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UNIT I

ROMANTIC THEORY & CRITICISM

1.0. Introduction:

Much before William Wordsworth started writing, the early Romantic poets like James Thomson (1700-48), Oliver Goldsmith (1728-74), Thomas Chatterton (1752-70), Thomas Gray (1716-71), William Collins (1718-63), William Cowper (1731-1800), George Crabbe (1754-1832), Robert Burns (1759-95), and William Blake (1757-1827) deviated from the neo-classic insistence on rules. Wordsworth is perhaps the only romantic poet who made his poetic experiences the locus of his critical discourse. Unlike Coleridge, he was not a theorist. Instead he unraveled before us the workings of the mind of the poet, and therefore, Wordsworth's literary criticism ceases to be criticism in its most literal sense. It comes out as the matrix where the poet's mind generates emotions and feelings with that much of intensity and passion required for transmitting them into poetic experience which forms the basis of poetic composition. From this perspective, Wordsworth's *Preface* to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800 can be seen as a poetic "manifesto," or "statement of revolutionary aims."

It is one of the curiosities of literary history that the strongholds of the Romantic Movement were England and Germany, not the countries of the romance languages themselves. Thus it is from the historians of English and

German literature that we inherit the convenient set of terminal dates for the Romantic period, beginning in 1798, the year of the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge and of the composition of *Hymns to the Night* by Novalis, and ending in 1832, the year which marked the deaths of both Sir Walter Scott and Goethe. However, as an international movement affecting all the arts, Romanticism begins at least in the 1770's and continues into the second half of the nineteenth century, later for American literature than for European, and later in some of the arts, like music and painting, than in literature. This extended chronological spectrum (1770-1870) also permits recognition as Romantic the poetry of Robert Burns and William Blake in England, the early writings of Goethe and Schiller in Germany, and the great period of influence for Rousseau's writings throughout Europe.

The early Romantic period thus coincides with what is often called the "age of revolutions"--including, of course, the American (1776) and the French (1789) revolutions--an age of upheavals in political, economic, and social traditions, the age which witnessed the initial transformations of the Industrial Revolution. A revolutionary energy was also at the core of Romanticism, which quite consciously set out to transform not only the theory and practice of poetry (and all art), but the very way we perceive the world. Some of its major precepts have survived into the twentieth century and still affect our contemporary period.

1.1. Romanticism:

Romanticism (also the Romantic era or the Romantic period) was an artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century and in most areas was at its peak in the approximate period

from 1800 to 1850. Partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, it was also a revolt against the aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment and a reaction against the scientific rationalization of nature. It was embodied most strongly in the visual arts, music, and literature, but had a major impact on historiography, education and the natural sciences. Its effect on politics was considerable and complex; while for much of the peak Romantic period it was associated with liberalism and radicalism, its long-term effect on the growth of nationalism was probably more significant.

The movement validated intense emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience, placing new emphasis on such emotions as apprehension, horror and terror, and awe—especially that which is experienced in confronting the sublimity of untamed nature and its picturesque qualities: both new aesthetic categories. It elevated folk art and ancient custom to a noble status, made spontaneity a desirable characteristic (as in the musical impromptu), and argued for a natural epistemology of human activities, as conditioned by nature in the form of language and customary usage. Romanticism reached beyond the rational and Classicist ideal models to raise a revived medievalism and elements of art and narrative perceived to be authentically medieval in an attempt to escape the confines of population growth, urban sprawl, and industrialism. Romanticism embraced the exotic, the unfamiliar, and the distant in modes more authentic than Rococo *chinoiserie*, harnessing the power of the imagination to envision and to escape.

Although the movement was rooted in the German *Sturm und Drang* movement, which prized intuition and emotion over the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the events of and ideologies that led to the French Revolution

planted the seeds from which both Romanticism and the Counter-Enlightenment sprouted. The confines of the Industrial Revolution also had their influence on Romanticism, which was in part an escape from modern realities. Indeed, in the second half of the 19th century, "Realism" was offered as a polar opposite to Romanticism. Romanticism assigned a high value to the achievements of 'heroic' individualists and artists, whose pioneering examples, it maintained, would raise the quality of society. It also vouched for the individual imagination as a critical authority allowed of freedom from classical notions of form in art. There was a strong recourse to historical and natural inevitability, a *Zeitgeist*, in the representation of its ideas.

1.1.1. The Term:

The group of words with the root "Roman" in the various European languages, such as romance and Romanesque, has a complicated history, but by the middle of the 18th century "romantic" in English and *romantique* in French were both in common use as adjectives of praise for natural phenomena such as views and sunsets, in a sense close to modern English usage but without the implied sexual element. The application of the term to literature first became common in Germany, where the circle around the Schlegel brothers, critics August and Friedrich, began to speak of *romantische Poesie* ("romantic poetry") in the 1790s, contrasting it with "classic" but in terms of spirit rather than merely dating. Friedrich Schlegel wrote in his *Dialogue on Poetry* (1800), "I seek and find the romantic among the older moderns, in Shakespeare, in Cervantes, in Italian poetry, in that age of chivalry, love and fable, from which the phenomenon and the word itself are derived." In both French and German the closeness of the adjective to *roman*, meaning the fairly new literary form of the novel, had some effect on the sense of the word in those languages. The use of the word did not become general

very quickly, and was probably spread more widely in France by its persistent use by Madame de Staël in her *De L'Allemagne* (1813), recounting her travels in Germany. In England Wordsworth wrote in a preface to his poems of 1815 of the "romantic harp" and "classic lyre", but in 1820 Byron could still write, perhaps slightly disingenuously, "I perceive that in Germany, as well as in Italy, there is a great struggle about what they call 'Classical' and 'Romantic', terms which were not subjects of classification in England, at least when I left it four or five years ago". It is only from the 1820s that Romanticism certainly knew itself by its name, and in 1824 the Académie française took the wholly ineffective step of issuing a decree condemning it in literature.

1.1.2. Context and Place in History:

The more precise characterization and specific definition of Romanticism has been the subject of debate in the fields of intellectual history and literary history throughout the 20th century, without any great measure of consensus emerging. That it was part of the Counter-Enlightenment, a reaction against the Age of Enlightenment, is generally accepted. Its relationship to the French Revolution which began in 1789 in the very early stages of the period, is clearly important, but highly variable depending on geography and individual reactions. Most Romantics can be said to be broadly progressive in their views, but a considerable number always had, or developed, a wide range of conservative views, and nationalism was in many countries strongly associated with Romanticism, as discussed in detail below.

In philosophy and the history of ideas, Romanticism was seen by Isaiah Berlin as disrupting for over a century the classic Western traditions of rationality

and the very idea of moral absolutes and agreed values, leading "to something like the melting away of the very notion of objective truth", and hence not only to nationalism, but also fascism and totalitarianism, with a gradual recovery coming only after the catharsis of World War II. For the Romantics, Berlin says,

in the realm of ethics, politics, aesthetics it was the authenticity and sincerity of the pursuit of inner goals that mattered; this applied equally to individuals and groups — states, nations, movements. This is most evident in the aesthetics of romanticism, where the notion of eternal models, a Platonic vision of ideal beauty, which the artist seeks to convey, however imperfectly, on canvas or in sound, is replaced by a passionate belief in spiritual freedom, individual creativity. The painter, the poet, the composer do not hold up a mirror to nature, however ideal, but invent; they do not imitate (the doctrine of mimesis), but create not merely the means but the goals that they pursue; these goals represent the self-expression of the artist's own unique, inner vision, to set aside which in response to the demands of some "external" voice — church, state, public opinion, family friends, arbiters of taste — is an act of betrayal of what alone justifies their existence for those who are in any sense creative.

Arthur Lovejoy attempted to demonstrate the difficulty of defining Romanticism in his seminal article "On The Discrimination of Romanticisms" in his *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948); some scholars see Romanticism as essentially continuous with the present, some like Robert Hughes see in it the inaugural moment of modernity, and some like Chateaubriand, 'Novalis' and Samuel Taylor Coleridge see it as the beginning of a tradition of resistance to Enlightenment rationalism—a 'Counter-Enlightenment'— to be associated most closely with German Romanticism. An earlier definition comes from Charles

Baudelaire: "Romanticism is precisely situated neither in choice of subject nor exact truth, but in the way of feeling."

The end of the Romantic era is marked in some areas by a new style of Realism, which affected literature, especially the novel and drama, painting, and even music, through Verismo opera. This movement was led by France, with Balzac and Flaubert in literature and Courbet in painting; Stendhal and Goya were important precursors of Realism in their respective media. However, Romantic styles, now often representing the established and safe style against which Realists rebelled, continued to flourish in many fields for the rest of the century and beyond. In music such works from after about 1850 are referred to by some writers as "Late Romantic" and by others as "Neoromantic" or "Postromantic", but other fields do not usually use these terms; in English literature and painting the convenient term "Victorian" avoids having to characterize the period further.

In northern Europe, the Early Romantic visionary optimism and belief that the world was in the process of great change and improvement had largely vanished, and some art became more conventionally political and polemical as its creators engaged polemically with the world as it was. Elsewhere, including in very different ways the United States and Russia, feelings that great change was underway or just about to come were still possible. Displays of intense emotion in art remained prominent, as did the exotic and historical settings pioneered by the Romantics, but experimentation with form and technique was generally reduced, often replaced with meticulous technique, as in the poems of Tennyson or many paintings. If not realist, late 19th-century art was often extremely detailed, and pride was taken in adding authentic details in a way that earlier Romantics did not trouble with. Many Romantic ideas about the nature and purpose of art, above all

the pre-eminent importance of originality, continued to be important for later generations, and often underlie modern views, despite opposition from theorists.

2.0. The Romantic Revival:

It is a fact that the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars and other social and political events did not initiate the Romantic Movement but enriched its content. The term romantic, however, first appeared in the mid seventeenth century English to describe what Chew and Altick called “the fabulous, the extravagant, the factious, and the unreal.” However, by the mid eighteenth century the term came to describe “pleasing” scenes and situation. What followed next was a prevalence of instincts and emotions over rationalism and common sense. It seems that the term romantic as a literary phenomenon was not perceived in the same vein and with the same degree of intensity in different contexts. This resulted in the use of the term to describe different tendencies at different times in different contexts. The same can be said of the term ‘romanticism’. It refers to a theory, a school of thought, and a matter of technique and so on. The poets and the writers not only sought to emancipate themselves from the fetters of neo-classical rules but also experimented with the old forms, revived some of them which went into the oblivion because the neo-classical writers considered them to be vulgar and undignified. In course of such experimentation with forms, revival of form or creations of new forms, following tendencies were noticed:

- The poet put more emphasis on imagination rather than intellect. They allowed free play of imagination in their poetry. Their free flights of fancy often led them to the strange, unfamiliar and the distant.

- The infatuation for the remote, the exotic and the mysterious enkindled in the romantic poets a love for the medieval. Just as the writers of the eighteenth century turned to classical writers for inspiration, the poets of the romantic revival turned to medieval age for inspiration. “The essential elements of the romantic spirit are curiosity and the love of beauty, and it is as the accidental effect of these qualities only, that it seeks the Middle Ages, because in the overcharged atmosphere of the Middle Ages there are unworked sources of romantic effect, of a strange beauty to be won by strong imagination out of things unlikely or remote.” (Pater, W.....)

- They gave free reign to their emotion and passion. They abhorred classical restraint and obsession with reason.
- Their preoccupation with imagination and emotions made their poetry primarily subjective. This was in contrast with the classical preference for objectivity in poetry. For them poetry was not genuine if it was not personal.
- Poetry became closer to everyday life of common man. The ‘poetic diction’ of the eighteenth century was rejected as artificial and unnatural.
- ”Return to nature” was their motto. They turned away from the artificial urban life and found refuge in the country life and nature.

They worshipped nature. Love of nature for them meant love of mankind, humanism and a more world view that encompassed the idea of freedom and equality.

The following table presents the contrast between the neo-classic and the romantic:

Romantic	Neo-Classical
Emphasis on Imagination	Emphasis on Intellect
Free Play of Emotions and Passions	Restraint and Obsession with Reason
Proximity to the everyday life of common man	Remoteness or aloofness from everyday life
Inspiration sought from country life and nature	Incidents from urban life prevailed
Primarily Subjective	Primarily Objective
Turned to Medieval Age for inspiration	Turned to Classical writers for inspiration

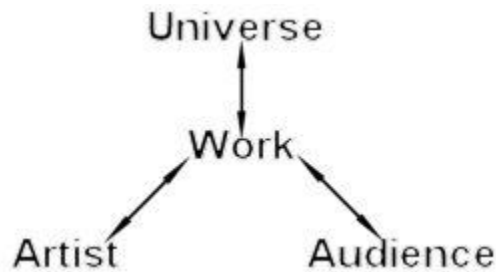
2.1. Impact of French Revolution:

The Romantic Revival is the result of many forces. One of the significant forces that shaped Romantic Revival is the French Revolution (1789–1799). The French Revolution in its bottom line brought a violent end to feudal powers and monarchy and asserted the right and supremacy of the individual free will. The new philosophy of the rights of all men was expressed both in politics and literature. This led to the “Liberalism in Literature.” The political liberalism of French Revolution inspired the liberation, individuality and rejection of prescribed rules in the Romantic Literature. The Romantic poets were inspired by the ideals

of equality, fraternity and liberty. They revolted against the tyranny of set formulas, rules and conventions. They asserted the dignity of individual spirit. This new form of philosophy became one of the main guidelines of a new school of Romantic poets, writers and philosophers. Romantic's search for fresh subject, their belief in nature, their emphasis upon spontaneity and their belief that everyone has a right to express his own idea are the features of individualism which was the prime demand of French Revolution.

3.0. Classicism and Romanticism:

In a famous book, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), M.H. Abrams distinguishes theories of art and criticism in terms of whether and how they privilege one or more terms or relationships in a set diagrammed like this:



So, some of our oldest theories of art define and value (or, in Plato's case, condemn) art in terms of the relationship of *Mimesis* which obtains between works of art and the universe, the world to which it relates. This is a major element of Classicism. Likewise, there are long traditions which characterize and value art in terms of its ability to 'please and instruct', and consequently focus on the rhetorical or pragmatic relationship between work and audience. There is a line from Greek

theories of Catharsis (q.v. 'Mimesis and Katharsis' on this website), through the history of rhetoric to contemporary reader - response criticism, as surveyed, for example, in Robert Holub's *Reception Theory* or in Elizabeth Freund's *The Return of the Reader*.

One might say that before the Romantic movement (say, 1770 - 1830) most theories of art simply took for granted the unimportance of the relationship between artist and work; where it obtruded itself (as in lyric poetry or the self - portrait), they responded by regarding those genres as minor and not worth theorizing. In the eighteenth century, says Abrams, Shakespeare's sonnets, unlike his plays, were simply ignored or condemned (p. 246).

Romanticism is, then, a critical watershed as well as a permanent possibility of artistic orientation, an orientation which emphasizes and values the work of art as Expressive of the artist's mind. Historically, the Romantic movement - for example, in English poetry and the theorizing of it by Wordsworth and Coleridge - wants the work to be expressive of the artist's emotions and feelings: poetry, says Wordsworth in the 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), 'is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', not directed in their origin to any external audience, and illuminating the objective world with the lamp of a subjective experience.

In Romanticism as a movement, Poetry - as the expression of emotion - is categorically contrasted with Science, as representation of reality. It is not opposed to prose, which may be poetic or scientific, according to its informing subjective or objective drive.

One might say that there is no reason not to regard as 'Romantic' any theory or practice of art which values the self-realization of the artist in his or her work, even when what is realized is more like a vision, or ideas and beliefs, than like a realization of 'simple' emotion. In this way one would be led to distinguish the question of whether self-expression or self-realization is important in or defining of art from the question of whether certain traditionally romantic oppositions, such as those between feeling and reason; subjective and objective; emotion and fact, are tenable. There are, of course, many good arguments to suggest that the stock romantic oppositions are untenable. For a survey of the arguments, see David Best's *The Rationality of Feeling*.

Romanticism as a movement implied and articulated significantly fresh evaluative criteria for art, notably the criteria of sincerity and spontaneity. What we now think of as later aestheticism and decadentism is, in part, a reaction against such criteria as demonstrably inadequate to judge a work of art. Thus Oscar Wilde in 'The Decay of Lying' (against, inter alia, Mrs Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere*) and, in another context, Baudelaire's address to the 'hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frere', Modern neo-classicism is, one might say, a cleaned-up version of aestheticism and decadence, which insists - in opposition to the romantic orientation and the romantic criteria - on the autonomy of the work of art, on judging the work itself, 'the words on the page', all considerations of biography (and hence of sincerity and spontaneity) excluded. Though associated with theorists of conservative and illiberal persuasions, notably the American 'New Critics' and T.S. Eliot, neo-classicism has also had its radical spokesmen, foremost among them Brecht, whose epic theatre is consciously anti-romantic (see, for example, Brecht's *Messingkauf Dialogues*).

