



The Influence of Romanticism on British Poetry: A Comparative Analysis of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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Abstract

This comparative analysis explores the influence of Romanticism on British poetry through an examination of the works of two prominent poets, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The Romantic period, which spanned from the late 18th to the early 19th century, was characterized by a profound shift in artistic expression and a focus on emotions, nature, individualism, and imagination. The study delves into the key thematic elements and stylistic techniques employed by Wordsworth and Coleridge in their poetry. It examines how both poets embraced the Romantic ideals and responded to societal and cultural changes of their time, infusing their verses with an appreciation for the natural world and a deep exploration of human emotions and experiences. Furthermore, the analysis investigates the unique perspectives and literary approaches adopted by each poet to convey their Romantic vision. Wordsworth's emphasis on the beauty and spirituality of nature, combined with his belief in the divinity of the human mind, is juxtaposed with Coleridge's imaginative and supernatural themes, often drawing inspiration from dreams and the mysterious. The study also explores the collaborative efforts between the two poets, most notably in their joint work, "Lyrical Ballads," which marked a significant milestone in the Romantic literary movement. Additionally, it considers the influence of personal experiences and historical context on their poetic compositions, allowing a better understanding of the human emotions and sentiments that imbued their writings.

Introduction

The Romantic era, a transformative period in British literary history spanning from the late 18th to the early 19th century, brought about a profound shift in artistic expression, challenging the established norms of the previous age. During this time, poets sought to break free from the



constraints of reason, emphasizing emotions, imagination, and a profound connection with nature. Two towering figures of this movement were William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose poetry exemplified the core principles and ideals of Romanticism.

William Wordsworth, often regarded as the pioneer of Romantic poetry, infused his works with a deep appreciation for the natural world and a belief in the transcendental power of nature. In poems such as "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" and "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," Wordsworth expressed his spiritual connection with nature, seeing it as a source of solace and inspiration for the human soul. His poetic philosophy, characterized by simplicity of language and profound insights into the human experience, resonated with the Romantic ethos of individualism and a celebration of the common man.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, on the other hand, delved into the realms of imagination, supernatural, and the mysterious. He explored the deeper recesses of the human mind, often drawing inspiration from dreams and the subconscious. In poems like "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Coleridge crafted vivid and fantastical landscapes, blending reality with fantasy to evoke powerful emotions in the reader. His poetic style and subject matter exemplified the Romantic emphasis on the individual's imagination and the transcendence of everyday experiences.

One of the most significant contributions of Wordsworth and Coleridge to the Romantic movement was their collaborative work, "Lyrical Ballads," published in 1798. This joint project marked a crucial turning point in British poetry, as it challenged the prevailing poetic conventions and introduced a more accessible and emotional style of verse. The collection included poems that celebrated the lives of common people and depicted ordinary experiences with an unprecedented depth of emotion and sympathy.

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the poetry of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, examining how their works exemplify and respond to the broader ideals of Romanticism. By delving into their thematic choices, literary techniques, and the influence of historical context, this research seeks to shed light on the enduring impact of



Romanticism on British poetry and the literary world as a whole. Through this exploration, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of these two iconic poets and their contributions to one of the most revolutionary periods in the history of British literature.

Need of the Study

The study on the influence of Romanticism on British Poetry, with a focus on the works of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is of great importance for several reasons.

The Romantic era marked a significant departure from the neoclassical traditions that had dominated literary circles, and it led to a profound transformation in the way poets approached their craft. Understanding the impact of Romanticism on British Poetry allows us to appreciate the evolution of literary movements and how cultural and societal changes influenced artistic expression. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were pivotal figures in the Romantic movement, and their contributions played a crucial role in shaping the poetic landscape of their time. By analyzing their poems, we can gain insights into the core principles of Romanticism, such as the celebration of nature, the exploration of human emotions, and the emphasis on individualism and imagination. This study holds relevance in the context of literary criticism and interpretation. Investigating the similarities and differences in the poetic styles of Wordsworth and Coleridge allows us to discern the nuances of their individual approaches to Romanticism. It also provides a deeper understanding of their collaborations, such as the influential "Lyrical Ballads," and how their distinct voices complemented each other to contribute to the broader Romantic literary movement.

