

# Constitution of the English Romantic Poetics: from Lyrical Ballads to Biographia Literaria

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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**Constitution of the English Romantic Poetics: From *Lyrical Ballads* to  
*Biographia Literaria***

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and  
Literature and German Language and Literature at the University of Rijeka

Supervisor: Sintija Čuljat, PhD

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## **Abstract**

Based on two of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's most important works, most notably their joint 1798 effort of *Lyrical Ballads*, this thesis explores the developing of the English Romanticism movement. The inquiry posed in this thesis applies to all the literary and cultural environments that fostered Romanticism as a movement that emphasizes nature, emotion, and the capacity for personal imagination. The Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads* and his emblematic poems provide a careful examination of Wordsworth's use of ordinary language to explain his distinctive artistic philosophy of emotional appeal and simplicity.

Thus, this thesis provides a thorough explanation of how the pursuits of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, both in joint and solo projects, embodied and characterized the ideals of Romanticism. In conclusion, it offers insights into their continuing interpersonal influence, demonstrating the Romantic poetics' enduring significance.

**Key words:** English Romanticism, Wordsworth, Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, imagination, nature, the supernatural, poetic philosophy

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## **Introduction**

The arrival of English Romanticism on the literary scene signals the most radical period of change in literary history: radical transformations in aesthetic principles, coupled with thematic preoccupations and a new concept of the figure of the poet himself. In that sense, the movement becomes part of the general late 18th-century motion set to redefine the relation of the individual to the natural world, imagination, and society. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were central in this revolution of literature; their collaboration, *Lyrical Ballads*, is often proclaimed as the founding text of English Romantic poetry.

This thesis approaches the dimensions of English Romanticism through the unique partnership between Wordsworth and Coleridge and their single and collaborative contributions that continue to characterize the driving spirit of Romanticism. In essence, this paper dwells on the cultural and literary background that created Romanticism with the new poetics supported in *Lyrical Ballads*, and on the distinguishable yet similar poetic frames of Wordsworth and Coleridge. By questioning their theoretical writings and emblematic poems, this thesis aims to provide readers with an understanding of how their collective and individual efforts contributed to the engendering of the poetic principles of English Romanticism.

This thesis tries to comprehensively understand their individual and joint contributions to the movement, emphasizing how their idiosyncratic poetic frames both impacted and inflected the Romantic notions at that time. The theoretical writings and emblematic poems of both of them provide insight into that transformative force of the work and its influence on literature and culture.

## 1. The Advent of English Romanticism: cultural and literary context

Romanticism, as it is currently understood, was a vast philosophical and artistic movement that began in the late eighteenth century and peaked in the early nineteenth century. Its ideals included a strong emphasis on human subjectivity and how it is expressed, an exaltation of nature as a vast symbol source, childhood and impulsiveness, sentiment and desire, the poet, the sublime, and imagination as a more thorough and expansive form of knowledge. Romanticism, as a general reaction to the Enlightenment, Neoclassical, and French Revolutionary views, first gained traction in the domains of philosophy and literature.

Generally speaking, this era is best understood as one in which the conventional classes were driven toward political, economic, cultural, and ideological domination by significant upheavals like the French, Industrial, and 1830–1848 revolutions, as well as the rise of nationalism. This era's dominant thought and practice was shaped by their worldview, which was broadly rationalist and economically liberal. It also gave rise to a number of rival movements, including socialism and anarchism. (Habib, 2015)

*The Lyrical Ballads* of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which was published in 1798, marked the beginning of Romanticism in English literature. The English Romantic movement in poetry was created upon Wordsworth's *Preface* to the second edition (1800) of *Lyrical Ballads*, when he defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." The movement's third principal poet during its early stages in England was William Blake. Preoccupation with the mystical, the subconscious, and the supernatural, as well as changes in literary form and subject, characterized the initial phase of the Romantic movement. (Britannica, 2024)

Wordsworth and Blake were among the authors who opposed key aspects of the emerging conservative social and economic structure. In search of spiritual consolation from the

mechanical and the squalor, competitive routine of the cities, as well as from the moral mediocrity of a middle-class society compliant, they turned to spirituality, nature, and visions of a basic, pure way of life, which they occasionally situated in an idealistic era of history like the Middle Ages.

In line with growing nationalistic views, Wordsworth believed that poets should imitate the "language of real life." He, Blake and Coleridge all elevated childhood and innocence of observation, untarnished by conventional education. Several Romantic writers also brought back older forms like the ballad and the folktale, and they understood nature differently from neo-Classical writers. (Habib, 2015)

The quest for new writing techniques went hand in hand with the new understanding of poetry and the insistence on a new subject matter. The popular poetic language of the late-eighteenth century, according to Wordsworth and his contemporaries, especially Keats, was stale and stiff, or "gaudy and inane," and completely inappropriate for expressing their views. For them, it could never be the language of emotion, thus Wordsworth tried to retrieve poetry's vocabulary from everyday speech. But Wordsworth's own language frequently deviates from his thesis. However, the timing was right for a transition when he released his *Preface to The Lyrical Ballads* in 1800: the fluid language of earlier 18th-century poetry had become just conventional. Nonetheless, a large number of the greatest writers of the day believed that something novel was taking on. William Blake's declaration in 1793 that "a new heaven is begun" was in line with Percy Bysshe Shelley's statement "The world's great age begins anew" one generation later. Furthermore, John Keats wrote of Leigh Hunt and William Wordsworth, "These, these will give the world another heart, / And other pulses." New ideals emerged; freedom, which had long been revered in England, was being extended to all spheres of human struggle. It was only natural to think that the era of dictators might be coming to an end as that notion spread throughout Europe. (Britannica, 2024)