Of course, for educationists the Romantic orientation and criteria were and remain of immense importance. This extends beyond the Romantic emphasis on self-expression, sincerity and spontaneity to the connected romantic claim that poetry (art) does not 'please and instruct' but is directly effective as an emotionally and, more generally, *morally* educative force. For Wordsworth, says Abrams, 'poetry, by sensitizing, purifying and strengthening the feelings, directly *makes us better*' (p. 330). John Stuart Mill, in an 1835 essay on Tennyson's poems, states the claim in its grandest terms, speaking of 'the noblest end of poetry as an intellectual pursuit, that of acting upon the desires and characters of mankind through their emotions, to raise them towards the perfection of their nature' (cited in Abrams, p. 334).

This is still a characteristic way of justifying the arts in education, the background matrix of which is an equation of imagination, sympathy and moral development. But after Auschwitz, says the German critic Theodor Adorno, such claims are unsustainable. Worse, 'to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (in Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, pp. 188 - 89). It is worse than insensitive to go on as if the redemptive claims of the Romantic movement had not been hopelessly discredited by history, says Adorno.

Of course, there is an enormous shift in arts education away from the orientations and values of Romanticism, or, more specifically, self-expression, as is evidenced in the work of the arts educationist Peter Abbs in such books as *Living Powers* and *A Is for Aesthetic*. Romanticism yields to a neo-classical emphasis on the work itself, on its forms and genres, its traditions and techniques,

and arts education becomes less the search for sincerity, spontaneity and self-expression than the patient initiation of pupils into the forms of artistic knowing.

On the other hand, if there is nothing to be known felt, imagined, concretized through the forms of artistic knowing, then they have no more claim to our interest than a parlour game. Deprived of a link to deep human concerns, poetry would be no better than a playstation game. (Trevor Pateman)

3.1. Romantic Theory:

The British Romantic period designates the time period 1785–1830. Romantic poets and writers would not have considered themselves similar and many of the writers considered canonical today were not popular until later in their careers or after their deaths. This period, nonetheless, designates a time in which many writers were responding to similar events and ideas about the form and function of literature.

The period was socially turbulent and imported revolutionary ideas created social conflict, often along class lines. The French Revolution had an important influence on the fictional and nonfictional writing of the Romantic period, inspiring writers to address themes of democracy and human rights and to consider the function of revolution as a form of apocalyptic change. In the beginning, the French Revolution was supported by writers because of the opportunities it seemed to offer for political and social change. When those expectations were frustrated in later years, Romantic poets used the spirit of revolution to help characterize their poetic philosophies. The Industrial Revolution, while bringing

about changes in manufacturing and thus improving the efficiency of production, brought about a different and related reaction in literature that addressed the rights of the laboring classes and improved labor conditions.

This revolutionary spirit prompted Romantic poets to posit new theories about the function and form of poetry. These arguments are demonstrated in Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*. Romantic poets presented a theory of poetry in direct opposition to representative eighteenth-century theories of poetry as imitative of human life and nature by suggesting that poetic inspiration was located not outside in nature, but inside the poet's mind, in a "spontaneous" emotional response. This new theory of poetry also posited new possible subjects of poetic expression in a revaluation of the outcast, delinquent, and the supernatural. Indeed, it often reveled in representations that made the ordinary appear miraculous. This wonder at the ordinary was often achieved in making the natural appear supernatural. Such representations often exemplify the interest of much Romantic poetry in describing and depicting alternate states of consciousness.

Literature also became a profitable business in the Romantic period with the increase of potential readership due to education reform and increased literacy. Improved printing technology and a new aesthetic valuation of art and literature for its own sake contributed to the growth of literature as a business. Attendant upon the increased profitability of literature was the growth of the periodical industry and the consequent added importance of the essay as a literary and critical form. Taking inspiration from their poetic counterparts, Romantic essayists prized a subjective viewpoint and often took on an autobiographical tone.

In addition to the essay, drama and the novel experienced formal revision in the Romantic era. Playwrights such as Shelley and Byron attempted to revitalize the poetic play, but without much practical success. Aside from a lack of popularity, only Drury Lane and Covent Garden theaters had the right to produce spoken drama thanks to a licensing act that was not repealed until 1843. Unlike drama, the novel increased in popularity and prominence with two new genres: the gothic novel and the novel of purpose. While the latter sought to propagate the social and political theories of the day, the former was less didactic and more interested in terror, perversion, and mystery. William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* is an appropriate example of the novel of purpose. Ann Radcliffe, Gregory Lewis, and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley all wrote gothic fiction. Although interested in historic novels more than gothic or novels of purpose, Sir Walter Scott also rose to prominence in this period.

The chief precepts of the Romantic Theory are as follows:

- **Imagination:**

The imagination was elevated to a position as the supreme faculty of the mind. This contrasted distinctly with the traditional arguments for the supremacy of reason. The Romantics tended to define and to present the imagination as our ultimate "shaping" or creative power, the approximate human equivalent of the creative powers of nature or even deity. It is dynamic, an active, rather than passive power, with many functions. Imagination is the primary faculty for creating all art. On a broader scale, it is also the faculty that helps humans to constitute reality, for (as Wordsworth suggested), we not only perceive the world around us, but also in part create it. Uniting both reason and feeling (Coleridge described it with the paradoxical

phrase, "intellectual intuition"), imagination is extolled as the ultimate synthesizing faculty, enabling humans to reconcile differences and opposites in the world of appearance. The reconciliation of opposites is a central ideal for the Romantics. Finally, imagination is inextricably bound up with the other two major concepts, for it is presumed to be the faculty which enables us to "read" nature as a system of symbols.

- **Nature:**

"Nature" meant many things to the Romantics. As suggested above, it was often presented as itself a work of art, constructed by a divine imagination, in emblematic language. For example, throughout "Song of Myself," Whitman makes a practice of presenting commonplace items in nature--"ants," "heap'd stones," and "poke-weed"--as containing divine elements, and he refers to the "grass" as a natural "hieroglyphic," "the handkerchief of the Lord." While particular perspectives with regard to nature varied considerably--nature as a healing power, nature as a source of subject and image, nature as a refuge from the artificial constructs of civilization, including artificial language--the prevailing views accorded nature the status of an organically unified whole. It was viewed as "organic," rather than, as in the scientific or rationalist view, as a system of "mechanical" laws, for Romanticism displaced the rationalist view of the universe as a machine (e.g., the deistic image of a clock) with the analogue of an "organic" image, a living tree or mankind itself. At the same time, Romantics gave greater attention both to describing natural phenomena accurately and to capturing "sensuous nuance"--and this is as true of Romantic landscape

painting as of Romantic nature poetry. Accuracy of observation, however, was not sought for its own sake. Romantic nature poetry is essentially a poetry of meditation.

- **Symbolism and Myth:**

Symbolism and myth were given great prominence in the Romantic conception of art. In the Romantic view, symbols were the human aesthetic correlatives of nature's emblematic language. They were valued too because they could simultaneously suggest many things, and were thus thought superior to the one-to-one communications of allegory. Partly, it may have been the desire to express the "inexpressible"--the infinite--through the available resources of language that led to symbol at one level and myth (as symbolic narrative) at another.

- **Other Concepts: Emotion, Lyric Poetry and the Self:**

Other aspects of Romanticism were intertwined with the above three concepts. Emphasis on the activity of the imagination was accompanied by greater emphasis on the importance of intuition, instincts, and feelings, and Romantics generally called for greater attention to the emotions as a necessary supplement to purely logical reason. When this emphasis was applied to the creation of poetry, a very important shift of focus occurred. Wordsworth's definition of all good poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" marks a turning point in literary history. By locating the ultimate source of poetry in the individual artist, the tradition, stretching back

to the ancients, of valuing art primarily for its ability to imitate human life (that is, for its mimetic qualities) was reversed. In Romantic theory, art was valuable not so much as a mirror of the external world, but as a source of illumination of the world within. Among other things, this led to a prominence for first-person lyric poetry never accorded it in any previous period. The "poetic speaker" became less a persona and more the direct person of the poet. Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and Whitman's "Song of Myself" are both paradigms of successful experiments to take the growth of the poet's mind (the development of self) as subject for an "epic" enterprise made up of lyric components. Confessional prose narratives such as Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and Chateaubriand's *Rene* (1801), as well as disguised autobiographical verse narratives such as Byron's *Childe Harold* (1818), are related phenomena. The interior journey and the development of the self recurred everywhere as subject material for the Romantic artist. The artist-as-hero is a specifically Romantic type.

- **Contrasts with Neo-Classicism:**

Consequently, the Romantics sought to define their goals through systematic contrast with the norms of "Versailles neoclassicism." In their critical manifestoes--the 1800 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, the critical studies of the Schlegel brothers in Germany, the later statements of Victor Hugo in France, and of Hawthorne, Poe, and Whitman in the United States--they self-consciously asserted their differences from the previous age (the literary "ancien regime"), and declared their freedom from the mechanical "rules." Certain special features of Romanticism may still be highlighted by this contrast.

We have already noted two major differences: the replacement of reason by the imagination for primary place among the human faculties and the shift from a mimetic to an expressive orientation for poetry, and indeed all literature. In addition, neoclassicism had prescribed for art the idea that the general or universal characteristics of human behavior were more suitable subject matter than the peculiarly individual manifestations of human activity. From at least the opening statement of Rousseau's *Confessions*, first published in 1781--"I am not made like anyone I have seen; I dare believe that I am not made like anyone in existence. If I am not superior, at least I am different."--this view was challenged.

- **Individualism: The Romantic Hero:**

The Romantics asserted the importance of the individual, the unique, even the eccentric. Consequently they opposed the character typology of neoclassical drama. In another way, of course, Romanticism created its own literary types. The hero-artist has already been mentioned; there were also heaven-storming types from Prometheus to Captain Ahab, outcasts from Cain to the Ancient Mariner and even Hester Prynne, and there was Faust, who wins salvation in Goethe's great drama for the very reasons--his characteristic striving for the unattainable beyond the morally permitted and his insatiable thirst for activity--that earlier had been viewed as the components of his tragic sin. (It was in fact Shelley's opinion that Satan, in his noble defiance, was the real hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.)

In style, the Romantics preferred boldness over the preceding age's desire for restraint, maximum suggestiveness over the neoclassical ideal of clarity, free experimentation over the "rules" of composition, genre, and decorum, and they promoted the conception of the artist as "inspired" creator over that of the artist as "maker" or technical master. Although in both Germany and England there was continued interest in the ancient classics, for the most part the Romantics allied themselves with the very periods of literature that the neoclassicists had dismissed, the Middle Ages and the Baroque, and they embraced the writer whom Voltaire had called a barbarian, Shakespeare. Although interest in religion and in the powers of faith were prominent during the Romantic period, the Romantics generally rejected absolute systems, whether of philosophy or religion, in favor of the idea that each person (and humankind collectively) must create the system by which to live.

- **The Everyday and the Exotic:**

The attitude of many of the Romantics to the everyday, social world around them was complex. It is true that they advanced certain realistic techniques, such as the use of "local color" (through down-to-earth characters, like Wordsworth's rustics, or through everyday language, as in Emily Bronte's northern dialects or Whitman's colloquialisms, or through popular literary forms, such as folk narratives). Yet social realism was usually subordinate to imaginative suggestion, and what was most important were the ideals suggested by the above examples, simplicity perhaps, or innocence. Earlier, the 18th-century cult of the noble savage had promoted similar ideals, but now artists often turned for their

symbols to domestic rather than exotic sources--to folk legends and older, "unsophisticated" art forms, such as the ballad, to contemporary country folk who used "the language of common men," not an artificial "poetic diction," and to children (for the first time presented as individuals, and often idealized as sources of greater wisdom than adults).

Simultaneously, as opposed to everyday subjects, various forms of the exotic in time and/or place also gained favor, for the Romantics were also fascinated with realms of existence that were, by definition, prior to or opposed to the ordered conceptions of "objective" reason. Often, both the everyday and the exotic appeared together in paradoxical combinations. In the *Lyrical Ballads*, for example, Wordsworth and Coleridge agreed to divide their labors according to two subject areas, the natural and the supernatural: Wordsworth would try to exhibit the novelty in what was all too familiar, while Coleridge would try to show in the supernatural what was psychologically real, both aiming to dislodge vision from the "lethargy of custom." The concept of the beautiful soul in an ugly body, as characterized in Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, is another variant of the paradoxical combination.

- **The Romantic Artist in Society:**

In another way too, the Romantics were ambivalent toward the "real" social world around them. They were often politically and socially involved, but at the same time they began to distance themselves from the public. As noted earlier, high Romantic artists

interpreted things through their own emotions, and these emotions included social and political consciousness--as one would expect in a period of revolution, one that reacted so strongly to oppression and injustice in the world. So artists sometimes took public stands, or wrote works with socially or politically oriented subject matter. Yet at the same time, another trend began to emerge, as they withdrew more and more from what they saw as the confining boundaries of bourgeois life. In their private lives, they often asserted their individuality and differences in ways that were to the middle class a subject of intense interest, but also sometimes of horror. ("Nothing succeeds like excess," wrote Oscar Wilde, who, as a partial inheritor of Romantic tendencies, seemed to enjoy shocking the bourgeois, both in his literary and life styles.) Thus the gulf between "odd" artists and their sometimes shocked, often uncomprehending audience began to widen. Some artists may have experienced ambivalence about this situation--it was earlier pointed out how Emily Dickinson seemed to regret that her "letters" to the world would go unanswered. Yet a significant Romantic theme became the contrast between artist and middle-class "Philistine." Unfortunately, in many ways, this distance between artist and public remains with us today.

4.0. The *Lyrical Ballads* and Wordsworth's Poetic Theory:

Wordsworth's aim in writing the 'Preface' was not to give an elaborate account of his theory of poetry or to make a systematic defense of his point-of-view. He wanted to introduce his poems with a prefatorial argument. He added the 'Preface' because he felt that his poems were different in theme and style, and

therefore, he should not present them without an introduction. It is a well observed phenomenon that every new poet struggles to carve a niche. That is what Wordsworth tried to do with the help of the 'Preface'.

It has been generally supposed that Wordsworth's theory of poetic language is merely a reaction against, and a criticism of, 'the Pseudo Classical' theory of poetic diction. But such a view is partially true. His first impulse was less a revolt against Pseudo-classical diction, "than a desire to find a suitable language for the new territory of human life which he was conquering for poetic treatment". His aim was to deal in his poetry with rustic and humble life and to advocate simplicity of theme. Moreover, he believed that the poet is essentially a man speaking to men and so he must use such a language as is used by men. The pseudo classicals advocated that the language of poetry is different from the language of prose while Wordsworth believes that there is no essential difference between them. The poet can communicate best in the language which is really used by men. He condemns the artificial language. Thus William Wordsworth prefers the language really used by common men.

Wordsworth's purpose, as he tells in the 'Preface' was, "to choose incidents and situations from common life", and quite naturally, he also intended to use, "a selection of language, really used by men". He was to deal with humble and rustic life and so he should also use the language of the rustics, farmers, shepherds who were to be the subjects of his poetry. The language of these men was to be used but it was to be purified of all that is painful or disgusting, vulgar and coarse in that language. He was to use the language of real men because the aim of a poet is to give pleasure and such language without selection will cause disgust.

The use of such a simple language has a number of advantages. The rustic language in its simplicity is highly emotional and passionate. This is more so the case when these humble people are in a state of emotional excitement. It is charged with the emotions of the human heart. Such a language is the natural language of the passions. It comes from the heart, and thus goes direct to the heart. In other words, through the use of such a language essential truths about human life and nature can be more easily and clearly communicated. It is more 'philosophical' language inasmuch as its use can result in a better and clearer understanding of the basic truths. But in city life emotions are not openly expressed.

Wordsworth was going to write about simple life so he writes in simple language and for this he adds metre. In his opinion, the language of poetry must not be separated from the language of men in real life. Figures, metaphors and similes and other such decorations must not be used unnecessarily. In a state of emotional excitement, men naturally use a metaphorical language to express themselves forcefully. The earliest poets used only such metaphors and images as result naturally from powerful emotions. Later on, poets used a figurative language which was not the result of genuine passion. They merely imitated the manner of the earlier poets, and thus arose the artificial language and diction of Pseudo-classics. A stereotyped and mechanical phraseology thus became current. The poet must avoid the use of such artificial diction both when he speaks in his own person, or through his characters.

Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction is of immense value when considered as a corrective to the artificial, inane, and unnatural phraseology current at the time. But considered in itself it is full of a number of contradictions and suffers

from a number of imitations. For one thing, Wordsworth does not state what he means by language. Language is a matter of words, as well as of arrangement of those words. It is the matter of the use of imagery, frequency of its use, and its nature, Wordsworth does not clarify what he exactly means by 'language'.

Coleridge was the first critic to pounce upon Wordsworth's theory of language and to expose its weaknesses. He pointed out, first, that a language so selected and purified, as Wordsworth suggests, would differ in no way from the language of any other men of commonsense. After such a selection there would be no difference between the rustic language and the language used by men in other walks of life.

Secondly, Wordsworth permits the use of metre, and this implies a particular order and arrangement of words. If metre is to be used, the order of words in poetry is bound to differ from that of prose. It does so differ in the poetry of Wordsworth himself. So Coleridge concludes that there is, and there ought to be, an essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.

