aims at investigating how the snail's world of completeness bears both the somatic and the psychic dimensions and also how the creature exists in that world narcissistically. Concomitantly, the article would probe into the association between the world of the snail and the poet's longing to attain sufficiency in the self at a time he is left alone. It would be conveyed how the snail of the poem embodies the poet's projected self in its idealised form, something which following the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan can be called the poet's "ideal ego," than an insignificant creature engrossed merely in nourishment on vegetation.

***Keywords*:** Cowper, completeness, private world, self, The Snail.

1. Introduction

When Lord Buddha, the enlightened soul of the East, was on the verge of the attainment of nirvāna, the word denoting emancipation from the endless chain of birth, death and rebirth, or "the transcendent state of freedom achieved by the extinction of desire and of individual consciousness" (*Britannica*, 2005, p. 177), he articulated the ultimate lesson of life to Ânanda and the other followers assembled around his deathbed: "attadīpā viharatha" (WordPress, 2013), that is, "be islands unto yourselves" (Access to Insight, 2013). He advised them to "seek no external refuge" (Access to Insight, 2013). What the lord aspired to preach through his articulation is self-sufficiency. For the Buddha, the self is one's true home (island). That is why, to be truly content one needs to find completeness in the self, and not seek refuge in external objects. As one attains self-sufficiency, one becomes endowed with lasting happiness and peace of mind.

The self-sufficiency the Buddha preaches gets beautifully epitomised in the snail of the celebrated English poet, William Cowper (1731- 1800)[1] in the 1799 panegyric dedicated to the

[1] William Cowper is esteemed to be one of the greatest English poets of the 18th century. He is also placed among the principal exponents of the Romantic moment in England.

creature. "The Snail" is the English translation of Vincent Bourne's Latin verse "Limax."[2] Cowper in the poem delineates the creature as an individual complete in the self, one who is "Well satisfied to be his own/ Whole treasure" (15-16).[3] The poem bears special significance among Cowper's shorter poetic works. It is because the reason behind its composition is quite personal. The article claims that the "own/ Whole" being portrayed in "The Snail" is an incarnation of Cowper's inherent desire of being self-sufficient. Cowper's primary emphasis throughout the poem is on the snail's attribute of being complete in himself. Cowper longs to procure the same trait. So, before attempting any probe into the poem a brief account of the situation that led Cowper in composing the poem needs to be proffered. That would aid in establishing the claim about the connection between the self-sufficient snail and the poet made above.

The time Cowper composed "The Snail," he was in quite a delicate state of life. The man, introverted and timid since his childhood days, had never savoured domestic bliss in the real sense. Having lost his mother at the tender age of six, he got admitted to a private school run by one Dr Pittman. But there he found misery awaiting him. In the school, he "was so severely bullied that he knew his tormentor 'by his shoe-buckles better than any other part of his dress'" (Poetry Foundation, 2021). In his later life in 1798, Cowper is found commemorating his plight with poignancy in the moving elegy *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture* –

> My mother! When I learn'd that thou wast dead,
>
> Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
>
> Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
>
> Wretch even then, life's journey just begun? (21-24)

Even Cowper's love affair with his cousin Theodora in his youth left him utterly disconsolate. Theodora's father rescinded all possibilities of his daughter's nuptial connection with Cowper. The pain of the unrequited love drove the timid and introverted man to a nervous breakdown in 1763. His subsequent attempts at putting an end to life placed him in the cells of a mental asylum. It was only when Cowper finally recovered that he had a glimpse of domiciliary comfort for the first time. His life was spent under the loving care of several well-wishers, but most importantly under that of Mary

[2] The full text of Vincent Bourne's "Limax" is being presented here:
Frondibus, et pomis, herbisque tenaciter hæret
Limax, et seeum portat ubique domum.
Tutus in hac sese occultat, si quando perielum
Imminet, aut subitae decidit imber aquæ.
Cornua vel leviter tangas, se protinus in se
Colligit, in proprios contrahiturque lares.
Secum habitat quacunque habitat; sibi tota supellex;
Solæ, quas adamat, quasque requirit, opes.
Secum potat, edit, dormit; sibi in ædibus isdem
Conviva et comes est, hospes et hospitium.
Limacem, quacunque sit, quacunque moretur,
(Siquis eum quærat) dixeris esse domi.
[*Poematia* (1764). J. Bettenham, 231].

