

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURE IN THE ROMANTIC POETRY OF WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

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Abstract

The late 18 th -mid 19 th century was the era in English literature arena history that stressed the dominance of emotions, individualism, and sensuous connection with nature. There were some notable poets who also extensively explored the meaning of nature, such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. As such, this paper seeks to analyze how their poems show that nature is not just a landscape but an emotional, spiritual, and philosophical reflection that gives form to human consciousness and emotions.

Keywords: Romanticism, nature, Wordsworth, Coleridge, spiritual renewal, imagination, human consciousness

1. INTRODUCTION

The Romantic period in English literature corresponds to the period between the late 18th and mid-19th century, when much concentration was deepened into individualism, emotion, imagination, and a deep affinity for nature. Two of its most significant luminaries were William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, both of whom reflected on nature with their poems- a reflection far surpassing mere material presence. They enriched nature with symbolic, philosophical, and spiritual meanings to inspire, solace, and enlighten man. This paper discusses the relevance of nature to the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge and how each of the two poets expresses nature's role regarding human conscious and emotional world.

1.1.The Romantic Movement and Its Emphasis on Nature

As the late 18th and early 19th centuries were celebrating, it was reaction to Enlightenment rationalism and to industrialization at large. Celebration instead of emotions, individuality, and creativity became the answer in place of the stiff systems that are deeply based on reasonings, rationalisms, intellectualizations, but this time were to be centered in the very subjective experience of the individual himself. Nature- as source for beauty but mainly a road towards individual and spiritual growth- received an unparalleled esteem within this movement.



Figure 1: Romanticism and Nature

For the Romantic poets, nature was not a background to human action but a life force in itself with an active power to mold and shape the human soul. There was a feeling of alienation from nature brought about by industrialization, which unfolded into fast urbanization and technological boom. The restoration point back to the simplicity and purity of former times was found in nature by the Romantic poets. They discovered a way out of the stresses and the depersonalizing effect of the modern world in nature; they had found peace, clarity, refuge, and comfort there. It was an icon of innocence, an actual sense-a world free of manmade ideas of civilization.

Key principles of the faith of power which nature could be the driving force of creativity and more emotional reaction to the wonders of life are regarded as the most potent features of Romanticism. This made Romantic poets depict nature as a mirror of the human reality in images of the aesthetics of beauty, awe, and sublime, where the sublime in particular refers to those sensations of awe or terror generated by the huge mighty, or mysterious power of nature. It was closely related to the Romantic ideal that the natural world could be beyond the human knowledge and give some insights into the infinite and the divine.

Moreover, nature was also viewed in a certain way as an ethical and religious leader. Nature in fact serves not only as an inspiration, but also, as Wordsworth often says is a teacher to most of the Romantic poets, and imparts wisdom and insight into some of the deeper truths of life. Nature was perceived to reflect some divine order; a man can get to the higher state of consciousness by sinking himself in the nature hence become spiritually awakened. This perception of nature as a living being that can influence the human mind was the main ideology of Romanticism and one of the main distinguishing features of the movement.

In such poets as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, nature is an escape and a place of self-discovery. In Wordsworth, nature, at its finest, restores childhood innocence and wisdom and introduces some sense of continuity and stability into the flux and reflux of life. Although Coleridge tends to explore the more secret and indirect aspects of nature, presenting

it as an ambiguous, even paradoxical, force to which human spirit is opposed, both poets emphasize the strong power of nature on the human mind and its ability to make people respond emotionally, which was one of the typical aspects of the Romantic era.

Emphasis on nature, as practiced by the Romantic movement was not just a feeling of its beauty but an acknowledgment of its influence in forming human feelings and beliefs, and experiences. Nature was therefore seen as one of the central themes of Romantic poetry as it was an ideal of innocence, wisdom, and spiritual affiliation that had become more and more elusive with an industrialized world. In their writings, the Romantic poets are reminding the readers of the critical interaction that is between humanity and nature and that they should be returning to the earth and its immense, transformative power.