Thirdly, the use of metre is as artificial as the use of poetic diction, and if one is allowed, it is absurd to forbid the use of the other. Both are equally good sources of poetic pleasure.

Fourthly, Coleridge objected to the use of the word real. He writes:

“Every man’s language varies, according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings. Every man’s language has, first, its individualities; secondly, the common properties of the class to which he belongs; and thirdly, words and phrases of universal use. For, ‘real’, therefore, we must substitute, ‘ordinary’ or *lingua communis*.”

Fifthly, Coleridge pointed out that it is not correct that the best parts of our language are derived from Nature. Language is letter-moulded. The best words are abstract nouns and concepts. If the poet wants to use the rustic language, he must think like the rustics whose language is curiously inexpressive. It would be putting the clock back. Instead of progression it would be retrogression.

Wordsworth's theory of language has strong weaknesses, but its significance is also far-reaching. O. Elton concludes his discussion of the subject with the following admirable words:

“Wordsworth, led by his dislike of, ‘glossy and unfeeling diction’ ... was led to proclaim that speech as the medium desired; that he guarded this chosen medium not indeed from his own misapplication of it, but ... proved its nobility in practice; that he did not clearly say what he meant by, ‘language’, or see the full effect upon the diction by the employment of metre; that he did not rule out other styles ... he did not touch on their theoretic basis; and that in many of his actual triumphs, won within that sphere of diction which he does vindicate.”

4.1. Wordsworth's Conception of Poetry: Passion and Reflection

Wordsworth propounded his views on poetry, its nature and functions and the qualification of a true poet in his 'Preface'. So far as the nature of poetry is concerned, Wordsworth is of the opinion that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Poetry has its origin in the internal feelings of the poet. It is a matter of passion, mood and temperament. Poetry cannot be produced by strictly adhering to the rules laid down by the Classicists. It must flow out naturally and smoothly from the soul of the poet.

But it must be noted that good poetry, according to Wordsworth, is never an immediate expression of such powerful emotions. A good poet must ponder over them long and deeply. In the words of Wordsworth, "poetry has its origin in emotions recollected in tranquility."

Process of Poetic Composition

There are four stages which play a very crucial role in converting an experience into a pleasing composition.

Stage One: Observation

First comes observation or perception of some object, character or incident which sets up powerful emotions in the mind of the poet.

Stage Two: Recollection

Next comes the contemplation or recollection of that emotion in tranquility. It must be noted that at this stage memory comes into play and brings out what had been lying in the unconscious for days, months or years. A similar kind of incident triggers the poet to visit the past experiences stored in the unexplored regions of his mind.

Stage Three: Filtering

The third stage is that of filtering wherein the poet is purged of non-essential elements and thus makes his experience communicable to all men.

Stage Four: Composition

The fourth stage is when the actual composition begins. The poet seeks to convey his emotions through print and turns into a communicator. In the words of Wordsworth he becomes a man speaking to men. What is important to him is not just expressing his joy but sharing it with his readers. *The Solitary Reaper* by Wordsworth demonstrates this poetic process.

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;

O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?--
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang

As if her song could have no ending;

I saw her singing at her work,

And o'er the sickle bending;--

I listened, motionless and still;

And, as I mounted up the hill,

The music in my heart I bore,

Long after it was heard no more.

The Solitary Reaper, William Wordsworth

Feelings started overflowing spontaneously as the poet listened to the song of the Highland girl: "the Vale profound / Is overflowing with the sound." Removed from the scene he started recollecting his experiences in tranquillity and exhuming theme of the song and causes its joyousness. Slowly but gradually this state of mind disappears, and an emotion which is quite similar to the original is generated. It soon turns into feeling and starts resonating and he begins composing his poem with "the music" he feels in his heart "Long after it was heard no more" causes its joyousness.

4.2. Coleridge and the Theory of Imagination:

The *Biographia Literaria* was one of Coleridge's main critical studies. In this work, he discussed the elements of writing and what writing should be to be considered genius. Although the work is not written from Coleridge's poetic mind, it is still written with the qualities and rhythm of the poetic. Not only does he discuss literature itself he discusses the many variables that influence and inspire writers. Through this discussion, he makes many value judgments, leaving his audience with a clear understand of his stance on certain issues. Some of the issues he tackles include politics, religion, social values, and human identity. His treatment of these issues tends to be conservative in its foundation, yet also blatant and original. He does not cater to one certain audience; rather he expresses his own thoughts from a personal viewpoint. Coleridge delivers the *Biographia Literaria* without a second thought of whether or not there will be any disagreement from his audience.

"Imagination" and "Fancy"

Rejecting the empiricist assumption that the mind was a tabula rasa on which external experiences and sense impressions were imprinted, stored, recalled, and combined through a process of association, Coleridge divided the "mind" into two distinct faculties. He labelled these the "Imagination" and "Fancy."

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of

the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

"Fancy," in Coleridge's eyes was employed for tasks that were "passive" and "mechanical", the accumulation of fact and documentation of what is seen. "Always the ape," Fancy, Coleridge argued, was "too often the adulterator and counterfeiter of memory." The Imagination on the other hand was "vital" and transformative, "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation." For Coleridge, it was the Imagination that was responsible for acts that were truly creative and inventive and, in turn, that identified true instances of fine or noble art.

The distinction b/w Fancy and the Imagination :

The distinction made by Coleridge between Fancy and the Imagination rested on the fact that Fancy was concerned with the mechanical operations of the mind, those which are responsible for the passive accumulation of data and the storage of such data in the memory. Imagination, on the other hand, described the "mysterious power," which extracted from such data, "hidden ideas and meaning." It also determined "the various operations of constructive and inventive genius."

Engell has demonstrated that Coleridge's division of the imagination into the "primary" and "secondary" draws a distinction between creative acts that are unconscious and those that are intentional and deliberate. "The Primary Imagination" was for Coleridge, the "necessary imagination" as it "automatically balances and fuses the innate capacities and powers of the mind with the external presence of the objective world that the mind receives through the senses." It represents man's ability to learn from nature. The over arching property of the primary imagination was that it was common to all people. The Secondary imagination, on the other hand, represents a superior faculty which could only be associated with artistic genius. It was this aspect of the imagination, one which could break down what was perceived in order to recreate by an autonomous willful act of the mind that has no analog in the natural world—which Coleridge associated with art and poetry. A key and defining attribute of the secondary imagination was a free and deliberate will; "superior voluntary controul. . .co-existing with the conscious will." The secondary imagination, once activated by the will, "dissolves, dissipates in order to recreate." Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*,

Significance of the Imagination :

The significance of the Imagination for Coleridge was that it represented the sole faculty within man that was able to achieve the romantic ambition of reuniting the subject and the object; the world of the self and the world of nature. By establishing the creative act as mimicking the "organic principle" or "one"—a divine principle believed to underlie all reality—the romantic theorist sought to establish a harmonious relationship between the ideal world of the subject and the real world of the object. Baker has demonstrated that Coleridge was convinced that the Imagination acted as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM," and that it not only reinforced the notion that perception was active and creative, it established the cosmos as an organic entity.

For Coleridge, the most important aspect of the imagination was that it was active to the highest degree. The creative act called the whole soul of man into activity. As Baker has argued: "the creative act, on the contrary, is a godlike-act-of-power and causing-to-be, imagination being the divine potency in man. The creative act by which the poet writes the poem is similar to the creative act by which God ordered the world out of chaos; if the poet's creative act is not a creation ex nihilo, it is a process of organic becoming through which the materials are transformed into something absolutely new, and also very likely, strange." James Volant Baker, *The Sacred River*. Coleridge's Theory of the Imagination

"Imagination" as "ESEMPLASTIC," :

Coleridge explained this property of the "Imagination" as "ESEMPLASTIC," to "shape into one" and to "convey a new sense." Coleridge in

the tenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria* described this ability of the imagination as "Esemplastic." Noting that *esemplastic* was a word he borrowed from the Greek "to shape," Coleridge explained that it referred to the imagination's ability to "shape into one, having to convey a new sense." He felt such a term was necessary as "it would aid the recollection of my meaning and prevent it being confounded with the usual import of the word imagination." *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 1, p. 86

If you really want to use a pretentious-sounding term, try *esemplastic*. Derived from Greek words meaning "into" and "one" and "mold," and coined by Coleridge in 1817, the word means "having the function of molding into unity; unifying." The picture derived from the word is of someone, probably a poet, taking images and words and feelings from a number of realms of human endeavor and thought and bringing them all together into a poem s/he writes. This requires a huge effort of the imagination, which we might call the "esemplastic power of the poetic imagination." A decade after its first appearance a writer could remark, "Nor I trust will Coleridge's favorite word *esemplastic*..ever become current."

Not only did the subject subsume the object it can also be argued that Imagination subsumed the role of Fancy within the creative work. Thus while Coleridge argued that the poet relied on both Fancy and Imagination when inventing a poem, and that the poet should seek a balance of these two faculties, (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol 1, p. 194) the "active" and "transformative" powers of the Imagination negated the contribution of, and representation of Fancy. In Coleridge's system, the Imagination is ultimately the only faculty which contributed to the creative process.

5.0. Romantic Literary Criticism:

English literary criticism of the Romantic era is most closely associated with the writings of William Wordsworth in his 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Modern critics disagree on whether the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge constituted a major break with the criticism of their predecessors or if it should more properly be characterized as a continuation of the aesthetic theories of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century German and English writers.

In 1800, in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth issued his famous proclamation about the nature of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." With this statement, Wordsworth posited a very different view of poetry than was standard at the time, shifting the center of attention from the work as a reflection or imitation of reality to the artist, and the artist's relationship to the work. Poetry would henceforth be considered an expressive rather than a mimetic art. Although the analogy of art as a mirror was still used, M. H. Abrams reports that the early Romantics suggested that the mirror was turned inward to reflect the poet's state of mind, rather than outward to reflect external reality. William Hazlitt in his "On Poetry in General" (1818) addressed the changes in this analogy "by combining the mirror with a lamp, in order to demonstrate that a poet reflects a world already bathed in an emotional light he has himself projected," according to Abrams. Additionally, music replaced painting as the art form considered most like poetry by the Romantics. Abrams explains that the German writers of the 1790s considered music "to be the art most immediately expressive of spirit and emotion," and both Hazlitt and John Keble made similar connections between music and poetry in their critical writings.

Many of the principles associated with early nineteenth-century English criticism were first articulated by late eighteenth-century German Romantics. René Wellek has documented the contributions of Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, F. W. J. Schelling, Novalis, and other important figures of the period. Novalis, for example, shared the English Romantics' belief that the poet was a member of a special breed, "exalted beyond any other human being." Similarly, Jochen Schulte-Sasse, in his comprehensive history of German literary criticism, traced the development of various elements of Romantic thought that appeared in Germany either prior to or concurrent with similar developments in England.

The literary reviews of the early nineteenth century, most notably the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*, participated in the formulation of critical theory as well. Although earlier reviews were little more than advertisements for the books being considered, or "thinly concealed puff for booksellers' wares," in the words of Terry Eagleton, the change in reviewing style in the Romantic period was not much of an improvement. According to Eagleton: "Criticism was now explicitly, unabashedly political: the journals tended to select for review only those works on which they could loosely peg lengthy ideological pieces, and their literary judgements, [sic] buttressed by the authority of anonymity, were rigorously subordinated to their politics." John O. Hayden reports that reviews were tainted not only by politics, but by "malicious allusions to the private lives of the authors," and concedes that "the critical values of the reviewers were neither uniform nor well established." Coleridge's unhappiness with the vicious, opinionated reviews in the periodicals prompted his attempt to devise a critical method that would supplant mere opinions with reviews based on

a set of sound literary principles. However, because such norms and conventions were associated with rationality—the very target of most Romantic poetry—criticism needed to head in a different direction. It had to “corner for itself some of the creative energy of poetry itself, or shift to a quasi-philosophical meditation on the nature and consequences of the creative act,” according to Eagleton. The Romantic poet/critic thus began to produce criticism that explained and justified not only creativity itself, but also his own creative practices, even his own poetry. T. S. Eliot reports, for example, that “Wordsworth wrote his ‘Preface’ to defend his own manner of writing poetry, and Coleridge wrote the *Biographia* to defend Wordsworth's poetry, or in part he did.” Paul A. Cantor, in his study of twentieth-century attacks on Romantic criticism, acknowledges the self-serving quality of the image put forth by Romantic poets who saw themselves as isolated and inspired geniuses possessed of special gifts unavailable to the masses. According to this image, explains Cantor, “the artist stands above society as a prophetic visionary, leading it into the future, while free of its past and not engaged in its present activities (in the sense of being essentially unaffected and above all uncorrupted by them.)”

In addition to the primacy of the poet, the aesthetic theories associated with Wordsworth and Coleridge in particular, were critical of earlier poets' “poetic diction,” which to the Romantics, was affected and artificial. They preferred, according to William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks “the primitive, the naïve, the directly passionate, the natural spoken word.” Wordsworth argued that there should be no difference between the language of prose and that of poetry, thus defending his use, within the *Lyrical Ballads*, of the everyday language of the middle and lower classes. Wimsatt and Brooks write that “Wordsworth's primitivism was part of a general reaction, setting in well before his own day, against the aristocratic side of neo-classicism.” But where Wordsworth associated

poetic diction with artifice and aristocracy and his own poetic language with nature and democracy, Coleridge saw the issue differently. "To Coleridge it seemed more like an issue between propriety and impropriety, congruity and incongruity. In effect he applied the classic norm of decorum," according to Wimsatt and Brooks.

Coleridge's critical theories also differ from Wordsworth's in that they are heavily grounded in theology. Sometimes, particularly in his later writings according to Timothy Corrigan, the theological overwhelms the literary. "What is most peculiar about his work during this period is the unusual extent to which he disregards the primary text and how completely his complex theological models and language usurp that text," contends Corrigan.

Current scholarly work on Romantic literary theory often suggests that many of the Romantic critics were far ahead of their time, anticipating the work of various late twentieth-century thinkers. One example is provided by Kathleen M. Wheeler, who states that "Coleridge's concept of polarity, of opposition, is in many ways anticipatory of Derrida's concept of difference ... for Coleridge, as for Derrida, relations and oppositions form the substances of experience." Wheeler also suggests that the work of several German Romanticists, whose writings were well known to Coleridge, is also directly related to Derridean deconstruction. "These ironists [Ludwig Tieck, Karl Solger, Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Jean Paul, and others] developed concepts of criticism as play, destructive creativity (= deconstruction), language as essentially about itself, an aesthetics of incomprehensibility, the reader as creative author, ideas about the unity of poetry and philosophy, literature and criticism, and criticism as art," according to Wheeler. Along similar lines, Wellek asserts that the work of German Romanticist

Tieck anticipates the theories of Sigmund Freud. "Freud could not have stated more clearly the association of art and lust than did Tieck," claims Wellek. Abrams makes a similar claim for John Keble's *Lectures on Poetry* (1844), insisting that they "broach views of the source, the function, and the effect of literature, and of the methods by which literature is appropriately read and criticized, which, when they occur in the writings of critics schooled by Freud, are still reckoned to be the most subversive to the established values and principles of literary criticism."

Despite efforts to position the English Romantics within a continuum of criticism extending from Plato and Aristotle to Jacques Derrida and the post-structuralists, several literary scholars still insist that the theories of Wordsworth and Coleridge were radically different from their predecessors. Patrick Parrinder claims that their poetry and criticism constituted nothing less than a cultural revolution. Parrinder validates "their claim to have overthrown the eighteenth-century canons of taste and to have reconstituted the genuine tradition of English poetry," and believes that their efforts to establish a new literary paradigm was aided, in part, by their self-conscious awareness of the revolution they were creating. "They not only produced the new poetry but the essential commentaries upon it," according to Parrinder. Eliot concurs, maintaining that "Wordsworth is really the first, in the unsettled state of affairs in his time, to annex new authority for the poet, to meddle with social affairs, and to offer a new kind of religious sentiment which it seemed the peculiar prerogative of the poet to interpret."

5.1. Coleridge's Theory of Criticism:

In treating of Coleridge as literary critic, there is no alternative but to speak either very briefly or at considerable length. The latter is here impossible. All that can be done, therefore, is to indicate the main avenues which his criticism opened out.

The only written monument of his critical work is that contained in *Biographia Literaria* (1815–17), and in a short series of articles contributed to Farley's *Bristol Journal* a year or two earlier (1814). All else has to be gleaned from the very imperfect reports of his lectures, recorded by Collier, Crabb Robinson and others. These lectures, of which there were, in all, some dozen courses, were delivered, partly in London partly at Bristol, between the years 1808 and 1819. Their avowed subjects, apart from a course on the history of philosophy (1818–19), were, mainly, the drama in general, or Shakespeare and Milton. But Coleridge was never the man to be bound down by a syllabus; and his audience had, on occasion, to bear, as best they could, a defence of school-flogging, an attack on "the Lancastrian system of education" and other such irrelevancies, when they had come to hear a discourse on *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet, in spite of these glaring faults, the lectures were not seldom worthy both of their subject and of their author. And, with the written pieces, they form a body of work such as makes an epoch in the history of English—it would hardly be too much to say, of European—criticism.