[3] Henceforth only line numbers are mentioned while referring to "The Snail" or any other poem. In some citations, the line number[s] follow either page number or book number or (in case of a play) the Scene of an Act.

Unwin, who was the widow of a retired clergyman (Rev. Morley Unwin). "Cowper's life with Mary Unwin," in the words of the modern Cowperian scholar Ben Field, "was a long period of domestic stability" (Field, 2019, p. 58). But fate deceived Cowper once again when his happiness met a tragic end in the shape of Unwin's demise in 1796. Cowper got completely shattered inwardly. The warm feeling of belonging to home seemed to perish with Unwin's death. His mental condition at this stage of life makes one reminiscent of that of Macbeth on losing his wife. As Lady Macbeth commits suicide, the world suddenly seems to lose its meaning for Macbeth. Existence, as though, becomes a burden for him. Macbeth begins to "be awary of the sun/ And wish[es] the estate o' the world were now undone" (Shakespeare 2001, p. 535, 5. 5. 49 - 50). In a likewise manner, the bereavement of Mary Unwin thrust Cowper into inexplicable misery. To him suddenly "[t]he world tasted bitter. Life was torture" (Hesse, 2018, p. 22). Utter hopelessness was now the "facticity" of his life (Spade, 1995, p. 172). He struggled hard with the milieu of loneliness, with an aspiration of transcending the facticity. It was during this time that Cowper undertook the translation of Bourne's verse. Because he was left alone, he was in dire need to discover the island, the "refuge" in the self. His yearning was to "be his own/ Whole treasure," like the snail. Field is worthy to be quoted in this context: "the very act of producing the poem amounts to the creation of a protective shell at this very vulnerable stage in Cowper's own life" (Field, 2019, p. 56).

That Cowper explores in a snail the wholeness of existence with an aspiration of imitating the creature's isolated way of life is quite intriguing. It is because, in the compositions that precede the death of Unwin, most importantly in his magnum opus *The Task* (1785), the reader discerns Cowper's manifest antipathy towards a snail. Needless to say, his adulatory tone about the creature in the present poem is curious enough to engage one's attention.

The objective of the present study is twofold. It would anatomise Cowper's snail as a self-sufficient entity by illumining both the essence and the constitution of the world in which the creature experiences serenity, security and conviction. Concomitantly, it would probe into the biographical context of the poem by investigating how the attribute of self-sufficiency of the creature is the reflection of the poet's yearning to attain completeness in the self. Towards the end, Cowper's outlook towards a snail as conveyed by the present poem would briefly be contrasted with the one reflected in his works that precede the death of Mary Unwin. That would further underscore the tie between "The Snail" and the poet's life. The entire argument would be corroborated by the theories of Freud, Lacan and Sartre.

2. Discussion

2.1. The Snail's World

"The Snail" is a relatively short poem of twenty-four lines with a harmonious division of four lines each in six stanzas. The fourth line is comparatively short every time – possessing a single word or only a couple of words. The poem is in iambic tetrameter and consists of a well-balanced rhyme scheme of aaab cccb dddb eeeb cccb fffb. Right from the outset, Cowper's reflection on the life of the snail reveals his motive of manifesting the creature as a complete, self-sufficient being within his "house secure" (5). The snail's shell, within which he resides, isolates him from the external world. But Cowper emphatically conveys that it is this isolated existence that the creature prefers. The snail never seeks the propinquity of others. He is "Well satisfied to be his own/ Whole treasure" (15- 16).

The reader readily espies here a sharp contrast between the snail's predilection for being alone and the human instinct of collective existence. A person can scarcely thrive on one's own or even imagine a life away from the society which, as defined by Franklin Henry Giddings, a leading sociologist of the early 20th century America, "is a group of interacting individuals whose collective behaviour, dominated and stimulated by the consciousness of kind, follows the laws of cosmic evolution" (Northcott, 1918, p. 2). Even the house of a person cannot be conceptualised without a family. By contrast, the snail is in need of no companion. He "dwells alone/ Except himself has chatells none," observes the poet (13- 14). Not only that, but the creature also abhors the encroaching of others in his private sphere. That is the reason he "shrinks into his house with much/ Displeasure" whenever he senses in his horns "the slightest touch" (11- 12, 9). The image of "the slightest touch" is quite significant. Being "slightest" the touch might not be intended at injuring the snail. It might be an endeavour of an outsider at cordiality with him. So, the snail's shrinking into his house signifies in a sense his reluctance at congeniality with others. This attitude of the snail is again emphasised by the image of his lone banquet. He prefers being alone even when consuming nourishment: "Nor partners of his banquet he needs" (18). Not only that, if by chance "he meets one" (19), he also makes haste to have a greater share of the food in availability. This self-centred attitude of Cowper's snail has prompted the general reader to assess the creature as an "anti-social" being.[4]