## **2. *The Lyrical Ballads* as the English Romantic movement poetic experiment**

William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, two important figures in the Romantic Movement, disliked the rigidity that society imposed at their time and decided to do something on that matter. Writings about kings, queens, and nobility were written at the period in a vocabulary that was beyond the comprehension of the majority of the lower classes. Wordsworth and Coleridge assembled a collection of poems that were written in a language and with subjects that were accessible to common people in an effort to increase support for their ideals and the number of people who could read literature. *Lyrical Ballads*, the name of their collection, was a precursor to modern poetry and a perfect representation of Romanticism. (Ellmaux, 2014)

*Lyrical Ballads* emerged in the spring and summer of 1798, when the Wordsworth and Coleridge families shared the quiet Somerset homestead of Holford as neighbours. Despite their brief acquaintance, Wordsworth and Coleridge quickly became close friends and admired each other's work. Both poets found solace in the quiet settlement from the tumultuous activities of major cities such as Bristol and London, which were often hostile to young men with unconventional views. As passionate reformers during the early years of the French Revolution, Wordsworth and Coleridge understood this better than anybody, and their withdrawal within the nation was driven as much by their own security worries as anything else.

The intention of their work, as Wordsworth subsequently said, was to create poetry that thoughtfully examined the lives of lowly, rural people. Additionally, the vocabulary used in the collection would mimic the real speech of these people, which Wordsworth said was more passionate and less manufactured. Both poets pitched their collection as some sort of statement, which, if successful, may radically redesign the field of English art and literature. They felt that the vocabulary and subject matter of contemporary poetry had become elaborate, formulaic,



and artificial. However, Wordsworth and Coleridge both had distinct roles to play in this project meant to test the limits of how everyday language and occurrences might be transformed into poetry and art. Wordsworth would mostly write about the extraordinary in the ordinary, the "powerful feeling" that comes with what appear to be perfectly normal and unimportant life circumstances at first glance. Considering, for instance, Betty Foy's excruciating joy at simply being able to watch her mentally challenged son in *The Idiot Boy*. Coleridge, however, would examine how the mind works in unusual situations by focusing on the ordinary inside the extraordinary: Among many other topics, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* examines the well-known feelings of faith, guilt, brutality, obsession, and perseverance as they are felt by a man who is physically imprisoned aboard a ghost ship while being pursued by supernatural forces. Therefore, it was essentially a compilation of "lyrical ballads," a poetry book that combined the ballad's embracing of the fantastical, humorous, and daring with the lyric poem's serious examination of character and subjectivity.

Wordsworth and Coleridge worked together to create a collection that would challenge readers to consider the striking similarities that exist between people despite differences in class, region, or educational background—in other words, to consider our common humanity. They also wanted to challenge readers to rethink poetry and what it was or ought to be written about, among other things. This was an ambitious project at the turn of the century, particularly given that the dedication to a "common" language and way of life might be (and sometimes was) interpreted as a show of support for republican France. Many of the early critics of *Lyrical Ballads* assumed that the writers were undoubtedly French supporters since there was no other way to explain their fascination with illiterate labourers.

There is no question that Wordsworth and Coleridge were devoted to a revolution in poetry and art with *Lyrical Ballads*, regardless of whether they continued to sympathize with the movement elsewhere. *Lyrical Ballads* is, in part, an attempt by Wordsworth and Coleridge to rid poetry of

the chilly conventions that had come to rule the literary scene; instead, they wanted to return poetry to what is most familiar, most common, and most significant in our creative, emotional and social lives. If, in modern times, this doesn't seem like such an astonishing accomplishment, it may be because of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's silent revolution in literature. (Kerr, 2014)

### **2.1. William Wordsworth's *Preface to The Lyrical Ballads***

Wordsworth wrote a brief "Advertisement" to go along with *Lyrical Ballads*, which he and Coleridge published in 1798. This authoritative text warns the readers that the poetry they are about to read will probably not be to their liking and explains how to adjust their preconceived notions of what constitutes a good poem so that they may enjoy it, as they should. It is intended for the readers to comprehend that most of the poems were composed as "experiments," with the intention of "ascertain how far the language of conversation in the lower and middle classes of society is adapted to the purpose of poetic pleasure." With that in mind, the readers may question if the material they are reading is indeed poetry, as it is likely that the readers define poetry as "the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers." The readers are told that the only way they can free themselves from this foolish belief is to admit that poetry is a challenging topic that calls for serious consideration. When a revised edition of *Lyrical Ballads* was requested in 1800, Wordsworth expanded on the stance adopted in the "Advertisement" to create the well-known *Preface*. In 1802, he made revisions and additions, the most significant of which is the elegant section that characterizes the essence and role of the poet. The only reason the *Preface* is not as authoritative as the "Advertisement" is that it agrees to provide justification for its demands. (Bloom, Trilling, 1978)

It has been believed that Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* represents a Romantic manifesto. It covers a gamut of properties and rules of Romantic poetry rendition.