Coleridge concerns himself not only with the practice of criticism, but, also—perhaps, by preference—with its theory. On both sides, he offers the sharpest contrast with the critics of the century, and, not least, of the generation,

preceding. The Wartons and Hurd, no doubt, stand apart from the men of their day. In sentiment, they rebel against the canons of the Augustans; and, so far, they are at one with Coleridge. But they were content to defend their instinctive judgments on purely literary grounds, and made no attempt to justify them on more general principles. Indeed, they seem never to have suspected that their revolt against the established taste in poetry carried with it a revolt against the established system in philosophy. Coleridge, on the other hand, was philosopher just as much as poet. He lived in the full tide of a philosophical, no less than a poetic, revival. He was himself among the leading figures in both. He had, therefore, on both sides, a far richer store of material to draw from than had been open to the earlier rebels. And it was the first instinct of his nature to weave, or force, every side of his experience into a consistent whole.

At the first step, he rules out the assumption, which, from Horace onwards, had wrought such havoc in criticism, that the object of poetry is to instruct; or, as a less extreme form of the heresy had asserted, to make men morally better. That this may be an effect of poetry—of much that is noblest in poetry—he is not in the least concerned to deny. That however, is no more than an incidental result. And the true end, or function, of poetry is to give immediate pleasure: pleasure, he explains in a somewhat disconcerting addition, “through the medium of beauty.”

This may not carry us very far. But, at least, it serves to warn us off from the wrong road, and to set our feet at the beginning of the right one. More than this: by further additions and modifications, Coleridge so expands his original doctrine as to bring us considerably further on the path. In the first place, the assertion that the pleasure which imaginative art aims at giving is wrought

“through the medium of beauty,” however much it may check the logical flow of the argument, at least serves to enforce the truth, already laid down by Aristotle, that imaginative pleasure differs in kind from all other forms of pleasure: nay, that one form of imaginative pleasure differs in kind from all other forms of imaginative pleasure: that given by poetry, for instance, from that given by sculpture or painting; that given by the drama from that given by lyric or by epic. In the second place, his own analysis of that which constitutes “beauty” is so illuminating, his own exposition of the conditions necessary to poetic pleasure is so subtle, as to bring us a great deal further on the road than, at the first moment, we may have been aware. The former throws a flood of light upon the points in which the various arts differ from each other, as well as upon those they have in common. The latter—enforced, as it is, by a criticism of Shakespeare’s early poetic work, and reinforced by an equally delicate criticism of the charm attaching to the consummate presentment of “common form” in poetry, particularly by the Italian poets of the later renaissance—is one of the most satisfying things ever written in this kind. In applying the principles which he had already laid down in theory, the author succeeds both in defining them more closely and in extending them more widely; in the very statement of his theory, he contrives to offer a model of the method which critics should aim at following in practice.

Of the rest of his work in practical criticism, no account can be offered. It must suffice to mention his criticism of Wordsworth in *Biographia*, and that of Shakespeare, as dramatist, in various courses of his lectures. The former, in itself, is a fine and discriminating piece of work. But it is more than doubtful whether Coleridge was the man to have undertaken it. He was aware that the slightly astringent touch, which he felt justice demanded, would give offence to his brother poet. And, considering the relation between the two men—a relation once of the warmest friendship, now of strained forbearance—it would have been more

gracious to keep silence. Indeed, so far as the criticism deals with Wordsworth's theory of "poetic diction," it cannot but strike the reader as carping; not to mention the appearance of treachery involved in attacking a theory for which he himself was commonly held, and, probably, with some justice, to be, in part, responsible. As critic of Shakespeare's dramatic genius, his part is less ambiguous, though even this is complicated by questions of unacknowledged debts to Schlegel. He was the first English writer to insist that every work of art—in this instance, every play—is, by its very nature, an organic whole; and that, if this is harder to discern in the complicated structure of Shakespearean and much other modern drama, it is because, at least in the nobler examples, such plays are not less, but more, vitally articulated; not less, but more, spontaneous and organic. Structure, scenic effect, poetry, character—all are shown to spring from the same common root in the spirit of the poet; each to enhance the imaginative effect which, instinctively, he had in view. And he enforces this, not as a mere abstract doctrine—though it lies at the core of his theory of beauty—but by an exposition of individual masterpieces which, for subtlety and suggestiveness, had certainly, if we except Goethe's masterly criticism of *Hamlet*, never been approached. It remains true that, having done so much, he might justly have been expected to do even more; and that nothing but his own nervelessness, at once the cause and effect of the opium habit, could have prevented him from doing it.

If, in literary criticism, there has sometimes been a disposition to exaggerate the value of the work actually accomplished by Coleridge, in philosophy, the tendency has almost always been to give him less than his due; certainly, as to what he achieved in the way of writing; too often, even as to his intrinsic capacity. Yet, his importance in the history of English philosophy is not to be denied. It is neither more nor less than to have stood against the current which, for the last century, had swept everything before it; to have assailed the

mechanical philosophy which, from the time of Locke, had firmly entrenched itself in this country and in France; and, however much he may have been overborne by the prejudices of the moment, at least to have paved the way for their ultimate exposure and defeat. Even at the moment, in the high tide of Bentham's influence, his labours were by no means in vain. As writer—still more, in his talk and in his personal influence—he served for a rallying point to all who felt, if they could not explain to themselves, the inadequacy of the prevailing system: the one man who was capable of laying bare its fallacies, the one man who was able to give a reasoned account of the larger faith after which they were blindly groping. The evidence of this is to be found in the lives of such men as Arnold and Maurice; or, more compactly, in the generous essay of Mill and the brilliant, but not too generous, chapter devoted to the subject in Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*.

Sources/Suggested Reading

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PAPER VII

UNIT II

WORDSWORTH'S 'PREFACE' to *LYRICAL BALLADS*

1.0. Introduction:

William Wordsworth, (born April 7, 1770, Cockermouth, Cumberland, England—died April 23, 1850, Rydal Mount, Westmorland), English poet whose *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), written with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped launch the English Romantic movement.

Wordsworth was born in the Lake District of northern England, the second of five children of a modestly prosperous estate manager. He lost his mother when he was 7 and his father when he was 13, upon which the orphan boys were sent off by guardian uncles to a grammar school at Hawkshead, a village in the heart of the Lake District. At Hawkshead Wordsworth received an excellent education in classics, literature, and mathematics, but the chief advantage to him there was the chance to indulge in the boyhood pleasures of living and playing in the outdoors. The natural scenery of the English lakes could terrify as well as nurture, as Wordsworth would later testify in the line “I grew up fostered alike by beauty and by fear,” but its generally benign aspect gave the growing boy the confidence he articulated in one of his first important poems, “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey...,” namely, “that Nature never did betray the heart that loved her.”

Wordsworth moved on in 1787 to St. John's College, Cambridge. Repelled by the competitive pressures there, he elected to idle his way through the university, persuaded that he "was not for that hour, nor for that place." The most important thing he did in his college years was to devote his summer vacation in 1790 to a long walking tour through revolutionary France. There he was caught up in the passionate enthusiasm that followed the fall of the Bastille, and became an ardent republican sympathizer. Upon taking his Cambridge degree—an undistinguished "pass"—he returned in 1791 to France, where he formed a passionate attachment to a Frenchwoman, Annette Vallon. But before their child was born in December 1792, Wordsworth had to return to England and was cut off there by the outbreak of war between England and France. He was not to see his daughter Caroline until she was nine.

The three or four years that followed his return to England were the darkest of Wordsworth's life. Unprepared for any profession, rootless, virtually penniless, bitterly hostile to his own country's opposition to the French, he lived in London in the company of radicals like William Godwin and learned to feel a profound sympathy for the abandoned mothers, beggars, children, vagrants, and victims of England's wars who began to march through the sombre poems he began writing at this time. This dark period ended in 1795, when a friend's legacy made possible Wordsworth's reunion with his beloved sister Dorothy—the two were never again to live apart—and their move in 1797 to Alfoxden House, near Bristol.

1.1. The Great Decade: 1797-1808

While living with Dorothy at Alfoxden House, Wordsworth became friends with a fellow poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. They formed a partnership that would change both poets' lives and alter the course of English poetry.

1.1.1. Coleridge and *Lyrical Ballads*:

The partnership between Wordsworth and Coleridge, rooted in one marvelous year (1797–98) in which they “together wantoned in wild Poesy,” had two consequences for Wordsworth. First it turned him away from the long poems on which he had laboured since his Cambridge days. These included poems of social protest like *Salisbury Plain*, loco-descriptive poems such as *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* (published in 1793), and *The Borderers*, a blank-verse tragedy exploring the psychology of guilt (and not published until 1842). Stimulated by Coleridge and under the healing influences of nature and his sister, Wordsworth began in 1797–98 to compose the short lyrical and dramatic poems for which he is best remembered by many readers. Some of these were affectionate tributes to Dorothy, some were tributes to daffodils, birds, and other elements of “Nature’s holy plan,” and some were portraits of simple rural people intended to illustrate basic truths of human nature.

Many of these short poems were written to a daringly original program formulated jointly by Wordsworth and Coleridge, and aimed at breaking the decorum of Neoclassical verse. These poems appeared in 1798 in a slim, anonymously authored volume entitled *Lyrical Ballads*, which opened with Coleridge’s long poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and closed with Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey.” All but three of the intervening poems were

Wordsworth's, and, as he declared in a preface to a second edition two years later, their object was "to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them . . . in a selection of language really used by men, . . . tracing in them . . . the primary laws of our nature." Most of the poems were dramatic in form, designed to reveal the character of the speaker. The manifesto and the accompanying poems thus set forth a new style, a new vocabulary, and new subjects for poetry, all of them foreshadowing 20th-century developments.

1.1.2. *The Recluse and The Prelude:*

The second consequence of Wordsworth's partnership with Coleridge was the framing of a vastly ambitious poetic design that teased and haunted him for the rest of his life. Coleridge had projected an enormous poem to be called "The Brook," in which he proposed to treat all science, philosophy, and religion, but he soon laid the burden of writing this poem upon Wordsworth himself. As early as 1798 Wordsworth began to talk in grand terms of this poem, to be entitled *The Recluse*. To nerve himself up to this enterprise and to test his powers, Wordsworth began writing the autobiographical poem that would absorb him intermittently for the next 40 years, and which was eventually published in 1850 under the title *The Prelude, or, Growth of a Poet's Mind*. *The Prelude* extends the quiet autobiographical mode of reminiscence that Wordsworth had begun in "Tintern Abbey" and traces the poet's life from his school days through his university life and his visits to France, up to the year (1799) in which he settled at Grasmere. It thus describes a circular journey—what has been called a long journey home. But the main events in the autobiography are internal: the poem exultantly describes the ways in which the imagination emerges as the dominant faculty, exerting its control over the reason and the world of the senses alike.

The Recluse itself was never completed, and only one of its three projected parts was actually written; this was published in 1814 as *The Excursion* and consisted of nine long philosophical monologues spoken by pastoral characters. The first monologue (Book I) contained a version of one of Wordsworth's greatest poems, "The Ruined Cottage," composed in superb blank verse in 1797. This bleak narrative records the slow, pitiful decline of a woman whose husband had gone off to the army and never returned. For later versions of this poem Wordsworth added a reconciling conclusion, but the earliest and most powerful version was starkly tragic.

1.1.3. A Turn to the Elegiac:

In the company of Dorothy, Wordsworth spent the winter of 1798–99 in Germany, where, in the remote town of Goslar, in Saxony, he experienced the most intense isolation he had ever known. As a consequence, however, he wrote some of his most moving poetry, including the "Lucy" and "Matthew" elegies and early drafts toward *The Prelude*. Upon his return to England, Wordsworth incorporated several new poems in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), notably two tragic pastorals of country life, "The Brothers" and "Michael." These poems, together with the brilliant lyrics that were assembled in Wordsworth's second verse collection, *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), help to make up what is now recognized as his great decade, stretching from his meeting with Coleridge in 1797 until 1808.

One portion of a second part of *The Recluse* was finished in 1806, but, like *The Prelude*, was left in manuscript at the poet's death. This portion, *Home at Grasmere*, joyously celebrated Wordsworth's taking possession (in December 1799) of Dove Cottage, at Grasmere, Westmorland, where he was to reside for

eight of his most productive years. In 1802, during the short-lived Peace of Amiens, Wordsworth returned briefly to France, where at Calais he met his daughter and made his peace with Annette. He then returned to England to marry Mary Hutchinson, a childhood friend, and start an English family, which had grown to three sons and two daughters by 1810.

In 1805 the drowning of Wordsworth's favorite brother, John, the captain of a sailing vessel, gave Wordsworth the strongest shock he had ever experienced. "A deep distress hath humanized my Soul," he lamented in his "Elegiac Stanzas" on Peele Castle. Henceforth he would produce a different kind of poetry, defined by a new sobriety, a new restraint, and a lofty, almost Miltonic elevation of tone and diction. Wordsworth appeared to anticipate this turn in "Tintern Abbey," where he had learned to hear "the still, sad music of humanity," and again in the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (written in 1802–04; published in *Poems, in Two Volumes*). The theme of this ode is the loss of his power to see the things he had once seen, the radiance, the "celestial light" that seemed to lie over the landscapes of his youth like "the glory and freshness of a dream." Now, in the Peele Castle stanzas, he sorrowfully looked back on the light as illusory, as a "Poet's dream," as "the light that never was, on sea or land."

These metaphors point up the differences between the early and the late Wordsworth. It is generally accepted that the quality of his verse fell off as he grew more distant from the sources of his inspiration and as his Anglican and Tory sentiments hardened into orthodoxy. Today many readers discern two Wordsworths, the young Romantic revolutionary and the aging Tory humanist, risen into what John Keats called the "Egotistical Sublime." Little of Wordsworth's later verse matches the best of his earlier years.

In his middle period Wordsworth invested a good deal of his creative energy in odes, the best known of which is “On the Power of Sound.” He also produced a large number of sonnets, most of them strung together in sequences. The most admired are the *Duddon sonnets* (1820), which trace the progress of a stream through Lake District landscapes and blend nature poetry with philosophic reflection in a manner now recognized as the best of the later Wordsworth. Other sonnet sequences record his tours through the European continent, and the three series of *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822) develop meditations, many sharply satirical, on church history. But the most memorable poems of Wordsworth’s middle and late years were often cast in elegiac mode. They range from the poet’s heartfelt laments for two of his children who died in 1812—laments incorporated in *The Excursion*—to brilliant lyrical effusions on the deaths of his fellow poets James Hogg, George Crabbe, Coleridge, and Charles Lamb.

1.2. Late Work:

In 1808 Wordsworth and his family moved from Dove Cottage to larger quarters in Grasmere, and five years later they settled at Rydal Mount, near Ambleside, where Wordsworth spent the remainder of his life. In 1813 he accepted the post of distributor of stamps for the county of Westmorland, an appointment that carried the salary of £400 a year. Wordsworth continued to hold back from publication *The Prelude*, *Home at Grasmere*, *The Borderers*, and *Salisbury Plain*. He did publish *Poems, in Two Volumes* in 1807; *The Excursion* in 1814, containing the only finished portions of *The Recluse*; and the collected *Poems* of 1815, which contained most of his shorter poems and two important critical essays as well. Wordsworth’s other works published during middle age include *The White Doe of Rylstone* (1815), a poem about the pathetic shattering of a Roman Catholic family during an unsuccessful rebellion against Elizabeth I in

1569; a *Thanksgiving Ode* (1816); and *Peter Bell* (1819), a poem written in 1798 and then modulated in successive rewritings into an experiment in Romantic irony and the mock-heroic and coloured by the poet's feelings of affinity with his hero, a "wild and woodland rover." *The Waggoner* (1819) is another extended ballad about a North Country itinerant.

Through all these years Wordsworth was assailed by vicious and tireless critical attacks by contemptuous reviewers; no great poet has ever had to endure worse. But finally, with the publication of *The River Duddon* in 1820, the tide began to turn, and by the mid-1830s his reputation had been established with both critics and the reading public.

Wordsworth's last years were given over partly to "tinkering" his poems, as the family called his compulsive and persistent habit of revising his earlier poems through edition after edition. *The Prelude*, for instance, went through four distinct manuscript versions (1798–99, 1805–06, 1818–20, and 1832–39) and was published only after the poet's death in 1850. Most readers find the earliest versions of *The Prelude* and other heavily revised poems to be the best, but flashes of brilliance can appear in revisions added when the poet was in his seventies.

Wordsworth succeeded his friend Robert Southey as Britain's poet laureate in 1843 and held that post until his own death in 1850. Thereafter his influence was felt throughout the rest of the 19th century, though he was honoured more for his smaller poems, as singled out by the Victorian critic Matthew Arnold, than for his masterpiece, *The Prelude*. In the 20th century his reputation was strengthened both by recognition of his importance in the Romantic movement and by an appreciation of the darker elements in his personality and verse.

1.3. Wordsworth as a Literary Critic:

Wordsworth was primarily a poet and not a critic. He has left behind him no comprehensive treatise on criticism. The bulk of his literary criticism is small yet “the core of his literary criticism is as inspired as his poetry”. There is the same utter sincerity, earnestness, passion and truth in both. He knew about poetry in the real sense, and he has not said even a single word about poetry, says Chapman, “which is not valuable, and worth thinking over”.