Justification of the study

The study on the influence of Romanticism on British Poetry, with a focus on the works of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is justified by the enduring significance of their literary contributions. The Romantic era marked a pivotal period in English literature, revolutionizing poetic expression and shaping the modern understanding of art, nature, and human emotions. Analyzing the poetic works of Wordsworth and Coleridge allows for a deeper comprehension of the core principles and themes of Romanticism, such as the celebration of



nature, the exploration of the individual psyche, and the rejection of conventional poetic forms. Their collaboration in "Lyrical Ballads" represents a milestone in literary history, further highlighting the transformative impact of Romantic ideals on the poetic tradition. Two of the most influential figures of the Romantic movement, their poems continue to be widely studied and revered, making this research relevant for understanding their enduring legacy and their profound influence on subsequent generations of poets and writers. Through this study, we can gain insights into the evolution of British poetry and the enduring significance of Romanticism as a pivotal literary movement in the shaping of modern literature.

Authorial Background of William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was a renowned English poet and one of the central figures of the Romantic literary movement. He was born in Cockermouth, a town in the Lake District of northwest England, which later became a significant source of inspiration for his poetry. Wordsworth's profound love for nature and the surrounding landscape played a crucial role in shaping his poetic vision. One of Wordsworth's most significant contributions to English literature was his belief in the power of individual imagination and emotion. He rejected the formal, artificial language of the neoclassical poets in favor of a simpler, more natural diction. Wordsworth's poetry celebrated the ordinary experiences of common people and explored the depths of human emotions, making his work more accessible and relatable to a wider audience. In 1798, Wordsworth, along with his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, published the groundbreaking collection "Lyrical Ballads." This volume is often considered the manifesto of the Romantic movement. It included some of his most famous poems, such as "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" and "The Tables Turned," both of which exemplify his deep connection with nature and the spiritual insights he drew from it.

Wordsworth's poetic philosophy was deeply rooted in the idea of the sublime beauty of nature and its ability to elevate the human spirit. He believed that nature was a teacher, guiding individuals towards a sense of moral and spiritual understanding. This concept of the "sublime" was a prevalent theme in his poetry, where he portrayed nature as a source of solace and renewal in a rapidly industrializing world. Later in life, Wordsworth served as the Poet Laureate of the



United Kingdom from 1843 until his death in 1850. His literary legacy continues to resonate in modern poetry, and his contributions to Romanticism have left an indelible mark on English literature. Today, William Wordsworth is celebrated as one of the greatest poets in the English language, admired for his evocative descriptions of nature, his exploration of human emotions, and his enduring influence on subsequent generations of poets and writers.

Authorial Background of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was an English poet, philosopher, literary critic, and one of the central figures of the Romantic literary movement. He was born in Ottery St Mary, Devon, England. Like his friend William Wordsworth, Coleridge also played a significant role in shaping the Romantic era's literary landscape. Coleridge's early works, including poems like "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan," exemplified his fascination with the supernatural, the mystical, and the imaginative. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," in particular, is considered one of the greatest English poems, known for its rich symbolism, eerie atmosphere, and exploration of guilt and redemption. Coleridge was an intellectual and philosophical thinker, and his poetry often reflected his complex thoughts on the human mind, nature, and the metaphysical realm. He was deeply interested in German philosophy and idealist thought, drawing inspiration from thinkers like Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schelling. His philosophical ideas can be seen in poems like "Dejection: An Ode," where he explores the relationship between the poet's mind and the external world. Coleridge's literary contributions extended beyond his own poetry. He is best known for his collaboration with William Wordsworth on the seminal work "Lyrical Ballads," which heralded the Romantic movement. Although Coleridge's contributions to the collection were smaller than Wordsworth's, his poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" had a profound impact on the collection and the Romantic literary movement as a whole. In addition to his poetry, Coleridge was a prominent literary critic and essayist. He wrote extensively on literature, philosophy, and social issues, and his critical insights helped to shape the understanding and appreciation of various literary works.