1.2. Wordsworth and Coleridge: Key Figures in Romanticism

There have been few who have influenced and shaped the trajectory of English poetry as much as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who did so during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Being considered one of the most influential persons in the movement that was to lead this turn of events is William Wordsworth, who drew attention to a focus on nature and the personal emotional response from it. He thought poetry should reflect common speech and deep emotional truth; much of the time, the subject of it came from the world around us, such as in nature, which often helped with his expression of deep personal experience. In *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, he conveys that nature contains a spiritual, healing quality to make man stronger and calmer within. Wordsworth, by giving due weightage to the transcendental powers of nature, emphasized and put emphasis upon the fact of importance given by an individual for reflecting or memorizing one's process towards self-realization.



Figure 2: Wordsworth and Coleridge: Key Figures in Romanticism

Coleridge, although an adherent to many Romantic principles, used a more mystical and philosophical inclination in exploring the world of nature and imagination. Many of his works are supernatural pieces that border on reality and fantasy as is reflected in his works-the poems *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*. He was of the opinion that the imagination showed the portals toward deeper truths about the world and the self. In Wordsworth, nature often becomes the fount of peace and wisdom; in Coleridge, mystery, symbol, and sometimes portent hang around nature. Notable also among Coleridge's critical writings is *Biographia Literaria*, in which he propounded a theory of imagination that identified imagination as the

door to knowledge both of external things and of human psychology. Wordsworth and Coleridge were two great collaborators in Romantic poetry, who influenced each other and contributed to the growth of the movement with its interest in emotion, nature, and imagination.

2. NATURE IN THE POETRY OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

William Wordsworth (1770-1850), who was among the most prominent representatives of the Romantic movement, considered nature to be a nurturing and transforming power. Nature is most revered by Wordsworth in his masterpiece, *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* (1798) where nature turns to be a healing power. Wordsworth as a poet in this poem reflects on his past and current encounters with nature, and this shows that the natural world should not only provide aesthetic satisfaction but also spiritual sustenance.

The well known quote by Wordsworth is, the child is father of the man, which also serves to emphasize the strong bond between man and nature in a very tender age. Childhood experiences with nature, Wordsworth says, are a defining perception in life, a greater awareness of its beauty and power. In many cases, he portrays nature as something alive that can educate people in wisdom and insight. Such perception is also reflected well in his renowned work, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, or *Daffodils*, which stipulates nature as a kind of emotional renewal. The view of the daffodils reinvigorates the spirit of the speaker and gives him a permanent experience that he still recalls and is comforted by.

Nature to Wordsworth is not merely a physical scene. Rather it is the human soul that is reflected in the face of nature. In *Tintern Abbey*, he has suggested that nature provides a deeper understanding of self since it gives the man a chance to reconnect with his own tranquility and universal truths that govern his life. According to him, this is because nature is a work of God where human souls may seek their morality and spiritual illumination.

2.1. Nature as a Source of Spiritual Renewal

Wordsworth makes nature rather profound in his works, as it is the well of soul restoring, seeking solace and a renewed feeling of heart to those exhausted of the death-giving effort that life demands. In a poem like *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth would remember how it is that his knowledge of nature brought him this eternal tranquility, clarity of mind spirituality. The world of nature is regarded as a healing power that enriches the body and feeds the soul. Wordsworth is of the view that nature can remind of their inner selves and revert to a sense of innocence and cleanliness. Being in the nature, individuals can also understand better themselves and the world, and therefore, become spiritually well beyond the commotion of the daily life.