The everyday—that is, regular people and events—as well as the usage of ordinary language are highlighted. "Selecting incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men," is Wordsworth's stated main goal. He continues by saying that he likes to paint modest or rural scenes because "the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity" in these kinds of environments.

Wordsworth often emphasizes the positive impact that nature has on the human mind in his works. From the tallest mountain to the most basic flower, all forms of the natural world inspire admirable, exalted ideas and intense feelings in those who see them. Wordsworth stresses nature's significance for a person's intellectual and spiritual growth on several occasions.

Wordsworth takes his time discussing the traits and personality of the Poet (a term he often capitalizes). He calls the Poet "a man talking to men," but adds that he is endowed with "a more comprehensive soul, and a greater knowledge of human nature" than other men. He draws comparisons between the skill and expertise of poets and that of scientists, attorneys, and other experts. Although he acknowledges that technical proficiency plays a role in a poet's work, this is a required rather than sufficient need.

Wordsworth emphasizes in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* how his poetry, which is centred on nature, has the ability to draw readers away from urbanity and industrialization, which he feels dull people's brains. He argues in favour of poetry, discusses the enjoyment of meter, and provides an explanation for his choice of writing style. "The spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity," is how he defines poetry, according to his own well-recognized description.

Wordsworth argues for his own poetic methods and lays forth his basic theories about the nature of poetry in the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*. He makes the case for poetry that is rooted in the natural world and the experiences of common people, particularly farmers, shepherds, and

peasants who live in rural places. Wordsworth's portrayal of the countryside, in contrast to the pastoral, strives to be based on the actual lives of rural residents rather than serving as an idealized rural setting for legendary or courtly stories.

Wordsworth writes in an emotive, figurative style that aims to "evoke pictorial images in the mind of the reader," and this reflects his purpose of "capturing the beauty of landscape" in the grandeur he assigns to his natural surroundings. Wordsworth believes that his poetry serves as a mediator between nature and man, thus by sharing the sensations and emotions he had in nature, he hopes to include the readers in this sublime emotional condition and in the uplifting force of nature.

Wordsworth outlines his core ideas on the composition and nature of poetry in his *Preface*. He does this by dissecting three key aspects of poetry creation, which he sees as the core of the Romantic ideology. Poetry's subject matter is one of these elements. Wordsworth makes the argument that the concept of a simple, rural existence is crucial. This is where poetry needs to show its strength. Therefore, Wordsworth thought that poetry relates to the fundamental principle of expressing happiness in life and appreciating what is seen every day. Wordsworth describes here the element of emotional connection that characterizes the poetry experience. (Areeb, 2022)

William Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* is one of the most important pieces of writing in the history of English literature. It expresses a very new way of thinking about writing that is based on honesty, simplicity, and the beauty of everyday life. In this way, Wordsworth founded the English Romantic movement by going against the rules of Neoclassical poetry and in favour of a more lively and recognizable form of writing called verse.

## **2.2. Wordsworth's emblematic poems included in *Lyrical Ballads***

It is through a focus on nature, emotion, and everyday experience of the common man that Wordsworth wanted to create poetry that would be at one time simple yet profound. Three representative poems from *Lyrical Ballads* will be analysed in this chapter: "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," "We Are Seven," and "The Idiot Boy."

### **2.2.1 "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey"**

The poem also known as "Tintern Abbey" is a monument of Wordsworth's moral outlook, philosophy of life, and attitudes toward nature and man. The author wrote this poem suddenly on July 13, 1798, and it was published in the same year in *The Lyrical Ballads*. The author wrote it down as soon as it occurred to him. The poet made two further visits to the location in 1798 and 1793. Not long after his second visit to the location, he wrote the poem. The poem is significant primarily because it documents the many phases of the poet's evolving perspective on nature. Wordsworth cherished nature as the physical manifestation of the ultimate splendour rather than for its aesthetic qualities, which are found in the hills, rivers, meadows, and forests. Wordsworth was unable to acquire this mindset when he was a youngster or even a young man. It was as a mature man that he experienced this emotion. The poet refers to *The Prelude* as "the Poem of my own Life," and although the evolution of this attitude toward Nature is described in great detail there, it is also briefly shown in *Tintern Abbey*. (Dutta, 2015)

The primary theme of this poem is nature and memory. Wordsworth describes how the memory of this beautiful landscape stayed with him, giving him comfort even at a time when he was grumbling, even if he stayed absent from it. Nature is not something to be looked at, but it is something that nourishes his soul even at times when he is far from it. The poem starts off with a description of the poet returning to the scene and shows how these "beauteous forms" have stayed with him, offering comfort and inspiration throughout the years:

“These beautiful forms,

Through a long absence, have not been to me

As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din

Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,

In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,”

The poem also deals with how the relationship of the poet with nature has undergone a change with age. As a young boy, he enjoyed nature for its beauty alone. Now, being a grown man, he finds deeper meanings within it. He feels that nature teaches man about life and helps him to fathom his emotions and the world around:

“For I have learned

To look on nature, not as in the hour

Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes

The still sad music of humanity,”

Wordsworth speaks of his function as a poet and realizes his functioning identity as an individual portraying feelings and flashes of insight that nature inspires. He believes that in writing about these experiences, he shall be able to transmit to others the wisdom and comfort he finds in nature. He expresses in the poem his gratitude for the natural world by wanting to express it through poetry.