Wordsworth’s criticism is of far-reaching historical significance. When Wordsworth started, it was the Neo-classical criticism, which held the day. Critics were pre-occupied with poetic genres, poetry was judged on the basis of rules devised by Aristotle and other ancients, and interpreted by the Italian and French critics. They cared for rules, for methods, for outward form, and had nothing to say about the substance, the soul of poetry. Wordsworth is the first critic to turn from the poetry to its substance; builds a theory of poetry, and gives an account of the nature of the creative process. His emphasis is on novelty, experiment, liberty, spontaneity, inspiration and imagination, as contrasted with the classical emphasis on authority, tradition, and restraint. His ‘Preface’ is an unofficial manifesto of the English Romantic Movement giving it a new direction, consciousness and program. After Wordsworth had written, literary criticism could never be the same as before.

Wordsworth through his literary criticism demolishes the old and the faulty and opens out new vistas and avenues. He discards the artificial and restricted forms of approved 18th century poetry. Disgusted by the, “gaudiness and inane phraseology”, of many modern writers, he criticizes poets who:

... separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.

Discarding formal finish and perfection, he stresses vivid sensation and spontaneous feelings. He says:

All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.

Scott James says:

He discards Aristotelian doctrine. For him, the plot, or situation, is not the first thing. It is the feeling that matters.

Reacting against the artificiality of 18th century poetry, he advocates simplicity both in theme and treatment. He advocates a deliberate choice of subject from “humble and rustic life”. Instead of being pre-occupied with nymphs and goddesses, he portrays the emotions of collage girls and peasants. There is a healthy realism in his demand that the poet should use, “the language of common men”, and that he should aim at keeping, “the reader in the company of flesh and blood.”

There is, no doubt, his views in this respect are open to criticism. Scott James points out, the flesh and blood and emotions of a townsman are not more profound. Besides, by confining himself wholly to rustic life, he excluded many essential elements in human experience. Thus, he narrowed down his range.

His insistence on the use of a selection of language really used by men is always in danger of becoming trivial and mean.

There is also, no doubt, that he is guilty of over-emphasis every now and then, and that it is easy to pick holes in his theories. Coleridge could easily demolish his theory of poetic diction and demonstrate that a selection of language as advocated by Wordsworth would differ in no way from the language of any other man of commonsense.

All the same, the historical significance of his criticism is very great. It served as a corrective to the artificial and inane phraseology and emphasized the value of a simpler and more natural language. By advocating simplicity in theme, he succeeded in enlarging the range of English poetry. He attacked the old, outdated and trivial and created a taste of the new and the significant. He emphasized the true nature of poetry as an expression of emotion and passion, and so dealt a death blow to the dry intellectuality of contemporary poetry. In this way, he brought about a revolution in the theory of poetry, and made popular acceptance of the new poetry, the romantic poetry, possible.

Unlike other romantics, Wordsworth also lays stress on the element of thought in poetry. He has a high conception of his own calling and so knows that great poetry cannot be produced by a careless or thoughtless person. He says:

Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply.

Poetic process is a complex one. Great poetry is not produced on the spur of the moment. It is produced only when the original emotion is contemplated in tranquility, and the poet passions anew.

Wordsworth goes against the neo-classic view that poetry should both instruct and delight, when he stresses that the function of poetry is to give pleasure, a noble and exalted kind of pleasure which results from increased understanding and sympathy. If at all it teaches, it does so only indirectly, by purifying the emotions, uplifting the soul, and bringing it nearer to nature.

The credit for democratizing the conception of the poet must go to Wordsworth. According to him, the poet is essentially a man who differs from other men not in kind, but only in degree. He has a more lively sensibility, a more comprehensive soul, greater powers of observation, imagination and communication. He is also a man who has thought long and deep. Wordsworth emphasizes his organic oneness as also the need for his emotional identification with other men.

We can do no better than conclude this account of the achievement of Wordsworth as a critic with the words of Rene Wellek:

Wordsworth thus holds a position in the history of criticism which must be called ambiguous or transitional. He inherited from neo-classicism a theory of the imitation of nature to which he gives, however, a specific social twist: he inherited from the 18th century a view of poetry as passion and emotion which he again modified as ... "recollection in tranquility". He takes up rhetorical ideas about the effect of poetry but extends and amplifies them into a theory of the social effects of literature ... he also adopts a theory of poetry in which imagination holds the central place as a power of unification and ultimate insight into the unity of the world. Though Wordsworth left only a small body of criticism, it is rich in survivals, suggestions, anticipations and personal insights.

1.4. Evaluation:

William Wordsworth was the central figure in the English Romantic revolution in poetry. His contribution to it was threefold. First, he formulated in his poems and his essays a new attitude toward nature. This was more than a matter of introducing nature imagery into his verse; it amounted to a fresh view of the organic relation between man and the natural world, and it culminated in metaphors of a wedding between nature and the human mind, and beyond that, in the sweeping metaphor of nature as emblematic of the mind of God, a mind that “feeds upon infinity” and “broods over the dark abyss.” Second, Wordsworth probed deeply into his own sensibility as he traced, in his finest poem, *The Prelude*, the “growth of a poet’s mind.” *The Prelude* was in fact the first long autobiographical poem. Writing it in a drawn-out process of self-exploration, Wordsworth worked his way toward a modern psychological understanding of his own nature, and thus more broadly of human nature. Third, Wordsworth placed poetry at the centre of human experience; in impassioned rhetoric he pronounced poetry to be nothing less than “the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man,” and he then went on to create some of the greatest English poetry of his century. It is probably safe to say that by the late 20th century he stood in critical estimation where Coleridge and Arnold had originally placed him, next to John Milton—who stands, of course, next to William Shakespeare.

2.0. 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*: The Text

THE FIRST volume of these Poems has already been submitted to general perusal. It was published, as an experiment, which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart.

I had formed no very inaccurate estimate of the probable effect of those Poems: I flattered myself that they who should be pleased with them would read them with more than common pleasure: and, on the other hand, I was well aware, that by those who should dislike them, they would be read with more than common dislike. The result has differed from my expectation in this only, that a greater number have been pleased than I ventured to hope I should please.

Several of my Friends are anxious for the success of these Poems, from a belief, that, if the views with which they were composed were indeed realized, a class of Poetry would be produced, well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and not unimportant in the quality, and in the multiplicity of its moral relations: and on this account they have advised me to prefix a systematic defence of the theory upon which the Poems were written. But I was unwilling to undertake the task, knowing that on this occasion the Reader would look coldly upon my arguments, since I might be suspected of having been principally influenced by the selfish and foolish hope of reasoning him into an approbation of these particular Poems: and I was still more unwilling to undertake the task, because, adequately to display the opinions, and fully to enforce the arguments, would require a space wholly disproportionate to a preface. For, to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence of which it is susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine

how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which, again, could not be determined, without pointing out in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other, and without retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself. I have therefore altogether declined to enter regularly upon this defence; yet I am sensible, that there would be something like impropriety in abruptly obtruding upon the Public, without a few words of introduction, Poems so materially different from those upon which general approbation is at present bestowed.

It is supposed, that by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association; that he not only thus apprises the Reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded. This exponent or symbol held forth by metrical language must in different eras of literature have excited very different expectations: for example, in the age of Catullus, Terence, and Lucretius, and that of Statius or Claudian; and in our own country, in the age of Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher, and that of Donne and Cowley, or Dryden, or Pope. I will not take upon me to determine the exact import of the promise which, by the act of writing in verse, an Author in the present day makes to his reader: but it will undoubtedly appear to many persons that I have not fulfilled the terms of an engagement thus voluntarily contracted. They who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title. I hope therefore the reader will not censure me for attempting to state what I have proposed to myself to perform; and also (as far as the limits of a preface will permit) to explain some of the chief reasons which have determined me in the choice of my purpose: that at least he

may be spared any unpleasant feeling of disappointment, and that I myself may be protected from one of the most dishonourable accusations which can be brought against an Author, namely, that of an indolence which prevents him from endeavouring to ascertain what is his duty, or, when his duty is ascertained, prevents him from performing it.

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose 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, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their

feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.

I cannot, however, be insensible to the present outcry against the triviality and meanness, both of thought and language, which some of my contemporaries have occasionally introduced into their metrical compositions; and I acknowledge that this defect, where it exists, is more dishonourable to the Writer's own character than false refinement or arbitrary innovation, though I should contend at the same time, that it is far less pernicious in the sum of its consequences. From such verses the Poems in these volumes will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy purpose. Not that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formerly conceived; but habits of meditation have, I trust, so prompted and regulated my feelings, that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a purpose. If this opinion be erroneous, I can have little right to the name of a Poet. For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of

much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connexion with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.

It has been said that each of these poems has a purpose. Another circumstance must be mentioned which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling.

A sense of false modesty shall not prevent me from asserting, that the Reader's attention is pointed to this mark of distinction, far less for the sake of these particular Poems than from the general importance of the subject. The subject is indeed important! For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day. For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly

gratifies. to this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.—When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble endeavour made in these volumes to counteract it; and, reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonourable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible; and were there not added to this impression a belief, that the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success.

Having dwelt thus long on the subjects and aim of these Poems, I shall request the Reader's permission to apprise him of a few circumstances relating to their style, in order, among other reasons, that he may not censure me for not having performed what I never attempted. The Reader will find that personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes; and are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose. My purpose was to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men; and assuredly such personifications do not make any natural or regular part of that language. They are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such; but have endeavoured utterly to reject them as a mechanical device of style, or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription. I have wished to keep the Reader in the company of flesh and blood, persuaded that by so doing I shall interest him. Others who pursue a different track will interest him likewise; I do not interfere

with their claim, but wish to prefer a claim of my own. There will also be found in these volumes little of what is usually called poetic diction; as much pains has been taken to avoid it as is ordinarily taken to produce it; this has been done for the reason already alleged, to bring my language near to the language of men; and further, because the pleasure which I have proposed to myself to impart, is of a kind very different from that which is supposed by many persons to be the proper object of poetry. Without being culpably particular, I do not know how to give my Reader a more exact notion of the style in which it was my wish and intention to write, than by informing him that I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject; consequently, there is I hope in these Poems little falsehood of description, and my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance. Something must have been gained by this practice, as it is friendly to one property of all good poetry, namely, good sense: but it has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets. I have also thought it expedient to restrict myself still further, having abstained from the use of many expressions, in themselves proper and beautiful, but which have been foolishly repeated by bad Poets, till such feelings of disgust are connected with them as it is scarcely possible by any art of association to overpower.

If in a poem there should be found a series of lines, or even a single line, in which the language, though naturally arranged, and according to the strict laws of metre, does not differ from that of prose, there is a numerous class of critics, who, when they stumble upon these prosaisms, as they call them, imagine that they have made a notable discovery, and exult over the Poet as over a man ignorant of his own profession. Now these men would establish a canon of criticism which the Reader will conclude he must utterly reject, if he wishes to be pleased with these volumes. and it would be a most easy task to prove to him, that not only the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most

elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written. The truth of this assertion might be demonstrated by innumerable passages from almost all the poetical writings, even of Milton himself. to illustrate the subject in a general manner, I will here adduce a short composition of Gray, who was at the head of those who, by their reasonings, have attempted to widen the space of separation betwixt Prose and Metrical composition, and was more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction.

In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,
And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fire:
The birds in vain their amorous descant join,
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire.
These ears, alas! for other notes repine;
A different object do these eyes require;
My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;
And in my breast the imperfect joys expire;
Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men;
The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;
To warm their little loves the birds complain.
I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,
And weep the more because I weep in vain.

It will easily be perceived, that the only part of this Sonnet which is of any value is the lines printed in Italics; it is equally obvious, that, except in the rhyme,

and in the use of the single word 'fruitless' for fruitlessly, which is so far a defect, the language of these lines does in no respect differ from that of prose.

By the foregoing quotation it has been shown that the language of Prose may yet be well adapted to Poetry; and it was previously asserted, that a large portion of the language of every good poem can in no respect differ from that of good Prose. We will go further. It may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. We are fond of tracing the resemblance between Poetry and Painting, and, accordingly, we call them Sisters: but where shall we find bonds of connexion sufficiently strict to typify the affinity betwixt metrical and prose composition? They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred, and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry 2 sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep,' but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial choir that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both.

If it be affirmed that rhyme and metrical arrangement of themselves constitute a distinction which overturns what has just been said on the strict affinity of metrical language with that of prose, and paves the way for other artificial distinctions which the mind voluntarily admits, I answer that the language of such Poetry as is here recommended is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men; that this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and, if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind. What other distinction would we have? Whence is

it to come? and where is it to exist? Not, surely, where the Poet speaks through the mouths of his characters: it cannot be necessary here, either for elevation of style, or any of its supposed ornaments: for, if the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures. I forbear to speak of an incongruity which would shock the intelligent Reader, should the Poet interweave any foreign splendour of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests: it is sufficient to say that such addition is unnecessary. and, surely, it is more probable that those passages, which with propriety abound with metaphors and figures, will have their due effect, if, upon other occasions where the passions are of a milder character, the style also be subdued and temperate.

But, as the pleasure which I hope to give by the Poems now presented to the Reader must depend entirely on just notions upon this subject, and, as it is in itself of high importance to our taste and moral feelings, I cannot content myself with these detached remarks. and if, in what I am about to say, it shall appear to some that my labour is unnecessary, and that I am like a man fighting a battle without enemies, such persons may be reminded, that, whatever be the language outwardly holden by men, a practical faith in the opinions which I am wishing to establish is almost unknown. If my conclusions are admitted, and carried as far as they must be carried if admitted at all, our judgements concerning the works of the greatest Poets both ancient and modern will be far different from what they are at present, both when we praise, and when we censure: and our moral feelings influencing and influenced by these judgements will, I believe, be corrected and purified.

Taking up the subject, then, upon general grounds, let me ask, what is meant by the word Poet? What is a Poet? to whom does he address himself? and

what language is to be expected from him?—He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. to these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves:— whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement.

But whatever portion of this faculty we may suppose even the greatest Poet to possess, there cannot be a doubt that the language which it will suggest to him, must often, in liveliness and truth, fall short of that which is uttered by men in real life, under the actual pressure of those passions, certain shadows of which the Poet thus produces, or feels to be produced, in himself.

However exalted a notion we would wish to cherish of the character of a Poet, it is obvious, that while he describes and imitates passions, his employment is in some degree mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering. So that it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his

feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs; modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure. Here, then, he will apply the principle of selection which has been already insisted upon. He will depend upon this for removing what would otherwise be painful or disgusting in the passion; he will feel that there is no necessity to trick out or to elevate nature: and, the more industriously he applies this principle, the deeper will be his faith that no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be to be compared with those which are the emanations of reality and truth.

But it may be said by those who do not object to the general spirit of these remarks, that, as it is impossible for the Poet to produce upon all occasions language as exquisitely fitted for the passion as that which the real passion itself suggests, it is proper that he should consider himself as in the situation of a translator, who does not scruple to substitute excellencies of another kind for those which are unattainable by him; and endeavours occasionally to surpass his original, in order to make some amends for the general inferiority to which he feels that he must submit. But this would be to encourage idleness and unmanly despair. Further, it is the language of men who speak of what they do not understand; who talk of Poetry as of a matter of amusement and idle pleasure; who will converse with us as gravely about a taste for Poetry, as they express it, as if it were a thing as indifferent as a taste for rope-dancing, or Frontiniac or Sherry. Aristotle, I have been told, has said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal.

Poetry is the image of man and nature. The obstacles which stand in the way of the fidelity of the Biographer and Historian, and of their consequent utility, are incalculably greater than those which are to be encountered by the Poet who comprehends the dignity of his art. The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man. Except this one restriction, there is no object standing between the Poet and the image of things; between this, and the Biographer and Historian, there are a thousand.

Nor let this necessity of producing immediate pleasure be considered as a degradation of the Poet's art. It is far otherwise. It is an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe, an acknowledgement the more sincere, because not formal, but indirect; it is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love: further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathize with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure. We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. The Man of science, the Chemist and Mathematician, whatever difficulties and disgusts they may have had to struggle with, know and feel this. However painful may be the objects with which the Anatomist's knowledge is connected, he feels that his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge. What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate

knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions, which from habit acquire the quality of intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment.

To this knowledge which all men carry about with them, and to these sympathies in which, without any other discipline than that of our daily life, we are fitted to take delight, the Poet principally directs his attention. He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature. and thus the Poet, prompted by this feeling of pleasure, which accompanies him through the whole course of his studies, converses with general nature, with affections akin to those, which, through labour and length of time, the Man of science has raised up in himself, by conversing with those particular parts of nature which are the objects of his studies. The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of science is pleasure; but the knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings. The Man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science. Emphatically may it be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, 'that he looks before and after.' He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of

mind, and things violently destroyed; the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. The objects of the Poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man. If the labours of Men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.—It is not, then, to be supposed that any one, who holds that sublime notion of Poetry which I have attempted to convey, will break in upon the sanctity and truth of his pictures by transitory and accidental ornaments, and endeavour to excite admiration of himself by arts, the necessity of which must manifestly depend upon the assumed meanness of his subject.