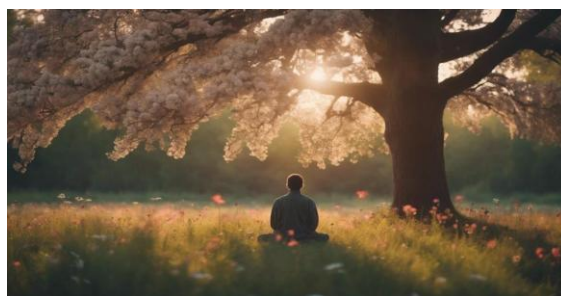


Figure 3: The Spiritual significance of Nature

Nature, then, is to Wordsworth a means of spiritual renovation, which cannot rest upon personal comfort; but nor will moral and philosophical counselling escape him in those scenery, because it reminds him of loftier morality. In this respect, the poet here portrays how daffodils comforted him in the meaning of his spirituality and brought comfort to his solitary time in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*. This emotional rebirth, but not impermanent, to which the speaker turns, as to the recollection of these things he draws life-giving nourishment: the nature of Wordsworth is strong at the heart and aims to develop the soul into some kind of spiritual rebirth that in its turn values life and world freely. Nature to Wordsworth is not something that exists physically but a kind of force that changes the mind and spirit.

2.2. The Role of Nature in Shaping Human Consciousness

Creation of human consciousness by nature was the main theme of Romantic poetry; it is also frequently presented as the influential power that could affect the way people think, evolve emotionally and spiritually. Nature is not however, a mere inert setting to the unfolding of the human mind as conventionally conceived in the mind of Romantic poets like William Wordsworth. Wordsworth was convinced that nature and quietness are the things that can revive the hidden emotions or feelings, returning people to the communion with their inner beings. He gives a lot of emphasis on the reconnection of people to their thoughts through nature in his poem and at times it offers them clarity and inspiration. This connection of nature creates the enlightened state of awareness where individuals can develop the understanding of the universal truth and moral cognition as the correlates of the personal development and emotional well-being.

The other problem is that nature in the setting of the Romantic poem depicts the mysteries of human consciousness. More grandeur of the sceneries, rhythmic tunes and details of the organic life are, indeed, more than figurative images concerning the depth potentiality of the human psyche but about its contradiction or transformation potential. Using the example of the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, it is possible to observe the interdependence of the forces of nature and imagination as giving people a path to the discovery of the outer reality and inner emotional space. Nature then is a tool of inner-reflection, and it enables individuals to analyze their feelings, desires, and even fears that are inside them. By being in close contact with nature, a human being will have the opportunity to discover more about himself/ herself in some deeper and profound understandings. The nature, then, is the ultimate force of the shaping of human consciousness.

3. NATURE IN THE POETRY OF SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), the other great Romanticist, was much more fundamentally and philosophically approached to nature. Though Wordsworth gives more emphasis on nature as a means of comfort and enlightenment on the spiritual life, Coleridge tends to refer to the nature as beautiful as well as mysterious. He saturates his works with the feeling that nature and the human thought are bound together and the imagination is the one that opens to unveil the secret of both.

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), Coleridge develops the supernatural and symbolic aspects of nature. The overall moral and metaphysical themes in the poem are the mariner and nature, specifically, the killing of the albatross. In the eyes of Coleridge, nature is not an entity of goodness but an entity of retribution and rehabilitation. This spiritual accounting of the solitude that the act of violence that the mariner commits against nature causes him is eventually compensated by the prospect of spiritual regeneration through the self-consciousness and the reverence to nature that his reconciliation to nature ultimately results in.

But here is another form of the importance of nature, Coleridge, *Kubla Khan*, 1797, in which the natural is intertwined with the fantastic: the luxuriant and exotic scenery is formed within the poem, and with the help of the human imagination it mixes with nature, producing the very image, which is dreamlike but nevertheless, very much rooted in reality. Nature to Coleridge is not a setting of human action but an influence mingling with the creative and imaginative powers of the human individual to form new worlds of possibility.

Coleridge in *Frost at Midnight* (1798) compares natural silence to the displacement of urban times. The poem shows the longing to the poet to have been back to nature and to find spiritual satisfaction which he discusses in terms of being more straight and more natural. Thus, nature to Coleridge is inspirational and can help human feeling and consciousness to express themselves in its complex diversity.