The last portion of the poem is dedicated to Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, who had been accompanying him in this visit to Tintern Abbey. He hopes that she, too, shall find in nature that comfort and strength to bear her sufferings:

“My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,

Knowing that Nature never did betray

The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,

Through all the years of this our life, to lead

From joy to joy: for she can so inform

The mind that is within us, so impress

With quietness and beauty, and so feed

With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,

Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,

Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all

The dreary intercourse of daily life,

Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb”

In addressing Dorothy, Wordsworth emphasizes the continuity of his relation to nature and his desire to share the intensity of this relationship with a person he loves. He expresses a wish that Dorothy might experience the serenity and spiritual nourishment in nature which he had known himself, thus reaching outward to enlarge the themes of memory, transformation, and healing power of nature from this poem.

Wordsworth also refers to nature as something spiritual, almost divine. He further believes that nature interlinks everything and everybody and has the power to guide and uplift people. This relation to a higher spiritual power is what centres around the poem and reflects the main Romantic idea about the beauty and strength of nature.

“A motion and a spirit, that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

And rolls through all things.”

"Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" illustrates how ordinary experiences can yield deep insights and emotional resonance. The reflective tone of "Tintern Abbey" portrays one of Wordsworth's principles that poetry should come from emotions recollected in tranquillity. Through the reflective tone, he manages to review his past experiences and their lasting effect on his emotional and spiritual life. The poem sustains the Romantic era's concept of the role of nature in human life.

### **2.2.2 “We are Seven”**

"We Are Seven" focuses on the poet's conversation with a small girl about her siblings; where the girl argues that her siblings are seven in number, while two of them are already dead. "Anecdote for Fathers," which comes before "We are Seven" in the 1798 version and after it in the 1800 edition, is often paired with the poem. The child's innocent but powerful knowledge is highlighted by the adult speaker of the poem's inability to impose his viewpoint on the little girl. This knowledge is developed outside of the boundaries of academia or scholarship. The conflict between "natural" and formal education is a recurring theme in *The Lyrical Ballads*. The speaker in "We Are Seven," who is presumably a guy with formal education, engages in an argument with a little girl. The poem's speaker, maintains that the two deceased children,



John and Jane, should not be included in the count, which is the main point of dispute over the young girl's sibling count—five or seven. On the other hand, the little child is adamant that her siblings be included. By the poem's conclusion, neither side has conceded, therefore the argument is still open. (Simmons, 2017)

The keen insights into this Romantic view of a child as pure and intuitive are represented in the poem.

“Their graves are green, they may be seen,”

The little Maid replied,

“Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door,

And they are side by side.

The fact that this girl believes in the survival of her dead siblings shows some deep emotional truth, not necessarily bound by logical reasoning.

The language used in the poem is simple in structure, just as everything in Wordsworth's poetic campaign had to show his commitment to "the real language of men." It makes complexity in life, death, and bonding between families accessibly emotional. An image of children's graves coupled with the natural setting in which they lie reinforces one of the most typical Romantic themes—continuity between life and death. A description by the girl makes the non-human world seem continuous and timeless in ways that her own could not be.

"We Are Seven" epitomizes Wordsworth's Romantic belief in the purity and profundity of the child's point of view. It invites the reader to revise his attitude toward death and rejoice in those relationships which are stronger than death. Through the naive yet incisive voice of the child, Wordsworth tells us that perhaps death is not really so absolute after all, and love and memory do have a way of keeping the departed very near.

### 2.2.3 “The Idiot Boy”

The poem "The Idiot Boy" from William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) offers a sympathetic look at young Johnny Foy's mental health issues by portraying him as a youngster who should be welcomed, cherished, and cared for rather than as a terrifying person who has to be sent to Bedlam or a comparable facility. Compared to many of the other poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, "The Idiot Boy" stays closer to the ballad form. Sentimentality is balanced by the humorous action, which is enhanced by the vibrant use of meter and rhyme. The implicit narrator's sporadic and often humorous comments further counteract sympathy.

Both reviewers and other poets criticized "The Idiot Boy." Nothing less deserving of the labour that seems to have been devoted to this, as Wordsworth's friend and fellow poet Robert Southey put it. The fellow *Lyrical Ballads* author Samuel Taylor Coleridge even commented on "the disgusting images of ordinary, morbid, idiocy." However, history has verified Wordsworth's groundbreaking achievement in shattering the poetry tradition that demanded exalted topics celebrated in elevated forms by using the language of lowly subjects and the straightforward ballad form. (Colledge, 2024)

In the poem, there is a simple-minded boy named Johnny, who is sent to run an errand by his mother, Betty Foy. She needs to fetch a doctor for her sick friend, Susan Gale, but since she has no one else to send, she reluctantly sends Johnny, even though he is mentally challenged. Galloping away on the pony, Johnny rides off to fetch the doctor but is quickly diverted by the natural environment and fails to deliver his task. The mother becomes overwhelmed with worry about the whereabouts of her child and begins the tiring search for him. It is the care that forms the emotional core of this poem as Betty's nocturnal search mirrors the depth of her love and fear for her child. Eventually, she finds Johnny playing by a brook, finding out that he never got to the doctor. Susan Gale eventually recovers, after all, without the help of the doctor, and Johnny comes home safe and sound, unaware of all the commotion he had caused.