What has been thus far said applies to Poetry in general; but especially to those parts of composition where the Poet speaks through the mouths of his characters; and upon this point it appears to authorize the conclusion that there are

few persons of good sense, who would not allow that the dramatic parts of composition are defective, in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature, and are coloured by a diction of the Poet's own, either peculiar to him as an individual Poet or belonging simply to Poets in general; to a body of men who, from the circumstance of their compositions being in metre, it is expected will employ a particular language.

It is not, then, in the dramatic parts of composition that we look for this distinction of language; but still it may be proper and necessary where the Poet speaks to us in his own person and character. to this I answer by referring the Reader to the description before given of a Poet. Among the qualities there enumerated as principally conducing to form a Poet, is implied nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree. The sum of what was said is, that the Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner. But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men. and with what are they connected? Undoubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations of the elements, and the appearances of the visible universe; with storm and sunshine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow. These, and the like, are the sensations and objects which the Poet describes, as they are the sensations of other men, and the objects which interest them. The Poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions. How, then, can his language differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel vividly and see clearly? It might be proved that it is impossible. But supposing that this were not the case, the Poet might then be allowed to use a peculiar language when expressing his feelings for his own gratification, or that of men like himself. But

Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men. Unless therefore we are advocates for that admiration which subsists upon ignorance, and that pleasure which arises from hearing what we do not understand, the Poet must descend from this supposed height; and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves. to this it may be added, that while he is only selecting from the real language of men, or, which amounts to the same thing, composing accurately in the spirit of such selection, he is treading upon safe ground, and we know what we are to expect from him. Our feelings are the same with respect to metre; for, as it may be proper to remind the Reader, the distinction of metre is regular and uniform, and not, like that which is produced by what is usually called POETIC DICTION, arbitrary, and subject to infinite caprices upon which no calculation whatever can be made. In the one case, the Reader is utterly at the mercy of the Poet, respecting what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion; whereas, in the other, the metre obeys certain laws, to which the Poet and Reader both willingly submit because they are certain, and because no interference is made by them with the passion, but such as the concurring testimony of ages has shown to heighten and improve the pleasure which co-exists with it.

It will now be proper to answer an obvious question, namely, Why, professing these opinions, have I written in verse? to this, in addition to such answer as is included in what has been already said, I reply, in the first place, because however I may have restricted myself, there is still left open to me what confessedly constitutes the most valuable object of all writing, whether in prose or verse; the great and universal passions of men, the most general and interesting of their occupations, and the entire world of nature before me—to supply endless combinations of forms and imagery. Now, supposing for a moment that whatever is interesting in these objects may be as vividly described in prose, why should I be condemned for attempting to superadd to such description the charm which, by

the consent of all nations, is acknowledged to exist in metrical language? to this, by such as are yet unconvinced, it may be answered that a very small part of the pleasure given by Poetry depends upon the metre, and that it is injudicious to write in metre, unless it be accompanied with the other artificial distinctions of style with which metre is usually accompanied, and that, by such deviation, more will be lost from the shock which will thereby be given to the Reader's associations than will be counterbalanced by any pleasure which he can derive from the general power of numbers. In answer to those who still contend for the necessity of accompanying metre with certain appropriate colours of style in order to the accomplishment of its appropriate end, and who also, in my opinion, greatly underrate the power of metre in itself, it might, perhaps, as far as relates to these Volumes, have been almost sufficient to observe, that poems are extant, written upon more humble subjects, and in a still more naked and simple style, which have continued to give pleasure from generation to generation. Now, if nakedness and simplicity be a defect, the fact here mentioned affords a strong presumption that poems somewhat less naked and simple are capable of affording pleasure at the present day; and, what I wish chiefly to attempt, at present, was to justify myself for having written under the impression of this belief.

But various causes might be pointed out why, when the style is manly, and the subject of some importance, words metrically arranged will long continue to impart such a pleasure to mankind as he who proves the extent of that pleasure will be desirous to impart. The end of Poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure; but, by the supposition, excitement is an unusual and irregular state of the mind; ideas and feelings do not, in that state, succeed each other in accustomed order. If the words, however, by which this excitement is produced be in themselves powerful, or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds. Now the co-presence of

something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion. This is unquestionably true; and hence, though the opinion will at first appear paradoxical, from the tendency of metre to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of pain connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose. The metre of the old ballads is very artless; yet they contain many passages which would illustrate this opinion; and, I hope, if the following Poems be attentively perused, similar instances will be found in them. This opinion may be further illustrated by appealing to the Reader's own experience of the reluctance with which he comes to the reperusal of the distressful parts of *Clarissa Harlowe*, or *The Gamester*; while Shakespeare's writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us, as pathetic, beyond the bounds of pleasure—an effect which, in a much greater degree than might at first be imagined, is to be ascribed to small, but continual and regular impulses of pleasurable surprise from the metrical arrangement.—On the other hand (what it must be allowed will much more frequently happen) if the Poet's words should be incommensurate with the passion, and inadequate to raise the Reader to a height of desirable excitement, then (unless the Poet's choice of his metre has been grossly injudicious), in the feelings of pleasure which the Reader has been accustomed to connect with metre in general, and in the feeling, whether cheerful or melancholy, which he has been accustomed to connect with that particular movement of metre, there will be found something which will greatly contribute to impart passion to the words, and to effect the complex end which the Poet proposes to himself.

If I had undertaken a SYSTEMATIC defence of the theory here maintained, it would have been my duty to develop the various causes upon which the pleasure received from metrical language depends. Among the chief of these causes is to be reckoned a principle which must be well known to those who have made any of the Arts the object of accurate reflection; namely, the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it, take their origin: it is the life of our ordinary conversation; and upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our taste and our moral feelings. It would not be a useless employment to apply this principle to the consideration of metre, and to show that metre is hence enabled to afford much pleasure, and to point out in what manner that pleasure is produced. But my limits will not permit me to enter upon this subject, and I must content myself with a general summary.

I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment. If Nature be thus cautious to preserve in a state of enjoyment a being so employed, the Poet ought to profit by the lesson held forth to him, and ought especially to take care, that, whatever passions he communicates to his Reader, those passions, if his Reader's mind be sound and vigorous, should always

be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure. Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction, an indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language closely resembling that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of metre, differing from it so widely—all these imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling always found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions. This effect is always produced in pathetic and impassioned poetry; while, in lighter compositions, the ease and gracefulness with which the Poet manages his numbers are themselves confessedly a principal source of the gratification of the Reader. All that it is necessary to say, however, upon this subject, may be effected by affirming, what few persons will deny, that, of two descriptions, either of passions, manners, or characters, each of them equally well executed, the one in prose and the other in verse, the verse will be read a hundred times where the prose is read once.

Having thus explained a few of my reasons for writing in verse, and why I have chosen subjects from common life, and endeavoured to bring my language near to the real language of men, if I have been too minute in pleading my own cause, I have at the same time been treating a subject of general interest; and for this reason a few words shall be added with reference solely to these particular poems, and to some defects which will probably be found in them. I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, I may have sometimes written upon unworthy subjects; but I am less apprehensive on this account, than that my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connexions of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases, from which no man can altogether protect himself. Hence I have no doubt, that, in some instances,

feelings, even of the ludicrous, may be given to my Readers by expressions which appeared to me tender and pathetic. Such faulty expressions, were I convinced they were faulty at present, and that they must necessarily continue to be so, I would willingly take all reasonable pains to correct. But it is dangerous to make these alterations on the simple authority of a few individuals, or even of certain classes of men; for where the understanding of an Author is not convinced, or his feelings altered, this cannot be done without great injury to himself: for his own feelings are his stay and support; and, if he set them aside in one instance, he may be induced to repeat this act till his mind shall lose all confidence in itself, and become utterly debilitated. to this it may be added, that the critic ought never to forget that he is himself exposed to the same errors as the Poet, and, perhaps, in a much greater degree: for there can be no presumption in saying of most readers, that it is not probable they will be so well acquainted with the various stages of meaning through which words have passed, or with the fickleness or stability of the relations of particular ideas to each other; and, above all, since they are so much less interested in the subject, they may decide lightly and carelessly.

Long as the Reader has been detained, I hope he will permit me to caution him against a mode of false criticism which has been applied to Poetry, in which the language closely resembles that of life and nature. Such verses have been triumphed over in parodies, of which Dr. Johnson's stanza is a fair specimen:—

I put my hat upon my head
And walked into the Strand,
And there I met another man
Whose hat was in his hand.

Immediately under these lines let us place one of the most justly admired stanzas of the 'Babes in the Wood.'

These pretty Babes with hand in hand
Went wandering up and down;
But never more they saw the Man
Approaching from the town.

In both these stanzas the words, and the order of the words, in no respect differ from the most unimpassioned conversation. There are words in both, for example, 'the Strand,' and 'the town,' connected with none but the most familiar ideas; yet the one stanza we admit as admirable, and the other as a fair example of the superlatively contemptible. Whence arises this difference? Not from the metre, not from the language, not from the order of the words; but the matter expressed in Dr. Johnson's stanza is contemptible. The proper method of treating trivial and simple verses, to which Dr. Johnson's stanza would be a fair parallelism, is not to say, this is a bad kind of poetry, or, this is not poetry; but, this wants sense; it is neither interesting in itself nor can lead to anything interesting; the images neither originate in that sane state of feeling which arises out of thought, nor can excite thought or feeling in the Reader. This is the only sensible manner of dealing with such verses. Why trouble yourself about the species till you have previously decided upon the genus? Why take pains to prove that an ape is not a Newton, when it is self-evident that he is not a man?

One request I must make of my reader, which is, that in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgement of others. How common is it to hear a person say, I myself do not object to this style of composition, or this or that expression, but, to such and such classes of people it will appear mean or ludicrous! This mode of criticism, so destructive of all sound unadulterated judgement, is almost universal: let the Reader then abide, independently, by his own feelings, and, if he

finds himself affected, let him not suffer such conjectures to interfere with his pleasure.

If an Author, by any single composition, has impressed us with respect for his talents, it is useful to consider this as affording a presumption, that on other occasions where we have been displeased, he, nevertheless, may not have written ill or absurdly; and further, to give him so much credit for this one composition as may induce us to review what has displeased us, with more care than we should otherwise have bestowed upon it. This is not only an act of justice, but, in our decisions upon poetry especially, may conduce, in a high degree, to the improvement of our own taste; for an accurate taste in poetry, and in all the other arts, as Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed, is an acquired talent, which can only be produced by thought and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition. This is mentioned, not with so ridiculous a purpose as to prevent the most inexperienced Reader from judging for himself (I have already said that I wish him to judge for himself), but merely to temper the rashness of decision, and to suggest, that, if Poetry be a subject on which much time has not been bestowed, the judgement may be erroneous; and that, in many cases, it necessarily will be so.

Nothing would, I know, have so effectually contributed to further the end which I have in view, as to have shown of what kind the pleasure is, and how that pleasure is produced, which is confessedly produced by metrical composition essentially different from that which I have here endeavoured to recommend: for the Reader will say that he has been pleased by such composition; and what more can be done for him? The power of any art is limited; and he will suspect, that, if it be proposed to furnish him with new friends, that can be only upon condition of his abandoning his old friends. Besides, as I have said, the Reader is himself conscious of the pleasure which he has received from such composition, composition to which he has peculiarly attached the endearing name of Poetry;

and all men feel an habitual gratitude, and something of an honourable bigotry, for the objects which have long continued to please them: we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased. There is in these feelings enough to resist a host of arguments; and I should be the less able to combat them successfully, as I am willing to allow, that, in order entirely to enjoy the Poetry which I am recommending, it would be necessary to give up much of what is ordinarily enjoyed. But, would my limits have permitted me to point out how this pleasure is produced, many obstacles might have been removed, and the Reader assisted in perceiving that the powers of language are not so limited as he may suppose; and that it is possible for poetry to give other enjoyments, of a purer, more lasting, and more exquisite nature. This part of the subject has not been altogether neglected, but it has not been so much my present aim to prove, that the interest excited by some other kinds of poetry is less vivid, and less worthy of the nobler powers of the mind, as to offer reasons for presuming, that if my purpose were fulfilled, a species of poetry would be produced, which is genuine poetry; in its nature well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and likewise important in the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations.

From what has been said, and from a perusal of the Poems, the Reader will be able clearly to perceive the object which I had in view: he will determine how far it has been attained; and, what is a much more important question, whether it be worth attaining: and upon the decision of these two questions will rest my claim to the approbation of the Public.

3.0. 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* and Wordsworth's Poetic Theory:

By way of understanding and appraisal, it must first be asked what Wordsworth set out to do and then to what degree he succeeded. It has been remarked that he was one of the giants; almost single-handedly he revived English poetry from its threatened death from emotional starvation. What Burns, Blake, and Cowper, his contemporaries, wanted to do and could not, he did.

The neo-classically oriented writers of the so-called Augustan Age (1701 to about 1750), Swift, Gay, Addison and Steele, Pope, and to a lesser extent Richardson and Fielding, chose Latin authors of the time of the Pax Romana (hence the name Augustan) as their models. They admired Virgil and Horace for correctness of phrase and polished urbanity and grace. By contrast, Shakespeare they found crude. They wrote and criticized according to what they considered the proper and acceptable rules of taste. Their relationship to the natural environment was one of cautious imitation. They did not hold with simple tutelage at the hands of nature; reason and good sense had to intervene. Reason, indeed, was the prime source of inspiration; emotion had to be subordinated to thought. Thematically, conditions in "high" society furnished many of the plots and characters, and humble life tended to be contemptuously ignored.

From about 1750 to 1790, literature came to be dominated indirectly by Doctor Samuel Johnson. Johnson, while no romanticist, was, like Voltaire in France, scornful of neo-classicism's aims and methods and, through ridicule, hastened its undoing. New forces were at work in England; change and vitality were coming to the front. The full emergence of the party system and cabinet government had taken place; the empire grew, trade increased, and the middle class asserted new power. But the rules and fetters of neoclassicism still bound literature. For Johnson, reason and common sense still prevailed over imagination

and sentiment. His violent and neat literary opinions and his didactic prose and verse came to symbolize the retrenchment of reactionary forces and the kind of literary creation which amounted to a kind of "apology" for the old ways. In poetry, a break with traditionalism had begun. The so-called proto-romantics (transition poets), Cowper, Gray, Blake, and Burns, among others, balked at merely copying classical subjects and forms once more. They wrote instead about simple, natural things in plain language, though they retained many of the older poetic structures. And they still subscribed to the notion that poetry had to be "fancier" than prose — an idea Wordsworth was to denounce.

Poetic language was devitalized, and so was the thematic province of poetry: Neither any longer evoked feeling. The Romantics were compelled to look about for new ways of saying things. Before their arrival on the literary scene, the amount of jargon was astonishing: It was vulgar to call a man a man; he was commonly a swain. The elaborate and absurd similes and images had to be banished, and fresh and incisive poetic insights would have to replace the stereotyped and labored abstractions of their predecessors. Finally, the heroic couplet gave way to blank verse.

One of Wordsworth's finest achievements was that his simple childhood readied his mind to the value of the non-artificial, and he was not slow to appreciate the need for a reform of "poetic" language. Poetry became an immediate and intimate experience told by the experienced. Beauty was to be admired for its own sake. Wordsworth's reliance on unaffected speech and action and his deep conviction that simplicity of living was a philosophy harmoniously in agreement with nature wrought a revolution in poetic values. His 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads* became the symbol and the instrument of romantic revolt.

Wordsworth's philosophy of life, his theory of poetry, and his political credo were all intricately connected. A change in one characteristically brought parallel changes in the others. In 1793, the poet found himself without a penny, banished from the homes of his relatives, embittered by the excesses of the Revolution in France, and beset by personal fears and uncertainties. He became a member of the so-called Godwin circle in London. William Godwin, the political philosopher and novelist, deplored the role of emotion in human affairs and claimed salvation lay only in reason perfected by education. Wordsworth began a serious reading of Godwin and soon determined to abandon his early naive reliance on intuition and subject all his beliefs to close scrutiny. For four years, he clung tenaciously to his Godwinian outlook until he nearly suffered a nervous breakdown. And his poetry suffered as a result of his philosophy. He said of some of *Guilt and Sorrow* that its diction was "vicious" and the descriptions "often false." *The Borderers*, from the same vintage, is so artificial in tone as to be depressing.

By 1798, Wordsworth turned back to nature and her wholesome teachings. "The Tables Turned" and "Expostulation and Reply" (both 1798) are both anti-intellectual in tone and mood, and signal the final break with Godwinism. It chanced that David Hartley, founder of the associationist school in psychology — his views were adapted afterward in the social philosophy of the Utilitarians — who at the moment absorbed Coleridge's attention, had expounded views which Wordsworth fancied matched his very own. Hartley put fundamental emphasis on environment in the shaping of personality. He was an empiricist in the tradition of Locke. He had won vogue for his skill in translating the theory of the association of ideas into a psychology of learning. Wordsworth had been looking for a satisfactory psychology, and this was it. Hartley taught that sensations (elemental ideas) produced vibrations in the nervous system. He held (with Locke) that the

mind was a "blank slate" until sensation introduced simple ideas into it; hence, sensation was the basis of all knowledge.