Cowper, however, does not seem to look upon the snail in this vein. His enthusiastic engagement in accentuating the snail's wholeness makes palpable his intention of acclaiming the creature's self-absorbed nature. Assessed from the psychoanalytic viewpoint, Cowper's proclivity for the snail's self-centredness can well be postulated as conveying his inherent desire to be complete in himself in a situation in which his loving companion's demise has thrust him to loneliness forever. He pines to be a self-sufficient being ("own/ Whole treasure"), one who needs no one else's company to survive. Cowper is evidently directed here by what the architect of psychoanalysis, Freud calls "the instinct of self-preservation" (Thurschwell, 2000, p. 82), which is one of the two major instincts (the other being sexual) shaping human life.

It is quite significant that Cowper fetches a comparison between the life of the snail and that of a hermit: "Thus hermit-like life he leads" (17). Through this comparison, he seeks to underscore the glory of a secluded life. For him, the snail's life is superior to that of the persons existing in a society. It is because contrary to those persons, he is self-sufficient like a hermit, and so needs no one else to survive. One might draw here a congruity between the "hermit-like" snail of Cowper and the hermit of Leo Tolstoy's story, *Three Questions* (1885).[5] The hermit, like the snail, prefers an isolated life. As the snail never forsakes his "house," so the hermit never quits the wood he lives. There is another striking resemblance between Cowper's snail and Tolstoy's hermit which is conveyed by the phrase, "his self-controlling power" (10). It is the attribute of self-composure that has enabled Tolstoy's hermit to lead a life of austerity in the wood. In the case of Cowper's snail, the aptitude of self-control gets revealed, especially, in the form of the creature's ability to recoil in its shell. This is eventuated with the snail's sensing unwanted intrusion in his private domain either in the form of natural turbulence ("Of storm, or other harm beside/ Of Weather," 7-8) or that of human "touch" (9).

[4] An instance is *The Summary of the poem 'The Snail' written by William Cowper in brief*. brainly.in. https://brainly.in/question/1955595

[5] The 1885 tale of Leo Tolstoy narrates the story of a king seeking answers to the three questions generated in his mind. The hermit mentioned in the text is the enlightened man who provides him with the answers.

Self-control is evidently one of those facets of Tolstoy's hermit which has directed him to the path of enlightenment. In this sense, Cowper's snail might also be viewed as an enlightened individual.

Being bereft "Of friends, of hope, of all . . ." with the death of Unwin (Cowper, 2011, p. 1), Cowper too is desirous to lead a hermit-like life in solitude, to be a snail who is complacent in being his "own/ Whole treasure." He wishes to procure that supreme self-control in which the island of happiness would be the self, and he would need "no external refuge." He would thus attain enlightenment.

The "house secure" or the shell where the snail resides deserves a special deliberation, for the nature of its relationship with the creature serves to underscore the creature's completeness once again. The snail's house, says the poet, is inseparably "combined" (22) with him. That is why one seeking the house is bound to discover its proprietor (the snail) concurrently:

> Who seeks him must be worse than blind,
>
> (He and his house are so combined),
>
> If, finding it, he fails to find
>
> Its master. (21- 24)

As the snail's house is indivisible from him, one might even postulate that it is a part of his body, and not something external that he uses to keep himself secure. In this sense, his body and his house indicate the same thing. The image of the house as the body is, quite intriguingly, found in Freud. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), while deciphering the mechanisms of a dream, and conveying the associations between dream images and linguistic structures, Freud pictures the house "to be a symbol of the body" (Hendrix, 2019, p. 19). However, the point of the snail's combination with his body underscores the creature's superiority over humanity once again. No human being can ever think about a dwelling founded on one's own, that is, without the aid of external agencies. However homely one might feel in one's house, it is, after all, something external to him or her (the body). So the expression 'own house' as applied to human beings, is never logically correct. However, the case of the snail is the contrary. His house is truly his own, untarnished by external agencies. The constituents fabricating his shell are exuded from his own body, unlike bricks, cement and other materials used to construct the human dwelling.