The poem focuses on the themes of motherly love, innocence of nature, and the simple country life. Wordsworth tried to convey an idea in this poem that emotional accomplishment and social relations are greater than intellectual success. Idiocy gets a different meaning in this poem, as the reader is forced to question his definition of the word because Johnny's innocence and bonding with nature were worth of their value.

Wordsworth's poem conveys aspects of motherly love and the worth of every human being. The way in which Betty cared for Johnny, despite societal assumptions and judgments, shows very deep, unconditional love. The poem has shown that the joy of Johnny is so close and dear and his innocence is too priceless to be sold when Betty says, "His heart was full of joy," that captured his simple delight of the world.

The Romantic values are also expressed in the poem's celebration of nature and in the ease of a child's view of the world. Johnny relates positively to his immediate environment, and Wordsworth reveals this in Johnny's happy delight, "The little boy was glad / With his head in a corner". Wordsworth moves against the rationalist way of thinking in his work by valuing emotional sensitivity and natural relation above strict practicality.

This structure, cast in ballad form with all its simplicity of rhyme scheme and rhythm, acts to emphasize the emotional impact. The repetitive presence of Betty's concern—for instance, when she cries out, "O, the mother's voice was heard, / O dear!" —emphasizes her rising anxiety and thus the stakes of the narrative. In general, "The Idiot Boy" is a tender exploration of maternal love, nature, and human dignity. Through his description of Betty's anxious and affectionate search for Johnny, Wordsworth allows readers to understand the dignity of every person, regardless of condition or capacity.

### 3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's concept of the supernatural within the *Lyrical Ballads*

There has been a consistent presence of the supernatural throughout the history of English literature, beginning with the earliest instances of the genre and continuing into modern texts. It continues to be one of the literary complexes that will endure. Samuel Taylor Coleridge stands out as having one of the most active minds among the poets of the first generation of English Romanticists. This is especially true in regard to his exploration of the supernatural. The supernatural components that are creatively crafted by Coleridge become believable and persuasive when he is in charge of them. His ability to convincingly evoke a voluntary suspension of disbelief from the reader is what ultimately leads to the establishment of poetic faith. In his use of supernatural elements, Coleridge makes a substantial departure from his contemporaries by establishing a profound connection between those aspects and human existence. Coleridge takes a more suggestive style, working toward the goal of evoking a sense of mystery, rather than presenting answers that are descriptive. His description of things that are not visible to the reader is made real and tactile by the use of inventive colour, which is a significant departure from the conventional Gothic settings that were prevalent throughout his time period. (Naz, Saeed, 2016)

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is perhaps the most famous poem by Coleridge, and the absolute archetype of his use of the supernatural in his literature. The poem tells of an old mariner who kills an albatross and has to struggle through a series of supernatural punishments for his action. This synthesizes Gothic horror, moral allegory, and Romantic imagination in one piece.

Coleridge achieves greatly detailed descriptions of supernatural events and settings for an atmosphere both vivid and eerie. The ghostly ship, spectral crew, and ominous occurrences (such as the curse of the albatross and the appearance of spirits) evoke a sense of awe and terror:

"And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,

(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)

As if through a dungeon-grate he peered

With broad and burning face."

The supernatural element in this poem serves a moral purpose to illustrate what happens as an outcome from the Mariner's transgression against Nature. The poem explores themes of sin, penance, and spiritual renewal, suggesting that the supernatural forces at play are manifestations of a higher moral order:

"He prayeth best, who loveth best

All things both great and small;

To the dear God that loves us,

He made and loveth all."

It is in the supernatural that Coleridge finds a placement for the Mariner's psychology, illustrating his inner torment and eventual enlightenment. The supernatural is used as an outside portrayal of his guilt and fear, which impels him towards self-awareness and repentance.

One of the key motives in the poem is the albatross which is used within the poem as an emblematic figure of good luck, while at the same time being a symbol of supernatural intervention. In the beginning, the albatross is a symbol of hope and favourable conditions for the mariner and his crew. Senseless killing of the bird by Mariner changes all that to produce a turn of events within the narrative in the form of a curse. It was not only a crime against nature but a type of supernatural crime which invoked series of fantastically horrifying events.

One of the most striking supernatural elements is that of the "Spectre-ship," since it appears without any wind or tide. This eerie image of the ship, coupled with the ghostly crew—"Death" and "Life-in-Death"—made it personify death and the undead, adding a lot to the feel of otherworldliness and unnatural happenings.

