

## **A Psychological Analysis Of Wordsworth And Coleridge, Two Prominent Romantic Poets**

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### **Romanticism: An Overview**

Keats criticizes the artificial and arbitrary mechanical principles of writing. Any commitment to regularity is an imposition of external constraints on the poet. Poetry ought to take the reader beyond the confines of time and place and into a fantastical world. This is the main idea of the text above and the defining feature of the time period known as the Romantic era. The literary and philosophical movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century are together referred to as romanticism. While Immanuel Kant's definition of enlightenment in "What is Enlightenment?" Romanticism introduced a different school of thought that placed an emphasis on subjective emotions (against reason and intellect), spontaneity (against order), and a radical skepticism with regard to the Enlightenment precepts. "is a process of man's liberation from bondage and oppression through the faculty of reason." William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Lyrical Ballads, which were originally published in 1798, capture the intellectual energies of the time and are often seen as a critical manifesto of Romanticism. Poetry, according to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800), should represent genuine human emotions, use the "lower" kinds of diction and the "language of conversation," and come from the poet's imagination and sentiments. However, Coleridge differs from Wordsworth's description of the poet as "a man speaking to men" and poetry as "the real language of men" in Biographia Literaria (1817), proposing instead a critical examination of aesthetic experience.

Characterized by nature, imagination, and symbolism, Rene Wellek's basic description of Romanticism reads: "Imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style" (10). The Romantics eschew the neoclassical literary standard and reject the reliance on reason. The 1690 essay Essay

Concerning Human Understanding by John Locke has impacted the subjective tendency in aesthetic philosophy. According to Locke, the human mind absorbs ideas acquired from senses like a blank sheet of paper (*tabula rasa*), without any inherent or a priori concepts. The mind detects and views the world via its senses before reflecting and coming up with thoughts based on the impressions. Sensual sensations are derived from observable aspects that constitute knowledge. David Hartley expands on Locke's notion of association of ideas in *Observations on Man* (1749). According to Hartley, thoughts originate from vibrations that outside things cause in the mind. Man comes to know morality and divinity via an associational process.

Both Locke and Hartley believed that experience is the source of knowledge and that the formation of kindness and love depends on the right conditions. Wordsworth's theory of poetry, which exemplifies the "primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement," depends on this concept of association (3). Wordsworth believed that the growth of a poet's mind depends on their habits of association and that natural landscapes are essential. However, Wordsworth believes that the poet's own mind serves as the poem's original source rather than the outside world. In contrast to Locke, who thought that human nature is moulded by sensory experiences in the outside world, Wordsworth emphasized how individual awareness shapes impressions, which lead to poetry. This focus on the poet's inner emotions rather than the outside world as a source for poetry constituted a significant shift in Romanticism. Poetic production is characterized by introspection and contemplation. In Romantic aesthetic philosophy, the poetic self, or the topic of contemplation, therefore takes centre stage.

Wordsworth recognizes the democratization of letters that was taking place at the time when he defines the poet in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* as "a man speaking to men." He then uses hermeneutics and interpretation to describe the phenomena of poetry. Poetry creation as a psychological urge and poetry reading as an interpretive effort are intertwined. For example, sublime is no longer a feature of the natural world but rather a force of the mind; as Wordsworth states in *Prelude* (1805), the "mind/ Is lord and master" over "outward sense" (270–1). Rather than the rhetorical forms, this psychological force becomes the meta-value of Romantic poetry. For Wordsworth and Coleridge, poetry therefore represents a

transcendent vision. A poet always creates this picture. A poet is a creative, thoughtful, and sentient individual. Poetry theory develops into a theory of the poet, the creative process, and reactions to the creative process.

### **William Wordsworth – “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*”**

Therefore, the main idea behind these poems was to take everyday events and situations and, to the greatest extent possible, relate or describe them using language that men actually use, while also adding a layer of fantasy to make everyday objects seem extraordinary.

According to Wordsworth, the Preface offers a "systematic defence of the theory" that the poems of *Lyrical Ballads* were written upon, but it also offers a systematic philosophy of poetic intricacy and poetical limitations in opposition to the world of experience and tangible objects. Poetry, according to Wordsworth, is "the spontaneous overflow" of emotions that are calmly recalled. Form, meter, and language are added to this "overflow" of emotions. Wordsworth criticizes poets' "vague, glossy, and unfeeling language," "gaudiness and inane phraseology," and poetic diction. Wordsworth believed that lyrical language alienates people's empathy. The language of metrical composition and prose are identical in every way. Poetry should be written in both the less formal language of the poor and rustic and the "real language of men." Poetry does not need meters; they are only an added delight.