3.1.Nature's Symbolism in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge employs nature as a strong symbolic force representing both spiritual and psychological dimensions of the Mariner's journey. Early in the poem, nature appears as an alien world that seems to be unconnected with human doings. The killing of the albatross by the Mariner signifies a natural balance and forms a trail of happenings which destroy this balance of nature. Albatross symbolizes the balance of the beautiful world of nature and of God. It was the killing that the Mariner viewed as a moment when the balance of the universe was breached. A symbolism in nature was then shown as evoking effects on the natural order where human beings could have destructive influences upon it and the spirit.



Figure 4: The Rime of Ancient Mariner

As the Mariner and his men continue on, the symbolism of nature reveals the inner turmoil growing in the heart of the Mariner in terms of a sense of guilt. The still lifeless sea symbolizes the spiritual desolation that is awaiting Mariner because of his crime. The burning sun on the sailors' heads and the eerie silence in the ocean show vivid pictures of punishment and isolation. Nature has emphasised the mental condition of the Mariner, and the monotony of the heat, and the sterility of the ocean, give the impression of feelings of guilt, desperation, and loneliness. This is further elaborated where the supernatural aspects in the poem like ghostly forms and spirits floating across the sea offer testament to the fact that nature is not actually only material but metaphysical phenomenon capable of influencing the soul and conscience.

But on the other hand, nature is also restoring, such as spiritual rebirth and reconciliation. This transformation occurs at the point when Marinar can finally learn to see the beauty in the natural world. He restores the beauty he himself had repudiated when he is talking of the slimy things. This new feeling about nature is his ever more awakened perception. It is this understanding of the sacredness of life that makes the Mariner a better person, yet it is in this understanding that nature comes to be symbol to itself: at first, it is punishment and desolation, but eventually it is redemption through healing and reborn. Ultimately, the symbolism of nature in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* portrays a great point in the unity of everything in nature and, consequently, the way it respects to achieve moral and spiritual perfection in the natural world.

3.2.The Imagination and Nature in *Kubla Khan* and *Frost at Midnight*

In *Kubla Khan*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge examines the relationship between the mind and nature, using vivid, dream-like imagery and fantastic sceneries. The poem starts with the narration of the grand and even mythical palace of the Kubla Khan, which is located in a stately pleasure-dome surrounded by gardens, rivers, and forests. In this case, Coleridge combines the nature with the imaginative development. Something fantastic can become sublime by the strength of the imagination. The imagery of the bountiful nature is dominant in this poem, and yet the emphasis is made on the way in which the imagination exalts and rises above the

material world. It is through nature that the mind can be able to imagine beauty and a greater world than the normal world of experience as the speaker envisions the palace and the surrounding. The combination of nature and imagination in Kubla Khan is an indication of the Romantic ideal, in which imagination, inspired by nature, is above the physical reality and can reach the sublime.

In Frost at Midnight, Coleridge approaches the relations between nature and imagination a bit warmer and more personal. The poem narrates of a dark and wintry night inside where the lonely speaker in his room is peering through the window of the outside world. Here in these lines, nature appears to be real and actual: a place too where spiritual and imaginative inspiration happens. The frost outside the window pane, the blackness of the night usher the speaker in a mood of contemplation where his thoughts in the darkness of the night are filled with the childhood experiences and with ideas of what his new-born baby boy would experience. In this poem, imagination becomes an object between the outside world and the inner world of the speaker. In his imagination, the speaker reinvents nature as something very comforting and nurturing, the symbol of the continuity of life, and of the emotional connections that have held generations of people together. This brings a harmony to the soul and a comfortable union to the external space of nature and the warmth of fire at home. This gives a hint that the human imagination is no longer a mere individualistic in introspection but also one that has the unity of seeking nature in the rhythmic movements. The feeling of intimacy of the nature and imagination found in Frost at Midnight leads to the man seeking strength by extracting meaning out of nature as it goes on its heartbeats.

4. COMMON THEMES AND DIFFERENCES IN THEIR VIEWS ON NATURE

While both Wordsworth and Coleridge regard nature as an influential and transformative phenomenon, they differ in regard to the place it occupies in human life. The character of Wordsworth is merely a consolation, an insulation, and a mentor into the ethical. He is interested in the correlation between man and nature which he implies causes individual and spiritual development.