The point of the snail's "house secure" can, however, be stretched a bit further. As the shell of the snail secures him from external hazards, it can conveniently be called his "fortress" (Hendrix, 2019, p. 19). The fortress isolates the snail's private world, both somatic and psychic, from the outside world. The private world of the snail secured inside the fortress is an ideal one for being complete in itself.

Because the fortress of the snail is "combined" with him, he is provided with its accompaniment everywhere – "To grass, or leaf, or fruit, or wall" (1). As an obvious consequence, he feels more "secure[d]" than any human being (human stronghold is immobile in essence). The sense of security enables him with confidence in all situations. The interrelation of the snail's sense of security and his confidence is established through a complex psychic process. The sense is at first felt like a permanent experience in the creature's conscious self. But the memory of the experience

instead of remaining confined in the conscious mind traverses its (the conscious) sphere to alight the unconscious and rest there as what in the Freudian language might be called "the trace of a thought" or the "mnemic trace" (Encyclopaedia, 2019) or the "mnemic residue" (Hendrix, 2019, p. 1) of the sense of being secured in the "house" (shell). This mnemic trace has a pronounced positive impact on the snail's unconscious, and the unconscious, in turn, provides the thoughts of the creature's conscious life with an assurance from within. Thus the shell (the "house," or the fortress) of the snail becomes mechanical in reciprocating the positive workings of both the selves of the creature's psyche. However, being confident always, the snail never "fears to fall" (2). Moreover, he slips inside his fortress effortlessly whenever "danger imminent betides" (6). As such, the fortress ("house") becomes the island where the snail seeks refuge.

Like the snail, the poet yearns for a "protective shell" around his private world, a "house secure" indivisible from him. That "house" would be his island of refuge in the absence of Mary Unwin. As the snail escapes to his shell on sensing external threat, he would escape to his "house" whenever he encounters the agony of loneliness. In this way, he would remain confident of never losing himself in the "Obscurest night" of despondency (Cowper, 2011, p. 1). The affliction of loneliness would be transmuted into the glory of a hermit-like solitude on the island. The physical shell of the snail, as such, becomes the symbol of the island of refuge in the self the poet craves for.

2.2. The World in Its Second Dimension

The snail's world, as the exposition made above clarifies, is founded primarily by the combination of his body and his "house secure," or his fortress (which is also his body). In this world, he relishes tranquillity and self-assurance. However, the world indicated here is only one of the two dimensions of the snail's world in entirety that endows him with wholeness. In the present dimension, the creature's world may be called the one that exists "inside us" (Hesse, 2018, p. 151), and in essence, is more corporeal than psychical. The second dimension of the world, in a sense, is the reverse of the first one. In this dimension, the creature's world indicates the one that exists "around" him (Hesse, 2018, p. 151), that is, the outer world, and in essence is related predominantly to his psyche. For the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 - 1980), the world one lives in "can act" on the person "only to the exact extent that he comprehends it; that is, transforms it into a situation" (Sartre, 1987, p. 77). In other words, the world of perception is subjective in nature, and in essence, is meaningful only in relation to an individual's consciousness of it. Even the 18th-century German thinker Kant (1724- 1804) says the same thing. For him, the consideration of an object is made "in [its] relation to our mind" (Wan-Abdullah, 2008, p. 31). The opinions of Sartre and Kant point to the fact that every person fashions the world in his or her own way with the aid of consciousness. The arrangement of the snail's world is likewise. By projecting his consciousness onto the "world around" him, that is, the "grass . . . leaf . . . fruit . . . wall," he constitutes his private world where he senses fullness, and even a sense of security ("nor fears to fall"). Thus the "world around" becomes the island of the snail in the psychological sense. However, the outer world being made the personal, the two dimensions of the snail's world get juxtaposed in him.

As the snail dwells exclusively in his private world, he always feels comfortable. But the problem arises with his experiencing "the slightest touch" (9) in his horns. He immediately "shrinks into his house" (his physical island) with "displeasure" (11, 12). The question is, what prompts him in doing so? Is it merely because he anticipates a physical hazard? Of course, he does that. There is

no denying the fact. But this is only the half-truth. Besides making such anticipation, the snail experiences another threat which is even more serious than the probable physical harm. He suddenly becomes "aware of the presence of someone else," of "another consciousness" (Spade, 1995, p. 211). The intrusion of the second consciousness disturbs the whole constitution of the world which until now was organized solely by his consciousness. He is displeased, of course, because he needs to abort his banquet in the middle. But more importantly, his disturbance is the outcome of the fact that the world around him now denotes not simply to his perspective, but to a second one too. The snail experiences his abrupt transformation into an object of another consciousness, something he can never become to himself. That is a significant reason behind his shrinking into his house. For Sartre, ". . . the difference between the two situations, before and after (the touch), is exactly the difference between an isolated consciousness, all by itself, and a consciousness in the presence of others" (Spade, 1995, p. 211).