Adding to his defence of the devaluation of poetic language and favouring everyday speech, Wordsworth describes a poet as a man communicating to other men. A poet is more perceptive of his surroundings, has a deeper understanding of human nature, and is able to express both the emotions he feels himself and those he observes in others. Wordsworth believed that poetry was the most intellectual form of writing, with universal and practical truth as its goal. Poetry represents a profound affinity between man and nature and is said to embody the "breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." Thus, the literary allusions and linguistic tricks are only decoration. Poetic language may be restrained while using meter since the laws of meter are set.

This focus on the human mind as the source of poetry is described by H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* as the transition from mimetic to "expressive" critical standards. According to Hayden, the "Romantics" were more interested in "creative theory" than they were in the expressive. Wordsworth's Preface is a compact manifesto that condenses some of the poet's most well-known and influential concepts into a manageable amount of text. The Preface makes clear its belief in the existence of animistic energies that are ready to feed the mind, its belief that natural law is better to human law, and its belief in the moral application of that law. Wordsworth challenges the notion that knowledge is the product of reason and intellect by defending the ideational substance of what his mind observes in solitary, unmediated contemplation of nature. This contradiction has to be seen in the same light as the tension found in Wordsworth's socio-historical French Revolution. The subjective lyric and the idealized, free-standing individual conscience both oppose the institutionalized social norms. The fact that Wordsworth's meditation is recognized to have moral as well as artistic implications makes the relationship evident. Wordsworth claims that the only appropriate basis for moral conscience is the basically solitary thought he is engaged in. His "thoughts and feelings" reveal his superiority; they should not be interpreted as perceptions but rather as inventions that come "from the structure of his own mind" and "by his own choice."

### **S. T. Coleridge – *Biographia Literaria***

"A general Preface will be pre-fixed, on the principles of philosophic and genial [having to do with genius] criticism relatively to the Fine Arts in general; but especially to Poetry," Coleridge wrote to Byron on March 30, 1815, expressing his desire to include this to his poetry. Wordsworth's revised Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* appears in Wordsworth's 1815 *Poems* some weeks later. Coleridge claims that "even though Wordsworth's Preface is half a child of my own Brain... yet I am far from going all lengths with Wordsworth." ....I have a strong suspicion that there is a significant gap between our theoretical perspectives on poetry, which I will attempt to fully explore (83). In the end, Coleridge published *Biographia Literaria* in 1817, which is a lengthy discussion and criticism of Wordsworth's two Prefaces (1800 and 1815).

The text *Biographia Literaria* is critical, religious, philosophical, and personal. Chapters 5–9 summarize Coleridge's intellectual migration from various mechanistic and associative systems to rest on religious and transcendental principles; Chapters 12 and 13 discuss fancy, primary, and secondary imagination; and Chapter 14 is a philosophic discussion of perceptions, imagination, and the aesthetic experience of fine arts, particularly poetry. The first four chapters present literary events of Coleridge's life from Christ's Hospital to 1798. Coleridge's theological and moral views are explained in sections in chapters 10, 12, 13, and 24. Coleridge rejects the mechanical understanding of the cosmos and embraces an imaginative basis based on the Logos, or the Word. Coleridge offers a critical assessment of Wordsworth's poetic theory in chapters 17–20 and 22. Coleridge builds an argument on how the mind functions, analyzes information, reflects, associations, and links experiences and ideas obtained from the senses, rejecting materialism and empiricism as sufficient explanations of the human psyche. Poetry first appears in *Biographia Literaria* as a nexus of writing practice, theory, friendship, life, and religion.

Coleridge characterizes poetry as "that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing pleasure, not truth, for its immediate object; and from all other species (having this object in common with it), it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with distinct gratification from each component part." A poem's single line or stanza cannot satisfy or reach perfection.

**In the same chapter, Coleridge defines the poet as:**

The poet, who is portrayed as the epitome of perfection, awakens the whole human spirit and subjects all of its faculties to one another in accordance with their respective dignity and value. He diffuses a spirit and tone of oneness that, via that artificial and magical force, which we have all too easily taken to be called imagination, blends and, in a sense, fuses, each into each. This power, initially activated by understanding and maintained under their unwavering, albeit subtle, control (*laxis effertur habenis*), manifests itself in the balancing of opposing or discordant qualities: sameness and difference; general and concrete; idea and individual and representative; sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; and an abnormally high emotional state and abnormally high emotional order.

What does Coleridge define as poetry? merges with "What makes a poet? Eventually, "What is Art?" A superior degree of the faculty [of synthesis], joined to a superior voluntary control over it," is how Coleridge describes imagination in chapter seven. In addition to gathering details (fancy), the mind combines all of its pictures to create something new (imagination). The mind's inert power is called fancy. The ability to actively chart new ground is imagination. The mind may halt, make sense, and gradually integrate pictures into perceptions and meanings via a sequence of apprehensions thanks to the passive power. Fancy employs "fixities and definites" that are either left unaltered by the piece as a whole or by the individual; via "memory" or "choice." The "fixities and definites" are transformed and rearranged by the active force of imagination to produce:

In order to recreate, the imagination dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates; otherwise, in cases when this process is made impossible, it nonetheless strives to idealize and to unite at all times. In the same way that all things are fundamentally fixed and dead, it is basically vital. FANCY, on the other hand, only has fixities and definites as counters. The Fancy is, in fact, nothing more than a mode of Memory freed from the constraints of place and time; it is combined with and altered by the empirical phenomena of the will, which we refer to as choice. However, just as with the regular memory, the fancy needs to have all of its resources pre-made from the association law.