The killing of the albatross by the Mariner is followed by a chilling transformation of his crew. He tells the listeners how, under the supernatural curse, his shipmates died, and the souls left their bodies, which sounds vividly "like the whiz of my cross-bow." This clearly shows the punishment given by the supernatural and the isolation of the Mariner. The mariner faces supernatural torments when he is left abandoned with the dead bodies of his crew. The amount of intense suffering—physical and psychological—he goes through uncovers that Coleridge used supernatural elements to work out themes of guilt, penance, and redemption.

The ghostly voices that the Mariner hears are also relevant to the supernatural elements in the poem, making comments on the events and reflecting the inner turmoil of the Mariner. For instance, when they are being taken to their resting place, the voices of the dead crew can still be heard, which enhances the eeriness and supernatural atmosphere of the scene.

Another supernatural element is the redemption of the Mariner through the growth of praying ability and the blessing of sea creatures. This act of penance and subsequent returning home convey spiritual awakening and redemption, facilitated by those very supernatural forces that initially punished him. The supernatural here works for transformation and moral reckoning.

The supernatural language and imagery throughout the poem enhance the ghostly and otherworldly elements. Detailed accounts of the spectral and eerie phenomena—the eery ship, the cursed crew, and haunting natural phenomena—constitute specific features in an otherwise vivid supernatural landscape that propels the narrative.

In “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, Coleridge remarkably brings together supernatural elements with psychological and moral themes. The supernatural enhances the atmospheric nature of the poem but acts as an element that truly enables the author to probe deeper into issues such as sin, punishment, and redemption. This is not simply an effect of the use of supernatural elements in the poem but part of the journey of the Mariner and the overall message of the poem.

While performing an act of innovation with the supernatural, Coleridge goes beyond the simple Gothic horror to express a richer, more nuanced exploration of the human psyche and moral dilemma. His supernatural landscapes do not work simply as backdrops to some adventure or other but are intrinsically related to the inner life and moral journeys of the characters. It is this approach that separates Coleridge from his contemporaries and underlines the continuing power of the supernatural to explore the deepest aspects of human experience.

### **3.1. The Romantic imaginary and Coleridge's critical thought**

The creative mind is able to create something new out of something that already exists; imagination gives us the capacity to see unity in the diversity of our experiences. Imagination and nature are intertwined, and it has been in nature as an entity from the beginning of existence. The portion of the mind that creates images in our minds is called imagination.

The romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1722–1834) is credited with helping to shape contemporary imagination theory, despite the fact that he did not write a single book on the subject. Celebrated Romantic author S.T. Coleridge offered something novel to his generation and something fresh to explore in the years to come. Apart from being known through such fantastic works as “Kubla Khan” and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, Coleridge is also

admired for his astute examination of the works of William Shakespeare, and the articulation of literary capabilities like primary and secondary imagination. Wordsworth was the one who sparked Coleridge's interest in the study of imagination. However, Coleridge is interested in the theory of imagination, while Wordsworth was solely interested in the practice of poetry and the influence of imagination on poetry. He is the first critic to delve into the properties of imagination being instrumental to creative endeavours.

Additionally, Coleridge is the first critic to differentiate between Fancy and Imagination and explain their separate responsibilities; Wordsworth uses them practically interchangeably. He took on the majority of the seminal works that came before him, including the ancient, medieval, and biblical texts, as well as the influential philosophers like Kant and his contemporaries Schelling. Although Coleridge did not provide a framework to back up his theories of imagination, the wisdom and reasoning strewn throughout his writings eventually come together to produce a significant and cohesive work of literary theory and criticism in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), where he acknowledges his debts to theorists like Schelling and Kant. Even though the piece is lengthy and seems to be freely arranged, it is contemplative rather than plain or linear in its autobiographical components. This was not intended to be a long piece, but rather almost an introduction to his work, particularly *Lyrical Ballads*, in which he would outline and defend his own poetic technique and style. The project evolved into a literary autobiography that encompassed a statement of his philosophical beliefs and an extended critical treatment of William Wordsworth's theory of poetry as propounded in the *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of verse on which he collaborated with Wordsworth. Coleridge makes a distinction between the primary and secondary imagination. The basic idea of creativity is the ability to take in information from the outside world through the senses, or the ability to see things as a whole and in their parts. It is something that happens naturally in the mind. The mind takes in thoughts and feelings from the outside world, organizes them, and



makes them smaller and more manageable so that the mind can make a clear picture of the outside world. In this way, it is possible to have clear and logical vision. "I AM" is the live power and main force behind all human experience. It is also a recurrence in the mind of the endless act of creation in the infinite "I AM." Along with the conscious will, the secondary is a mirror of the primary. In order to make something new, it melts, spreads, and disappears. The less important ability of fancy is just a way of remembering things. It deals with fixed and unchangeable things, with useful facts instead of "ideas." It is clear that this view of imagination is similar to Schelling's: primary imagination is the ability that all humans use to make sense of their experiences; secondary imagination is the ability of artists to give existing things new shape and meaning. In his mind, this second imagining is what all creative action is about. It is the power that brings differences together in harmony. This power brings everything together by combining or fusing the different parts of the soul, like awareness, intelligence, will, and feeling. It also combines the inside and the outside, the subjective and the objective, the mind and nature, and the spiritual and physical aspects. Nature is tinged with the soul of the poet, and the soul of the poet is merged in nature. The artist finds "identity" in both people and nature. This is because the secondary imagination brings them together.