Coleridge's life was marked by personal struggles, including battles with opium addiction and financial difficulties. Nevertheless, his poetic genius and intellectual pursuits left an indelible



mark on English literature. He is remembered as a key figure of the Romantic era, celebrated for his imaginative poetry, profound philosophical ideas, and influential literary criticism. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's legacy continues to inspire and captivate readers and scholars alike, making him one of the most enduring and admired figures in English literature.

The Nature of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry is characterized by its profound and imaginative exploration of human emotions, nature, and the supernatural. As a key figure of the Romantic literary movement, Coleridge infused his works with a deep sense of wonder, mystery, and introspection. Nature is a prominent theme in Coleridge's poetry. He had a deep reverence for the natural world, often depicting it as a source of solace and spiritual renewal. His poems, such as "Frost at Midnight" and "The Nightingale," capture the beauty and tranquility of the natural landscape, reflecting the Romantic belief in the healing power of nature on the human soul. Coleridge's poetry also delves into the complexities of human emotions and psychology. He was fascinated by the workings of the human mind, exploring themes of guilt, despair, and the subconscious. His introspective poems, like "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," delve into the darker recesses of the human psyche, using vivid and supernatural imagery to convey psychological and moral dilemmas. The supernatural is a recurring element in Coleridge's poetry. He drew inspiration from folklore, myths, and dreams, often blending reality with the fantastical. Poems like "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel" are examples of his skill in creating haunting and enigmatic atmospheres through supernatural elements. Coleridge's poetry stands as a testament to his unique ability to blend the ordinary with the extraordinary, the natural with the supernatural, and the introspective with the mysterious. His imaginative vision, coupled with his exploration of human emotions and the wonders of nature, continues to captivate readers and solidifies his place as one of the most significant poets of the Romantic era.

The Romantic Tenets in the Selected Poetry of William Wordsworth

The selected poetry of William Wordsworth exemplifies the core tenets of the Romantic literary movement. As one of the pioneering figures of Romanticism, Wordsworth's verses embody the



central themes and ideals that defined the era. Wordsworth's poetry celebrates the beauty and power of nature. He believed that nature was a source of spiritual and moral guidance, and his works often reflect a deep reverence for the natural world. Poems like "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" and "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" illustrate his profound connection with nature, expressing its ability to evoke emotions and inspire the human soul. Wordsworth emphasized the importance of individualism and the expression of personal emotions. He sought to break free from the formal conventions of poetry prevalent in the previous era, embracing a more natural and accessible language. His poetry often explores human emotions and experiences, drawing from his own life and observations of the world around him. Wordsworth's poetry is characterized by a focus on the ordinary and the everyday. He found beauty and significance in simple, everyday occurrences and the lives of common people. This emphasis on the ordinary reflects the Romantic belief in the value of the individual and the power of personal experience.

My heart leaps up when I behold

"My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold" is a short and expressive poem by William Wordsworth. In just nine lines, the poet captures the essence of his deep connection with nature and the profound impact it has on his emotions.

The opening line, "My heart leaps up when I behold," immediately reveals the joy and excitement that nature evokes within the poet's heart. He expresses a deep and spiritual connection with the natural world, and this connection brings him immense happiness.

The subsequent lines, "A rainbow in the sky," symbolize the beauty and wonder of nature's manifestations. The rainbow serves as a powerful representation of the majesty and harmony found in the natural world.