Imagination connects and makes associations between seemingly unrelated sights to produce something new, while fancy observes and is a product of memory. Primary and secondary imagination, according to Coleridge, are further classified as this deft assembling of elements to form a pleasing whole. The primary imagination is the capacity of perception, which is an intrinsic human aptitude. A poet's secondary imagination is an enhanced form of their conscious will. A poet endowed with the "synthetic and magical power" of secondary imagination functions as a catalyst for the process of unification. Through secondary imagination, the poet dissolves, dissipates, diffuses, and unifies the formless mass of experience that fancy gathers. The poet's creation, "with form, connections, and unity," is a work of aesthetics. "The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by

the pleasurable activity of the mind excited by the attractions of the journey," says Coleridge in chapter fourteen of his book.

Coleridge contends that there is no fundamental distinction that can be made between prose and metrical work. In poetry, "that prospectiveness of mind, that view, which enables a man to foresee the whole of what he is to convey" directs the "order" implied by metric composition. Coleridge emphasizes the natural integration of all linguistic resources into poetry in order to bring disparate ideas together to form a cohesive whole. Speaking in "delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part," a poet—"an ideal perfection"—states that "the parts...mutually support and explain each other."

### **Dialectic unity between Wordsworth and Coleridge**

Wordsworth defined imagination as a way of association, whereas Coleridge thought that our perceptions are perceived, created, transformed, and united by our imaginative capacities. Wordsworth believed that the human capacity for creativity is related to and explained by imagination. In Coleridge's view, the mind is paramount in its dynamic and active relationship with the outside world. It possesses a power that is not mentioned or taken into account in the theories of the materialists: it is "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception," which enables man to form perceptions that are constitutive of both nature and God, the creator of nature ('the infinite I am'). Poetry and other noble arts are created by this force. Fancy is appreciated but limited to the rearranging and combining of distinct sense experiences that already exist; it combines or juxtaposes but does not change or unite. For Coleridge, imagination transforms. Wordsworth's division between poetry and science is echoed in *Biographia Literaria*, but Wordsworth's focus on rustic language is criticized. Wordsworth creates the idea of a poetic diction that mimics the language of common experience in response to the neoclassical poetic diction, which held that individual vocabulary and experience were unsuitable for poetry. The language of the rustic, according to Coleridge, is "purified from all provincialism and grossness, and." ....created in accordance with grammatical standards. ....won't be any different from the words of any other sensible individual.

Coleridge believed that the intellect is where language gets its finest qualities. This conception of the mind's creative capacity recurs in Keats's concept of "negative capability," where he makes a distinction between the spiritual imagination and materialistic "reason."

Wordsworth seems to be at the forefront of an aesthetic theory trajectory that favours "the primitive, the naïve, the directly passionate, the natural spoken word," as described by William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks. The Romantic aesthetic theory posits a visionary idea of poetry, orchestrates carefully theorized claims on the value of a poet, and espouses an inward, reflective, and introspective poetic selfhood. Kathleen M. Wheeler notes that this trajectory is the precursor of the twentieth century post-structuralist theories: "Coleridge's concept of polarity, of opposition, is in many ways anticipatory of Derrida's concept of difference... for Coleridge, as for Derrida, relations and oppositions form the substances of experience." The legacy of Romanticism depends on this shift in self-awareness within the framework of the French Revolution, industrialization, and the emergence of scientific materialism. The Romantics not only disdain language, skill, and meterual propriety, but they also severely criticize the inorganic human society with their ardent, self-absorbed individuality that stressed an organic oneness with the environment. Paul de Man and Geoffrey Hartman see this as a blinding moment that counteracts the Romantic legacy by rejecting the visualism of the Enlightenment and the imitatio naturae concept, turning inside instead of outward, and creating the imaginative autonomy. The "flash upon that inward eye" (Wordsworth's term from the poem "I wandered lonely as a cloud") that exposes the reality of nature that is represented by metaphors, symbols, hieroglyphs, and emblems is another aspect of blindness that is insight. The first-person Romantic lyric reinvents the organic form of English literary criticism, in contrast to the Petrarchan or Elizabethan love-poems. The intricate and unique answers of every poet to the concepts of imagination, nature, and poetry itself embody the revolutionary drive of Romantic aesthetic philosophy.

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