The debt to Hartley is apparent throughout *Lyrical Ballads*. Nature, Wordsworth reasoned, teaches the only knowledge important to humanity. The human beings who possessed this vital knowledge would be those closest to nature — the farmers and shepherds of the countryside. So it was to describing the visions of people like this that he turned in *Lyrical Ballads*. The critics immediately pounced upon him, saying, in effect, he did not know poetry from agronomy, whereupon he reissued the poems and added his notorious 'Preface', which informed the critics (though not in certain terms) that it was they who were absolutely ignorant of the real nature of poetry.

In late 1797, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and his sister Dorothy planned a trip from Alfoxden, where they lived, to the Valley of Stones, near Lynmouth, in Devon. They proposed meeting expenses for the modest trip by writing a poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and submitting it to the *Monthly Magazine* in the hope of getting five pounds. Wordsworth early had misgivings and withdrew from authorship because he feared that he would botch the poem. He was in the process of writing his own poems, and the two men constantly aired their views on the nature of poetry and the poetic faculty.

The two men complemented each other. Coleridge thought in terms of quick and brilliant generalizations and Wordsworth thought somewhat ploddingly and provided a valuable devotion to detail. Jointly, they conceived the romantic formula which was to enliven poetry from that day to this, Coleridge with his vast knowledge of German transcendental philosophy in which traces of romanticism were already evident, and Wordsworth with his cunning awareness of the magic of the commonplace. They induced a mutual flood of creativity. It was Coleridge

who afterward urged Wordsworth on with *The Prelude* and persuaded him to undertake *The Recluse*. Coleridge's contemporaries alleged it was impossible not to plan on a vast and abstract scale while under his influence.

Out of the discussions between the two men about what poetry ought to be and how it should affect its audience came a growing desire on the part of the two poets to collaborate on a volume of verse. They adopted a division of labor in which Coleridge would endeavor through poetic means to make the uncommon (supernatural) credible; Wordsworth would attempt to make the common uncommon — through simple but meticulous descriptions of everyday things. The decision to be guided by these tenets amounted to the fanfare announcing the romantic revolt in English literature. *Lyrical Ballads* became both the symbol and instrument of that revolution. Thus was disclosed the prescription which was to carry poetry and prose through romantic, realist, and modern phases, and which invests them to this very day; the evocation of emotion and inculcation of transcendental awareness through the artistic examination of immediate experience.

The spearhead and chief mechanism for this process was going to be a revolutionary type of poetic diction for which Wordsworth was to become famous. The original formulation was rather crude, and it underwent transformation at the hands of the poets as they proceeded. Coleridge became less and less convinced of its power as an artistic tool and finally disclaimed it altogether, saying that he and Wordsworth might have subscribed to it in theory but fell far short of exploiting it in actuality. Wordsworth himself felt that his work was a shining embodiment of the doctrine — as well as a vindication — and never completely abandoned it.

The second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* appeared in two volumes in 1800 in Wordsworth's name alone. In the anonymous 1798 edition, there had been a mere

"advertisement" to orient the reader to the poems; in 1800, the famous "Preface" took its place. Wordsworth notes that friends had urged him to write a defense of the collection, but he preferred to write instead a "simple" introduction. This turned out to be a somewhat long explanation of the poet's attempt to write in a manner hitherto unknown.

He describes poetry as the spontaneous overflow of emotions. Poetry is not dependent upon rhetorical and literary devices, but is the free expression of the poet's thought and feeling. The poet is a teacher and must strive to reveal truth, not through scientific analysis and abstraction, but through an imaginative awareness of persons and things. He may broaden and enrich our human sympathies and our enjoyment of nature in this way. He must communicate his ideas and emotions through a powerful re-creation of the original experience. For this, he must have a sensibility far beyond that of the ordinary individual. He tells how he weeded out the dead expressions from the older poetic vocabulary and substituted the flesh-and-blood language of the common person. Poetry and prose, he says, differ only as to presence or absence of rhyme; they do not differ as to language. For Wordsworth, the important thing was the emotion aroused by the poem, not the poem itself (hence his lukewarm regard for form). In the last analysis, a poem re-stimulated past emotion in the reader and promoted learning by using pleasure as a vehicle.

Coleridge remarked that half the 'Preface' was in fact the child of his own brain. Yet, he felt that there was much that was inadequate in the document. He felt that Wordsworth's conception of poetry relied too much on Hartley's theories and did not adequately explain Wordsworth's poems. Coleridge says in the *Biographia Literaria* (1814) that he was convinced Wordsworth's work was not the product of simple fancy, but of imagination — a creative, and not a mere associative, faculty. Furthermore, he thought the difference between poetry and

prose was substantial, and it lay in the different ways they treated the same subject. He agreed with Wordsworth's idea of plain poetic diction but felt his colleague had not given enough thought to selecting from the language of everyday life. He thought Wordsworth's poetry reached a true sublimity when he most forgot his own ideas.

Wordsworth's position in his later work grew closer to that of Coleridge. But the poetic doctrines elaborated in the 'Preface' solidly underlay *Lyrical Ballads* and were the springboard to the expanded philosophy of art throughout *The Prelude*.

Sources/Suggested Reading:

1. <http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/p/the-prelude/critical-essays/wordsworths-poetic-theory-8212-preface>
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PAPER VII

UNIT 3

COLERIDGE'S BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA (CHAPTER XIII)

1.0. Introduction:

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, (born October 21, 1772, Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire, England—died July 25, 1834, Highgate, near London), English lyrical poet, critic, and philosopher. His *Lyrical Ballads*, written with William Wordsworth, heralded the English Romantic movement, and his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is the most significant work of general literary criticism produced in the English Romantic period.

Coleridge's father was vicar of Ottery and headmaster of the local grammar school. As a child Coleridge was already a prodigious reader, and he immersed himself to the point of morbid fascination in romances and Eastern tales such as *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*. In 1781 his father died suddenly, and in the following year Coleridge entered Christ's Hospital in London, where he completed his secondary education. In 1791 he entered Jesus College, Cambridge. At both school and university he continued to read voraciously, particularly in works of imagination and visionary philosophy, and he was remembered by his schoolmates for his eloquence and prodigious memory. In his third year at Cambridge, oppressed by financial difficulties, he went to London and enlisted as

a dragoon under the assumed name of Silas Tomkyn Comberbach. Despite his unfitness for the life, he remained until discovered by his friends; he was then bought out by his brothers and restored to Cambridge.

On his return, he was restless. The intellectual and political turmoil surrounding the French Revolution had set in motion intense and urgent discussion concerning the nature of society. Coleridge now conceived the design of circumventing the disastrous violence that had destroyed the idealism of the French Revolution by establishing a small society that should organize itself and educate its children according to better principles than those obtaining in the society around them. A chance meeting with the poet Robert Southey led the two men to plan such a “pantisocracy” and to set up a community by the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. To this end Coleridge left Cambridge for good and set up with Southey as a public lecturer in Bristol. In October 1795 he married Sara Fricker, daughter of a local schoolmistress, swayed partly by Southey’s suggestion that he was under an obligation to her since she had been refusing the advances of other men.

Shortly afterward, Southey defected from the pantisocratic scheme, leaving Coleridge married to a woman whom he did not really love. In a sense his career never fully recovered from this blow: if there is a makeshift quality about many of its later events, one explanation can be found in his constant need to reconcile his intellectual aspirations with the financial needs of his family. During this period, however, Coleridge’s intellect flowered in an extraordinary manner, as he embarked on an investigation of the nature of the human mind, joined by William Wordsworth, with whom he had become acquainted in 1795. Together they entered upon one of the most influential creative periods of English literature.

Coleridge's intellectual ebullience and his belief in the existence of a powerful "life consciousness" in all individuals rescued Wordsworth from the depression into which recent events had cast him and made possible the new approach to nature that characterized his contributions to *Lyrical Ballads* (which was to be published in 1798).

Coleridge, meanwhile, was developing a new, informal mode of poetry in which he could use a conversational tone and rhythm to give unity to a poem. Of these poems, the most successful is "Frost at Midnight," which begins with the description of a silent frosty night in Somerset and proceeds through a meditation on the relationship between the quiet work of frost and the quiet breathing of the sleeping baby at the poet's side, to conclude in a resolve that his child shall be brought up as a "child of nature," so that the sympathies that the poet has come to detect may be reinforced throughout the child's education.

At the climax of the poem, he touches another theme, which lies at the root of his philosophical attitude:

...so shalt thou see and hear

The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible

Of that eternal language, which thy God

Utters, who from eternity doth teach

Himself in all, and all things in himself.

Coleridge's attempts to learn this "language" and trace it through the ancient traditions of mankind also led him during this period to return to the visionary interests of his schooldays: as he ransacked works of comparative religion and mythology, he was exploring the possibility that all religions and mythical traditions, with their general agreement on the unity of God and the immortality of the soul, sprang from a universal life consciousness, which was expressed particularly through the phenomena of human genius.

While these speculations were at their most intense, he retired to a lonely farmhouse near Culbone, Somersetshire, and, according to his own account, composed under the influence of laudanum the mysterious poetic fragment known as "Kubla Khan." The exotic imagery and rhythmic chant of this poem have led many critics to conclude that it should be read as a "meaningless reverie" and enjoyed merely for its vivid and sensuous qualities. An examination of the poem in the light of Coleridge's psychological and mythological interests, however, suggests that it has, after all, a complex structure of meaning and is basically a poem about the nature of human genius. The first two stanzas show the two sides of what Coleridge elsewhere calls "commanding genius": its creative aspirations in time of peace as symbolized in the projected pleasure dome and gardens of the first stanza; and its destructive power in time of turbulence as symbolized in the wailing woman, the destructive fountain, and the voices prophesying war of the second stanza. In the final stanza the poet writes of a state of "absolute genius" in

which, if inspired by a visionary “Abyssinian maid,” he would become endowed with the creative, divine power of a sun god—an Apollo or Osiris subduing all around him to harmony by the fascination of his spell.

Coleridge was enabled to explore the same range of themes less egotistically in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” composed during the autumn and winter of 1797–98. For this, his most famous poem, he drew upon the ballad form. The main narrative tells how a sailor who has committed a crime against the life principle by slaying an albatross suffers from torments, physical and mental, in which the nature of his crime is made known to him. The underlying life power against which he has transgressed is envisaged as a power corresponding to the influx of the sun’s energy into all living creatures, thereby binding them together in a joyful communion. By killing the bird that hovered near the ship, the mariner has destroyed one of the links in this process. His own consciousness is consequently affected: the sun, previously glorious, is seen as a bloody sun, and the energies of the deep are seen as corrupt.

All in a hot and copper sky,

The bloody Sun, at noon,

Right up above the mast did stand,

No bigger than the Moon.

.....

The very deep did rot; O Christ!

That ever this should be!

Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs

Upon the slimy sea.

Only at night do these energies display a sinister beauty.

About, about, in reel and rout

The death-fires danced at night;

The water, like a witch's oils,

Burnt green, and blue and white.

After the death of his shipmates, alone and becalmed, devoid of a sense of movement or even of time passing, the mariner is in a hell created by the absence of any link with life. Eventually, however, a chance sight of water snakes flashing like golden fire in the darkness, answered by an outpouring of love from his heart, reinitiates the creative process: he is given a brief vision of the inner unity of the universe, in which all living things hymn their source in an interchange of harmonies. Restored to his native land, he remains haunted by what he has experienced but is at least delivered from nightmare, able to see the ordinary processes of human life with a new sense of their wonder and mercifulness. These last qualities are reflected in the poem's attractive combination of vividness and sensitivity. The placing of it at the beginning of *Lyrical Ballads* was evidently intended to provide a context for the sense of wonder in common life that marks many of Wordsworth's contributions. While this volume was going through the press, Coleridge began a complementary poem, a Gothic ballad entitled "Christabel," in which he aimed to show how naked energy might be redeemed through contact with a spirit of innocent love.

1.1. Troubled Years of Coleridge:

Early in 1798 Coleridge had again found himself preoccupied with political issues. The French Revolutionary government had suppressed the states of the Swiss Confederation, and Coleridge expressed his bitterness at this betrayal of the principles of the Revolution in a poem entitled "France: An Ode."

At this time the brothers Josiah and Thomas Wedgwood, who were impressed by Coleridge's intelligence and promise, offered him in 1798 an annuity of £150 as a means of subsistence while he pursued his intellectual concerns. He used his new independence to visit Germany with Wordsworth and Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy. While there Coleridge attended lectures on physiology and biblical criticism at Göttingen. He thus became aware of developments in German scholarship that were little-known in England until many years later.

On his return to England, the tensions of his marriage were exacerbated when he fell in love with Sara Hutchinson, the sister of Wordsworth's future wife, at the end of 1799. His devotion to the Wordsworths in general did little to help matters, and for some years afterward Coleridge was troubled by domestic strife, accompanied by the worsening of his health and by his increasing dependence on opium. His main literary achievements during the period included another section of "Christabel." In 1802 Coleridge's domestic unhappiness gave rise to "Dejection: An Ode," originally a longer verse letter sent to Sara Hutchinson in which he lamented the corrosive effect of his intellectual activities when undertaken as a refuge from the lovelessness of his family life. The poem employs the technique of his conversational poems; the sensitive rhythms and phrasing that he had learned to use in them are here masterfully deployed to represent his own depressed state of mind.

Although Coleridge hoped to combine a platonic love for Sara with fidelity to his wife and children and to draw sustenance from the Wordsworth household, his hopes were not realized, and his health deteriorated further. He therefore resolved to spend some time in a warmer climate and, late in 1804, accepted a post in Malta as secretary to the acting governor. Later he spent a long time journeying

across Italy, but, despite his hopes, his health did not improve during his time abroad. The time spent in Malta had been a time of personal reappraisal, however. Brought into direct contact with men accustomed to handling affairs of state, he had found himself lacking an equal forcefulness and felt that in consequence he often forfeited the respect of others. On his return to England he resolved to become more manly and decisive. Within a few months he had finally decided to separate from his wife and to live for the time being with the Wordsworths. Southey atoned for his disastrous youthful advice by exercising a general oversight of Coleridge's family for the rest of his days.

Coleridge published a periodical, *The Friend*, from June 1809 to March 1810 and ceased only when Sara Hutchinson, who had been acting as amanuensis, found the strain of the relationship too much for her and retired to her brother's farm in Wales. Coleridge, resentful that Wordsworth should apparently have encouraged his sister-in-law's withdrawal, resolved shortly afterward to terminate his working relationship with William and Dorothy Wordsworth and to settle in London again.

The period immediately following was the darkest of his life. His disappointment with Wordsworth was followed by anguish when a wounding remark of Wordsworth's was carelessly reported to him. For some time he remained in London, nursing his grievances and producing little. Opium retained its powerful hold on him, and the writings that survive from this period are redolent of unhappiness, with self-dramatization veering toward self-pity.

In spite of this, however, there also appear signs of a slow revival, principally because for the first time Coleridge knew what it was to be a fashionable figure. A course of lectures he delivered during the winter of 1811–12 attracted a large audience; for many years Coleridge had been fascinated by William Shakespeare's achievement, and his psychological interpretations of the chief characters were new and exciting to his contemporaries. During this period, Coleridge's play *Osorio*, written many years before, was produced at Drury Lane with the title *Remorse* in January 1813.

1.2. Late Life and Works:

In the end, consolation came from an unexpected source. In dejection, unable to produce extended work or break the opium habit, he spent a long period with friends in Wiltshire, where he was introduced to Archbishop Robert Leighton's commentary on the First Letter of Peter. In the writings of this 17th-century divine, he found a combination of tenderness and sanctity that appealed deeply to him and seemed to offer an attitude to life that he himself could fall back on. The discovery marks an important shift of balance in his intellectual attitudes. Christianity, hitherto one point of reference for him, now became his "official" creed. By aligning himself with the Anglican church of the 17th century at its best, he hoped to find a firm point of reference that would both keep him in communication with orthodox Christians of his time (thus giving him the social approval he always needed, even if only from a small group of friends) and enable him to pursue his former intellectual explorations in the hope of reaching a Christian synthesis that might help to revitalize the English church both intellectually and emotionally.

One effect of the adoption of this basis for his intellectual and emotional life was a sense of liberation and an ability to produce large works again. He drew together a collection of his poems (published in 1817 as *Sibylline Leaves*) and wrote *Biographia Literaria* (1817), a rambling and discursive but highly stimulating and influential work in which he outlined the evolution of his thought and developed an extended critique of Wordsworth's poems.

For the general reader *Biographia Literaria* is a misleading volume, since it moves bewilderingly between autobiography, abstruse philosophical discussion, and literary criticism. It has, however, an internal coherence of its own. The book's individual components—first an entertaining account of Coleridge's early life, then an account of the ways in which he became dissatisfied with the associationist theories of David Hartley and other 18th-century philosophers, then a reasoned critique of Wordsworth's poems—are fascinating. Over the whole work hovers Coleridge's veneration for the power of imagination: once this key is grasped, the unity of the work becomes evident.