Coleridge stated that Fancy is less important than the secondary imagination, which is already in the physical world. The baser things we want come from fancy. It is not a creative part of the brain; it is where lust lives. The imagination is the tool we use to understand the world around us. Imagination is something we all have and it works through our senses. The creative vision is what a poet uses to imagine and bring things together. Coleridge believed that the mind was not a blank slate that could be filled with outward events and sense feelings that were then remembered and put together through a process of association. Instead, he saw the "mind" as having two separate parts, which he called Fancy and Imagination.

Images do not seem to be separate when someone is in a state of ecstasy; instead, they are linked together by rules that have nothing to do with the facts of events. The mind is compared to fancy, which is less important because fancy is what helps poets put together metaphors, similes, and other literary devices. As it turns out, Fancy is just a form of memory that is freed from the rules of time and space. Like any other memory, though, Fancy must get all of its information from the law of association.

Finally, we can say that Coleridge looked into a deep thought about Imagination and Fancy. Most reviewers who came after him have set Fancy apart from Imagination. They see Imagination as the faculty that makes greater, more serious, and more intense poetry, while Fancy is seen as the faculty that makes lower, lighter, or more amusing poetry. (Rani, 2013)

### **3.2: Toward a fully-fledged period poetics: S. T. Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria***

One of his most striking works in literature is definitely *Biographia Literaria*, or *Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, published in 1817, which is a vivid portrayal of Coleridge's inner views and convictions, as the very title of this work signifies. In *Biographia Literaria*, S.T. Coleridge makes a comprehensive overview of his eventful life, starting from his curiosity and interest in the poetry of his friend Wordsworth, and ending with the literary criticism and psychology of art. Coleridge mentions a vast deal of important essayists, scholars, and eminent academics in the numerous sketches that comprise the work; many of these individuals had played a major role in influencing the intellectual environment of his day.

The fact that Coleridge often references works in their original languages throughout the work further demonstrates the author's admiration for and understanding of Latin and Greek. This illustrates just how incredibly informed Coleridge was. It is noteworthy that while not actually putting out any systematic or philosophical conceptions of his own, Coleridge developed crucial

views regarding aesthetics.

We may argue that a large portion of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's philosophical path, which is well documented in *Biographia Literaria*, is essentially a reprise of his opinions, observations, and critiques of writers like William Wordsworth, William Lisle Bowles, and Alexander Pope, to mention a few. Coleridge examines the connection between philosophy and literature in further drawings included in *Biographia Literaria*. He highlights the views of philosophers such as Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, René Descartes, and Immanuel Kant in those sections. One of the main topics covered in *Biographia* is in fact philosophy. By alluding to the writings of authors like Thomas De Quincey in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), Coleridge demonstrates his interest in and concern for significant historical developments. It is important to remember that the rise of notable philosophers during Coleridge's time significantly improved the state of philosophy. The way that German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling thought and influenced Coleridge's peers is only one example. (Lahlou, 2022)

Coleridge's analysis of the poet's imaginative foundation is essential to *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge is certain that the reader should naturally experience an enthusiastic state of mind as a result of the poet's inspired and creative abilities. Coleridge's body of work eloquently illustrates how certain poets may become more well-known than others based on how well they use their imagination.

In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge addresses the question of which narrative methods to use in a particular work of art. In this sense, Coleridge believes that a piece of art is lacking if it does not include literary techniques like metaphor, allegory, and imagination. According to him, these literary devices give the piece remarkable depth and immerse the reader more fully in the author's creative process.

At the heart of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* is the connection between the different steps

and processes he personally went through while writing the work. Coleridge takes some pride in his artistic skills, but he also knows that some of his writing had been criticized by readers. He thinks that a lot of this negative feedback is not even close to helpful criticism. He blames the reader for not being objective when rating his work. It is not as easy as some people might say to make value judgments about a work of art, according to Coleridge. He stresses how important it is to have the right literary review tools in order to give a fair assessment of any work.

So, it shouldn't be a wonder that Coleridge's *Biographia* largely relates to the ideas of "subjectivity" and "unreliability" in critical evaluations. In conclusion, Coleridge's goal in writing *Biographia Literaria* is to artistically honour the poet's personality and uniqueness through the poet's mind and moving words. Coleridge is asking the artist to probe human psyche, the realm of the divine, and the meaning of words.

All things considered, we can state that Coleridge's *Biographia* raised a number of issues that have been important in advancing scholarly inquiry, particularly in the areas of philosophy and literature. Having said that, Coleridge's literary influences should not be disregarded since, in the two centuries and more since the publication of the *Biographia Literaria*, they have grown to be an essential component of literary exercise and practice. (Lahlou, 2022)

#### 4. Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetic frames refracted

The collaboration between William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in creating *Lyrical Ballads* was a very radical moment in literary history because it put into close conjunction two quite different but complementary poetic visions where each represented a different type of Romanticism. Coleridge was kind, outspoken, and easily moved by the shimmering beauty he felt all around him, even though he was a bit disorderly. A strong religious or even magical feeling ran through him. Wordsworth was moody and remote, but he had a strong sense of his own greatness. The stress in their personalities broke up their friendship in the end, but not before it inspired their poems. In that one year, their different personalities pushed and pulled against each other, resulting in some of the most famous poems ever written in English, such as "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Coleridge, and "The Prelude" by Wordsworth. *Lyrical Ballads*, which they wrote together, was the first book in the Romantic movement and changed the course of English writing forever.