Coleridge in turn is more dynamic in his portrayal of the nature. He not only makes his nature feeding, he also makes it mysterious, mysterious - a mystery that appeals to and challenges the human soul. Where Wordsworth emphasizes on unity with nature, Coleridge tends to make his work more about the confrontations and frictions that are possible to create when we interact with the nature.

Both are, however, united in a great reverberation of their ability to re-create the human mind. What Wordsworth saw was the revelations and inspirations which were pouring out of nature and which brought the poet a long way in the process of comprehending themselves and the world. To Coleridge, nature was destined to investigate everything that existed on the axis of imagination- the unconscious or symbolic levels of reality.

4.1.Shared Reverence for Nature's Power

William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge share the same reverence towards the power of nature as they both believe that nature is inspirational, educative, and revitalizing. To

Wordsworth, nature was a thing that was sacred, life-affirming and could heal soul and provide a balance of emotions. This kind of faith is exhibited in the Tintern Abbey poem where he speaks about the beauty of nature in that it elevates the mind to a high level of calmness and clarity. Despite being heavily affected by nature, Coleridge managed to make his work very mystical and symbolic in such masterpieces as Kubla Khan or The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Nature in the works of both these poets is not only a physical landscape but is assigned moral-spiritual power in order to transform human consciousness. It gave them comfort at the hard moments of their lives and a way of discovering themselves. A common respect to nature shows how significant nature is as a muse and also as a pathfinder to explain the relationship between human encounter and knowing more of truth about life and the universe.

4.2.Diverging Perspectives on Nature's Role in Human Life

While the fact that both Wordsworth and Coleridge are concerned with the profound impact of nature on human life, their perspectives on the role of nature are immensely different, as they are guided by their personal philosophy and poetic methods. Wordsworth considers nature primarily as an ethical and spiritual compass that can give clarity and vision to the man. To him, nature is simple and calming and it can cleanse the soul and can lead the mind to the truth. This kind of relationship can be distinctly observed in the poems such as Tintern Abbey where nature is the nursing factor that brings back the senses of the individual to allow him time to reflect on himself whereby the person again connects with a higher self-awareness and comprehension of the world. The nature, as visualized by Wordsworth, is strongly idealistic in that it is an abode of self regeneration, emotional healing as well as revisiting of the lost innocence. To him, nature shapes the life of human being by establishing harmony between the human being and nature.

Coleridge becomes more complicated about nature, regarding it as transcendent and mysterious. He also believes in the strength of nature in working with the human soul, yet many times he describes nature and gives the emphasis on its power to awe, fear, and the unknown. Such a manifestation of nature is not only a place of peace but it is a supernatural creature, benevolent or vengeant, which is a manifestation of inner conflict and guilt of the human spirit. Coleridge is more symbolic and mystical in nature and in certain instances the conflict between conscious and unconscious mind. Generally, to him nature was never a shining path of revelation. More so a very complex sphere of human souls struggling out the final and most profound thoughts on human desires, human feelings or fear. But, two poets gazing up at nature, which was a so much greater part in the action of human consciousness, Wordsworth appeared to be principally emphasizing the characteristic of a healing in nature itself, as Coleridge placed stress on its more mystic and agonizing aspects.

5. CONCLUSION

The examples of the poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge prove the significance of nature in Romantic movement. They both view nature as inspirational and insightful but present two completely different sides of the connection of nature and the human mind. In Wordsworth, nature is a sanctuary where the spirit is formed with just straightforward sense of morality. Nature offers the groundwork to speculate more on the mysteries of existence

as envisioned by Coleridge because it is the mystery and what defies imagination. A totally different kind of nature characterizes both the poets, a nature that comprises the very fabric of human experience as well as concerns not only the outer but the inner world too. Through the exploration of nature, Wordsworth and Coleridge deliver timelessness into deep connections between the human world and the natural one and the imagination.

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