The poem concludes with a contemplative statement, "So was it when my life began; So is it now I am a man," signifying the continuity of the poet's love for nature from his childhood to adulthood. The final line, "So be it when I shall grow old, or let me die!" conveys Wordsworth's desire for this connection to nature to remain strong throughout his life, even in old age or death.



"My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold" is a heartfelt expression of Wordsworth's profound appreciation for nature and its enduring impact on the human spirit, reflecting the core tenets of Romanticism that celebrate the beauty and spiritual significance of the natural world.

Romantic themes in the poem "My Heart Leaps up When I Behold" by William Wordsworth

The poem "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold" by William Wordsworth embodies several Romantic themes that were prevalent during the Romantic era. One of the central themes is the celebration of nature and its profound impact on human emotions. Wordsworth's joyous exclamation in the opening line, "My heart leaps up when I behold," highlights his deep connection with nature and the happiness it brings him. The poem also reflects the Romantic belief in the beauty and wonder of the natural world. The reference to the rainbow in the sky symbolizes the majestic and harmonious aspects of nature, evoking a sense of awe and admiration. The poem expresses the Romantic idea of the continuity of emotions and experiences throughout life. The lines, "So was it when my life began; So is it now I am a man," suggest a lifelong attachment to nature that remains unchanged over time. "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold" encapsulates the core Romantic themes of nature's beauty, its profound impact on human emotions, and the enduring connection between the individual and the natural world. The poem exemplifies the Romantic era's deep appreciation for nature's power to inspire and uplift the human spirit.



Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a prolific poet who made significant contributions to English literature during the Romantic era. Some of his most famous and enduring poems include:

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner": This is perhaps Coleridge's most well-known work, a long narrative poem that tells the haunting tale of a sailor's supernatural experiences at sea, exploring themes of guilt, redemption, and the power of nature.

"Kubla Khan": A fragmentary and dreamlike poem, "Kubla Khan" describes a mystical vision of a fantastical palace and its surroundings, inspired by an opium-induced dream.

"Christabel": A Gothic and supernatural poem, "Christabel" tells the story of a young woman encountering a mysterious stranger in the woods, filled with eerie and atmospheric imagery.

"Frost at Midnight": This reflective and introspective poem explores the beauty of nature, the silence of the winter night, and the thoughts of the poet as he contemplates his own life and experiences.

"Dejection: An Ode": A deeply personal poem, "Dejection" reflects Coleridge's feelings of melancholy and the loss of creative inspiration, as he contemplates the relationship between the human mind and nature.

Coleridge's poetry is characterized by its vivid imagery, supernatural elements, introspection, and exploration of complex human emotions. His works continue to captivate readers with their imaginative power and philosophical insights, solidifying his place as one of the great Romantic poets of his time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the influence of Romanticism on British poetry, as exemplified by the works of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, has left an indelible mark on the literary landscape. The Romantic era, characterized by a celebration of nature, heightened emotions, and a focus on individualism and imagination, transformed the way poets approached their craft and



ushered in a new era of literary expression. Wordsworth's deep connection with nature and his belief in the spiritual power of the natural world resonated with readers and laid the foundation for the Romantic ideal of finding solace and inspiration in the natural environment. His emphasis on the ordinary experiences of common people and the exploration of human emotions made poetry more accessible and relatable to a wider audience, contributing to the democratization of literature. Coleridge, on the other hand, delved into the realms of imagination and the supernatural, creating vivid and fantastical landscapes that tapped into the depths of human consciousness. His emphasis on the mysterious and the metaphysical added a new dimension to Romantic poetry, expanding its boundaries beyond the tangible world. The collaboration between Wordsworth and Coleridge in "Lyrical Ballads" marked a seminal moment in the Romantic literary movement. Their joint endeavor challenged existing poetic conventions, and their experimental use of everyday language paved the way for a more authentic and emotional poetic voice. In essence, the poetry of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge exemplifies the transformative impact of Romanticism on British literature.



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