Wordsworth and Coleridge were looking for a new kind of literary undertaking that would have "a power like one of nature's" and last for a long time. Their project was democracy at its core. They disagreed with the techniques used in poetry at the time, so they wanted to write poems for regular people about regular people in everyday words. This led to the creation of *Lyrical Ballads*, which they wrote together and had released anonymously in 1798. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Coleridge was the first piece in the collection, and "Tintern Abbey" by Wordsworth was the last. Following Wordsworth's directions, the book's design was simple, with no frills or decorations, to match the poem itself. It started with a brief preface or "advertisement" written by Wordsworth. Wordsworth had stated that the majority of the poems are to be considered as experiments. The main reason they were written was to see how well

the words used by people in the middle and lower classes of society can be used for literary pleasure. (Smith, 2020)

Wordsworth and Coleridge became less friendly as well as unable to work together over time. "My style and Coleridge's style would not mix," Wordsworth stated. For example, Wordsworth liked to write straightforward lines about the world as he saw it, while Coleridge liked to use poetic language to write about abstract ideas. Coleridge sometimes thought Wordsworth's writing was too everyday; he wrote to a friend that it "clung to the palpable, or often to the petty." Wordsworth, on the other hand, thought Coleridge's style changed and afterward said that "Mariner" was badly written.

The fact that Coleridge bowed down to Wordsworth's greatness didn't help. Wordsworth's sense of superiority and Coleridge's sense of weakness made their friendship and Coleridge's artistic growth impossible in the end. Coleridge stated that it was hard "for a mind so original to compose another man's thoughts and fancies" when he talked about Wordsworth's opposition to his ideas. In the years to come, Coleridge would lose faith in his own abilities as a poet. He would defer to Wordsworth when it came to editing and work hard on revising Wordsworth's own poems. When a new version of *Lyrical Ballads* came out in 1800, it was only listed under Wordsworth's name, even though it included Coleridge's work.

Coleridge offered more theories than Wordsworth, even though Wordsworth was a better lyricist. Wordsworth's poems were fragmented when they met for the first time in the Quantocks, and his spirit was "dead to deeper hope." With Coleridge's support, Wordsworth got over his sadness and started to see the world as a magical and spiritual place where everything was linked. In his diaries that year, Wordsworth wrote that "unknown modes of being" are "bound / Together by a link, & with a soul / Which makes all one." This was Coleridge speaking through him. Subsequently Wordsworth loved to quote Milton's "Paradise Lost", even though these lines sound more like Coleridge than Wordsworth: "Millions of

spiritual creatures walk the earth/Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep." (Smith, 2020)

The poetic frames of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, hugely different in many respects, have a good number of interlinking elements. Their joint work in *Lyrical Ballads* had not only spawned English Romanticism but brought out the complementary elements in the visions of both almost simultaneously. Wordsworth's reverence for Nature and the common man found counterpoint with Coleridge's probing into the supernatural and imagination to fashion a multifaceted culture that lasts. It is in their refracted poetic frames that one finds a deeper understanding of the complexities and innovations that define Romantic poetics.

## Conclusion

The study of work of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Lyrical Ballads* gives a broad look at a very important literary movement. This thesis explored the cultural and literary backgrounds of English Romanticism, following the innovative poetry of the *Lyrical Ballads* as well as how the different but complementary ideas in Wordsworth and Coleridge's works affected their style. Because of how strong their own ideas and accomplishments were, we can get a better idea of how rich, complex, and novel English Romantic poetry was.

*The Lyrical Ballads* marked a huge change in English writing. In his *Preface* to the collection, Wordsworth laid out a new literary theory that focused on simplicity, emotional impact, and common language that could bespeak human experience. With a focus on everyday life and new forms in his collection, he sets the scene for the Romantic time that proceeds. Even though Wordsworth is mostly interested in nature, he is determined to learn more about what ordinary people go through. The idea of "spots of time" in Wordsworth's work shows how important events in nature can last a lifetime. It also shows how dedicated he was to taking the ordinary and moving it to the sublime.

Diverse styles marked Wordsworth and Coleridge's collaboration, but it led to a more varied and rich literary movement. The spiritual and lofty ideas of Coleridge were balanced by Wordsworth's interest in the everyday and natural. Together, these works show the Romantic ideal of being open to all kinds of human experience, from the personal and immediate to the supernatural and beyond this world.

In the end of this thesis, it is shown that the start of English Romanticism was not a single event in history, but rather a process with a long-lasting effect on literature and society. Wordsworth and Coleridge's example shows how two different, but complementary poetic stances could interact as to facilitate the understanding of the novel Romantic poetry concepts. It is evident



in their work that poetry still has the power to explore the most intangible aspects of human experience.

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