The image of the snail shrinking into his house evokes a similar one from Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* –

Or, as the snail, whose tender horns being hit,

Shrinks backwards in his shelly cave with pain . . . (Shakespeare, 2001, p. 706. 1033-34)

Though Shakespeare uses the lines to delineate Venus's deliberate act of closing her eyes on seeing the injury of Adonis, there is a striking resemblance between the images presented in these lines and of Cowper's. Shakespeare's snail shrinks into her "shelly cave" ("house secure" in Cowper) with "pain" ("displeasure" in Cowper) when its horns are "hit" ("touch" in Cowper).

The snail's act of retreating to his house with displeasure can very interestingly be associated with Cowper's personal life. The reader easily gets reminiscent of the situation of the poet after he has lost Mary Unwin. The "grass," the "leaf," the "fruit," or the "wall" are all constituents of the world of the snail's consciousness. The snail lives in that world with the greatest convenience possible. Suddenly the "touch" from outside disturbs the whole arrangement of his world. Similarly, Unwin was an indissoluble part of the world where Cowper lived with utmost felicity and comfort. As the snail and his house grew "Together" (6), so Cowper felt togetherness with her. Unwin's death is symbolically the external consciousness that upsets the whole organisation of Cowper's world. Until then, Unwin was his island, the "external" agent in whom he sought refuge. But now with her sad demise, he was in need of exploring that island, that refuge, in the self, his *dharma* (Access to Insight, 2013) being his dedicated engagement in his work (as the snail's is the consumption of nourishment). That would endow him with a sense of fulfilment, of being liberated from all external bondage, and become "his own/ Whole treasure."

The snail of the poem, as such, becomes the symbol of Cowper's "ideal ego" (Easthope, 1999, p. 62), something which, according to the much acclaimed French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, characterises the idealised self of a person.[6] Ideal ego, in Lacan's words, makes its appearance at "that point at which [a person] desires to gratify himself in himself" (Lacan, 1978, p.

[6] Jacques Lacan (1901 - 1981) is a preeminent French psychoanalyst of the 20th century. In his work, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1978) he propounds the concept of the "ideal ego" in this vein while working on the Freudian theory of "superego" (the ethical integrant of one's personality).

257). It is a psychic mechanism that "is defined in the way the subject projects itself onto objects, moves out into identification with them" (Easthope, 1999, p. 62). In other words, the ideal ego signifies the projection of the self onto an object (or, objects), and discovering it (the self) in that (those). That self is "the perfection to which the ego strives" (Hendrix, 2019, p. 16). An important point in the constitution of the ideal ego is "projection," which for Freud is "the ascribing to others of feelings and wishes which are actually our own" (Eagleton, 2000, p. 138). Freud argues that projection is quite natural on the part of human beings. Besides being a defence mechanism, projection aids one to endow an outside object (even imaginary) with the qualities one would like to possess oneself. The same thing is done by Cowper in portraying the snail. Loneliness being his lot after Unwin's death, Cowper is in dire need to find contentment in the self, and being unable to satisfy the need in real life, projects his desire (the desired self) on the snail, portraying the creature as epitomising the "perfection" he himself seeks to attain.

2.3. Two Contrary Perspectives about a Snail

"The Snail" thus not only delineates beautifully a creature complete and content in the self but also reflects through the creature's complacency the yearning of self-sufficiency of the poet. As the snail of the poem embodies Cowper's desired self, his "ideal ego," his veneration for the creature can scarcely be doubted. But as indicated earlier, Cowper's present perspective about a snail does not bear harmony with the one reflected in his earlier compositions. In this context, it is worthy to annex that besides being a poet Cowper was always zealous about gardening. As an enthusiastic gardener, he detested a snail heartily. He was well aware of a snail's propensity to "spoil" the beauty of a garden one rears with the utmost care, and so advocated destroying it on necessity. In one of his letters to Unwin, which he wrote while composing *The Task*, Cowper stated,

> I allow the life of an animal to be fairly taken away when it interferes either with the interest or convenience of Man. Consequently, Snails and all reptiles that spoil our crops either of fruit or grain may be destroyed if we can catch them. (Cowper, 1979 -86, II, p. 87)

The pungency of Cowper's tone about the creature acquires greater intensity in the lines of *The Task* (1785). Here he applies epithets like venomous or "loathsome" to portray a snail:

> I would not enter on my list of friends
>
> (Though graced with polish'd manners and fine sense,
>
> Yet wanting sensibility) the man
>
> Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.
>
> An inadvertent step may crush the snail
>
> That crawls at evening in the public path:
>
> Will tread aside, and let the reptile live.
>
> The creeping vermin, loathsome to the sight,
>
> And charged perhaps with venom, that intrudes,
>
> A visitor unwelcome, into scenes

Sacred to neatness and repose, the alcove,

The chamber, or refectory, may die:

A necessary act incurs no blame.

…

The sum is this: if man's convenience, health,

Or safety interfere, his rights and claims

Are paramount, and must extinguish theirs. But he that has humanity, forewarn'd, (VI. 560-73, 581-3)

So, Cowper considered a snail to be a pest, a destructive agent unleashed in his garden. So long as a snail did not intrude on his garden, he would tolerate the creature. But sensing its presence there, he would not dither in killing it.

However, in "The Snail" Cowper reveals a completely different attitude towards the creature. Not only does he no longer possess dislike for a snail, but he also articulates approbation for the creature's mode of life, and has an earnest desire to imitate that. The snail's voracious nature – "Nor partner of his banquet needs, / And if he meet one, only feeds/The faster" (18- 20) – now fascinates him, as he perceives it as a vehicle to be content in oneself. If the snail's edacity for vegetation is considered a text, Cowper was aware until the present only about its conscious significance, that is, the "manifest content" of the text (Thurschwell, 2000, p. 35). He looked upon the trait from the material perspective as a force operative in the destruction of his handiwork. His present laudation of the snail's nature articulates his discovery of "the repressed unconscious" or the "hidden meaning" of the same text (Thurschwell, 2000, p. 35). This meaning, like anything unconscious, is "brought to light" in "suitable circumstances" (Freud, 1961, pp. 17, 16). The "suitable" circumstance is shaped here by the loneliness the poet encounters with the death of Unwin. This circumstance enables the poet to look beyond the "manifest content" of the text. The snail's esurience is now for Cowper one of those attributes that enable the creature to be "Well satisfied to be his own/ Whole treasure" (15-16), to be the "island" unto the self.

4. Conclusion

"The Snail" is then more than just a poem about a snail. It is a poem intended primarily to reflect the poet's quest for refuge, for the completeness of life in the self. Of course, Cowper has taken great pains in delineating each and every attribute of a snail with minute details. The places the creature resides, the way he consumes nourishment, the way he is intertwined with his "house secure" (5), or even the way he "shrinks into his house" (11) on experiencing "the slightest touch" in his horns or of "danger imminent" (6),[7] have all been conveyed through vivid images. However, each of these facets of the snail points finally to his being a creature whose sufficiency rests in the self. Because the snail's island is the self, he savours the joy of solitary existence like a hermit. This hermit-like complacency, as the article has argued, was the only prerequisite of the poet to exist after

[7] The lines from "The Snail" have been extracted from *Poetical Works of William Cowper* (1905), J. C. Bailey (Ed.). Methuen, IX.

losing his refuge, Mary Unwin. In her absence, he was in need to explore his home or his island ("house secure") in the self. That is the reason he wished to become a snail, the very creature he detested previously. It is worthy to quote Field once again here:

> . . . the translation of "The Snail" was made in the spring of 1799, it is tempting to respond to the poem in more final, grave, and valedictory terms than the text itself invites . . . the poem is more than the translation of a skilled hobbyist, and both the text and the act of its creation arise from Cowper's relationship to the idea of home [the island in the self]. (Field, 2019, p.66)

It is quite significant that only a year after the composition of the poem Cowper passed away in April 25, 1800. It would remain unresolved whether the attainment of his "ideal ego" ever got materialised, that is, if his wish to become a snail by exploring the refuge in the self was ever fulfilled. If, however, it is assumed that his longing begot positive result, one can conclude with certainty that his death was a happy death, one synonymous with nirvāna for not needing an "external refuge" (Access to Insight, 2013) and thus attaining "the transcendent state of freedom" in the self.

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