A new dramatic piece, *Zapolya*, was also published in 1817. In the same year, Coleridge became associated for a time with the new *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana*, for which he planned a novel system of organization, outlined in his *Prospectus*. These were more settled years for Coleridge. Since 1816 he had lived in the house of James Gillman, a surgeon at Highgate, north of London. His election as a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1824 brought him an annuity of £105 and a sense of recognition. In 1830 he joined the controversy that had arisen around the issue of Catholic Emancipation by writing his last prose work, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*. The third edition of Coleridge's *Poetical Works* appeared in time for him to see it before his final illness and death in 1834.

1.3. Coleridge as a Literary Critic:

Coleridge is one of the greatest of literary critics, and his greatness has been almost universally recognized. He occupies, without doubt, the first place among English literary critics. After eliminating one after another the possible contenders for the title of the greatest critic, Saintsbury concludes:

“So, then there abide these three – Aristotle, Longinus and Coleridge.”

According to Arthur Symonds, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* is,

“... the greatest book of criticism in English.”

Herbert Read concludes Coleridge as:

“... head and shoulders above every other English critic.”

I. A. Richards considers him as the fore-runner “of the modern science of semantics”, and Rene Wellek is of the view that he is a link, “between German Transcendentalism and English Romanticism.”

A man of stupendous learning, both in philosophy and literature, ancient as well as modern, and refined sensibility and penetration intellect, Coleridge was eminently fitted to the task of a critic. His practical criticism consists of his evaluations of Shakespeare and other English dramatists, and of Milton and Wordsworth. Despite the fact there are so many digressions and repetitions, his practical criticism is always illuminating and highly original. It is rich in suggestions of far reaching value and significance, and flashes of insight rarely to be met with in any other critic. His greatness is well brought out, if we keep in mind the state of practical criticism in England before him. The Neo-classic critics judged on the basis of fixed rules. They were neither legislative nor judicial, nor were carried away by their prejudices. Coleridge does not judge on the basis of any rules. He does not pass any judgment, but gives his responses and reactions to a work of art. His criticism is impressionistic-romantic, a new kind of criticism, a criticism which dealt a knock out blow to neo-classic criticism, and has been in vogue, more or less, ever since. He could discover new beauties in Shakespeare and could bring about fresh re-valuations of a number of old English masters. Similarly, his criticism of Wordsworth and his theories enable us to judge him and his views in the correct perspective.

In the field of theoretical inquiry, Coleridge was the first to introduce psychology and philosophy into literary criticism. He was interested in the study of the process of poetic creation, the very principles of creative activity, and for this purposes freely drew upon philosophy and psychology. He thus made philosophy the basis of literary inquiry, and thus brought about a union of philosophy, psychology and literary criticism. His literary theories have their bases in philosophy; he imparted to criticism the dignity which belongs to philosophy. He philosophized literary criticism and thus brought about a better and truer understanding of the process of creation and the nature and function of poetry.

His greatest and most original contribution to literary criticism is his theory of imagination. Addison had examined the nature and function of imagination, and Wordsworth, too, had developed his own theory on the subject. But all previous discussions of imagination look superficial and childish when compared with Coleridge's treatment of the subject. He is the first critic to differentiate between Imagination and Fancy, and to differentiate between primary and secondary Imagination. Through his theory of imagination he revolutionized the concept of artistic imitation. Poetic imitation is neither a servile copy of nature, nor is it the creation of something entirely new and different from Nature. Poetry is not imitation, but creation, but it is creation based on the sensations and impressions received from the external world. Such impressions are shaped, ordered, modified and opposites are reconciled and harmonized, by the imagination of the poet, and in this way poetic creation takes place.

Further, as David Daiches points out:

“It was Coleridge who finally, for the first time, resolved the age old problem of the relation between the form and content of poetry.”

Through his philosophical inquiry into the nature and value of poetry, he established that a poem is an organic whole, and that its form is determined by its content, and is essential to that content. Thus metre and rhyme, he showed, are not merely, “pleasure super-added”, not merely something superfluous which can be dispensed with, not mere decoration, but essential to that pleasure which is the true

poetic pleasure. This demonstration of the organic wholeness of a poem is one of his major contributions to literary theory.

Similarly, his theory of “Willing Suspension of Disbelief” marks a significant advance over earlier theories on the subject. His view that during the perusal of a poem or the witnessing of a play, there is neither belief nor disbelief, but a mere suspension of disbelief, is not universally accepted as correct, and the controversy on the subject has been finally set at rest.

However, it may be mentioned in the end that as Coleridge’s views are too philosophical, he is a critic no easy to understand. Often it is fragmentary and unsystematic. Victorians, in general, could not appreciate him and his appeal was confined to the few.

It is only in the 20th century that his literary criticism has been truly understood and recognition and appreciation have followed. Today his reputation stands very high, and many go to him for inspiration and illumination. Despite the fragmentary nature of his work, he is now regarded as the most original critic of England.

1.4. Evaluation:

Coleridge’s achievement has been given more widely varying assessments than that of any other English literary artist, though there is broad agreement that his enormous potential was never fully realized in his works. His stature as a poet

has never been in doubt; in “Kubla Khan” and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” he wrote two of the greatest poems in English literature and perfected a mode of sensuous lyricism that is often echoed by later poets. But he also has a reputation as one of the most important of all English literary critics, largely on the basis of his *Biographia Literaria*. In Coleridge’s view, the essential element of literature was a union of emotion and thought that he described as imagination. He especially stressed poetry’s capacity for integrating the universal and the particular, the objective and the subjective, the generic and the individual. The function of criticism for Coleridge was to discern these elements and to lift them into conscious awareness, rather than merely to prescribe or to describe rules or forms.

In all his roles, as poet, social critic, literary critic, theologian, and psychologist, Coleridge expressed a profound concern with elucidating an underlying creative principle that is fundamental to both human beings and the universe as a whole. To Coleridge, imagination is the archetype of this unifying force because it represents the means by which the twin human capacities for intuitive, non-rational understanding and for organizing and discriminating thought concerning the material world are reconciled. It was by means of this sort of reconciliation of opposites that Coleridge attempted, with considerable success, to combine a sense of the universal and ideal with an acute observation of the particular and sensory in his own poetry and in his criticism.

2.0. *Biographia Literaria*:

Biographia Literaria, or in full *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of MY LITERARY LIFE and OPINIONS*, is an autobiography in discourse

by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which he published in 1817, in two volumes. The work is long and seemingly loosely structured, and although there are autobiographical elements, it is not a straightforward or linear autobiography. Instead, it is meditative. The work was originally intended as a mere preface to a collected volume of his poems, explaining and justifying his own style and practice in poetry. The work grew to a literary autobiography, including, together with many facts concerning his education and studies and his early literary adventures, an extended criticism of William Wordsworth's theory of poetry as given in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (a work on which Coleridge collaborated), and a statement of Coleridge's philosophical views.

In the first part of the work Coleridge is mainly concerned with showing the evolution of his philosophic creed. At first an adherent of the associational psychology of David Hartley, he came to discard this mechanical system for the belief that the mind is not a passive but an active agency in the apprehension of reality. The author believed in the "self-sufficing power of absolute Genius" and distinguished between genius and talent as between "an egg and an egg-shell". The discussion involves his definition of the imagination or "esemplastic power," the faculty by which the soul perceives the spiritual unity of the universe, as distinguished from the fancy or merely associative function.

The book has numerous essays on philosophy. In particular, it discusses and engages the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. Being fluent in German, Coleridge was one of the first major English literary figures to translate and discuss Schelling, in particular.

The later chapters of the book deal with the nature of poetry and with the question of diction raised by Wordsworth. While maintaining a general agreement with Wordsworth's point of view, Coleridge elaborately refutes his principle that the language of poetry should be one taken with due exceptions from the mouths of men in real life, and that there can be no essential difference between the language of prose and of metrical composition. A critique on the qualities of Wordsworth's poetry concludes the volume.

The book contains Coleridge's celebrated and vexed distinction between "imagination" and "fancy". Chapter XIV is the origin of the famous critical concept of a "willing suspension of disbelief".

2.1. Biographia Literaria: Chapter XIII

On the imagination or esemplastic power

O Adam, One Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not depriv'd from good, created all
Such to perfection, one first matter all,
Endued with various forms, various degrees
Of substance, and, in things that live, of life;
But more refin'd, more spiritous and pure,
As nearer to him plac'd, or nearer tending,
Each in their several active spheres assign'd,
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
Proportion'd to each kind. So from the root

Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
More aery: last the bright consummate flower
Spirits odorous breathes: flowers and their fruit,
Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd,
To vital spirits aspire: to animal:
To intellectual!--give both life and sense,
Fancy and understanding; whence the soul
REASON receives, and reason is her being,
Discursive or intuitive.

"Sane dicerentur si res corporales nil nisi materiale continerent, verissime in fluxu consistere, neque habere substantiale quicquam, quemadmodum et Platonici olim recte agnovere."

"Hinc igitur, praeter pure mathematica et phantasiae subjecta, collegi quaedam metaphysica solaque mente perceptibilia, esse admittenda et massae materiali principium quoddam superius et, ut sic dicam, formale addendum: quandoquidem omnes veritates rerum corporearum ex solis axiomatibus logisticis et geometricis, nempe de magno et parvo, toto et parte, figura et situ, colligi non possint; sed alia de causa et effectum, actioneque et passione, accedere debeant, quibus ordinis rerum rationes salventur. Id principium rerum, an entelecheian an vim appellemus, non refert, modo meminerimus, per solam Virium notionem intelligibiliter explicari."

Sebomai noeron
Kruphian taxin
Chorei TI MESON
Ou katachuthen.

Des Cartes, speaking as a naturalist, and in imitation of Archimedes, said, give me matter and motion and I will construct you the universe. We must of course understand him to have meant; I will render the construction of the universe intelligible. In the same sense the transcendental philosopher says; grant me a nature having two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity, and I will cause the world of intelligences with the whole system of their representations to rise up before you. Every other science presupposes intelligence as already existing and complete: the philosopher contemplates it in its growth, and as it were represents its history to the mind from its birth to its maturity.

The venerable sage of Koenigsberg has preceded the march of this master-thought as an effective pioneer in his essay on the introduction of negative quantities into philosophy, published 1763. In this he has shown, that instead of assailing the science of mathematics by metaphysics, as Berkeley did in his ANALYST, or of sophisticating it, as Wolf did, by the vain attempt of deducing the first principles of geometry from supposed deeper grounds of ontology, it behoved the metaphysician rather to examine whether the only province of knowledge, which man has succeeded in erecting into a pure science, might not furnish materials, or at least hints, for establishing and pacifying the unsettled, warring, and embroiled domain of philosophy. An imitation of the mathematical method had indeed been attempted with no better success than attended the essay of David to wear the armour of Saul. Another use however is possible and of far greater promise, namely, the actual application of the positions which had so wonderfully enlarged the discoveries of geometry, mutatis mutandis, to

philosophical subjects. Kant having briefly illustrated the utility of such an attempt in the questions of space, motion, and infinitely small quantities, as employed by the mathematician, proceeds to the idea of negative quantities and the transfer of them to metaphysical investigation. Opposites, he well observes, are of two kinds, either logical, that is, such as are absolutely incompatible; or real, without being contradictory. The former he denominates *Nihil negativum irrepraesentabile*, the connection of which produces nonsense. A body in motion is something-- *Aliquid cogitabile*; but a body, at one and the same time in motion and not in motion, is nothing, or, at most, air articulated into nonsense. But a motory force of a body in one direction, and an equal force of the same body in an opposite direction is not incompatible, and the result, namely, rest, is real and representable. For the purposes of mathematical calculus it is indifferent which force we term negative, and which positive, and consequently we appropriate the latter to that, which happens to be the principal object in our thoughts. Thus if a man's capital be ten and his debts eight, the subtraction will be the same, whether we call the capital negative debt, or the debt negative capital. But in as much as the latter stands practically in reference to the former, we of course represent the sum as $10-8$. It is equally clear that two equal forces acting in opposite directions, both being finite and each distinguished from the other by its direction only, must neutralize or reduce each other to inaction. Now the transcendental philosophy demands; first, that two forces should be conceived which counteract each other by their essential nature; not only not in consequence of the accidental direction of each, but as prior to all direction, nay, as the primary forces from which the conditions of all possible directions are derivative and deducible: secondly, that these forces should be assumed to be both alike infinite, both alike indestructible. The problem will then be to discover the result or product of two such forces, as distinguished from the result of those forces which are finite, and derive their difference solely from the circumstance of their direction. When we have formed a scheme or outline of these two different kinds of force, and of their different results, by the process of

discursive reasoning, it will then remain for us to elevate the thesis from notional to actual, by contemplating intuitively this one power with its two inherent indestructible yet counteracting forces, and the results or generations to which their inter-penetration gives existence, in the living principle and in the process of our own self-consciousness. By what instrument this is possible the solution itself will discover, at the same time that it will reveal to and for whom it is possible. Non omnia possumus omnes. There is a philosophic no less than a poetic genius, which is differenced from the highest perfection of talent, not by degree but by kind.

The counteraction then of the two assumed forces does not depend on their meeting from opposite directions; the power which acts in them is indestructible; it is therefore inexhaustibly re-ebullient; and as something must be the result of these two forces, both alike infinite, and both alike indestructible; and as rest or neutralization cannot be this result; no other conception is possible, but that the product must be a tertium aliquid, or finite generation. Consequently this conception is necessary. Now this tertium aliquid can be no other than an inter-penetration of the counteracting powers, partaking of both.

* * * * *

Thus far had the work been transcribed for the press, when I received the following letter from a friend, whose practical judgment I have had ample reason to estimate and revere, and whose taste and sensibility preclude all the excuses which my self-love might possibly have prompted me to set up in plea against the decision of advisers of equal good sense, but with less tact and feeling.

"Dear C.

"You ask my opinion concerning your Chapter on the Imagination, both as to the impressions it made on myself, and as to those which I think it will make on the Public, i.e. that part of the public, who, from the title of the work and from its forming a sort of introduction to a volume of poems, are likely to constitute the great majority of your readers.

"As to myself, and stating in the first place the effect on my understanding, your opinions and method of argument were not only so new to me, but so directly the reverse of all I had ever been accustomed to consider as truth, that even if I had comprehended your premises sufficiently to have admitted them, and had seen the necessity of your conclusions, I should still have been in that state of mind, which in your note in Chap. IV you have so ingeniously evolved, as the antithesis to that in which a man is, when he makes a bull. In your own words, I should have felt as if I had been standing on my head.

"The effect on my feelings, on the other hand, I cannot better represent, than by supposing myself to have known only our light airy modern chapels of ease, and then for the first time to have been placed, and left alone, in one of our largest Gothic cathedrals in a gusty moonlight night of autumn. 'Now in glimmer, and now in gloom;' often in palpable darkness not without a chilly sensation of terror; then suddenly emerging into broad yet visionary lights with coloured

shadows of fantastic shapes, yet all decked with holy insignia and mystic symbols; and ever and anon coming out full upon pictures and stone-work images of great men, with whose names I was familiar, but which looked upon me with countenances and an expression, the most dissimilar to all I had been in the habit of connecting with those names. Those whom I had been taught to venerate as almost super-human in magnitude of intellect, I found perched in little fret-work niches, as grotesque dwarfs; while the grotesques, in my hitherto belief, stood guarding the high altar with all the characters of apotheosis. In short, what I had supposed substances were thinned away into shadows, while everywhere shadows were deepened into substances:

If substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,

For each seem'd either!

"Yet after all, I could not but repeat the lines which you had quoted from a MS. poem of your own in the FRIEND, and applied to a work of Mr. Wordsworth's though with a few of the words altered:

-----An Orphic tale indeed,

A tale obscure of high and passionate thoughts

To a strange music chanted!

"Be assured, however, that I look forward anxiously to your great book on the CONSTRUCTIVE PHILOSOPHY, which you have promised and announced:

and that I will do my best to understand it. Only I will not promise to descend into the dark cave of Trophonius with you, there to rub my own eyes, in order to make the sparks and figured flashes, which I am required to see.

"So much for myself. But as for the Public I do not hesitate a moment in advising and urging you to withdraw the Chapter from the present work, and to reserve it for your announced treatises on the Logos or communicative intellect in Man and Deity. First, because imperfectly as I understand the present Chapter, I see clearly that you have done too much, and yet not enough. You have been obliged to omit so many links, from the necessity of compression, that what remains, looks (if I may recur to my former illustration) like the fragments of the winding steps of an old ruined tower. Secondly, a still stronger argument (at least one that I am sure will be more forcible with you) is, that your readers will have both right and reason to complain of you. This Chapter, which cannot, when it is printed, amount to so little as an hundred pages, will of necessity greatly increase the expense of the work; and every reader who, like myself, is neither prepared nor perhaps calculated for the study of so abstruse a subject so abstrusely treated, will, as I have before hinted, be almost entitled to accuse you of a sort of imposition on him. For who, he might truly observe, could from your title-page, to wit, "My Literary Life and Opinions," published too as introductory to a volume of miscellaneous poems, have anticipated, or even conjectured, a long treatise on Ideal Realism which holds the same relation in abstruseness to Plotinus, as Plotinus does to Plato. It will be well, if already you have not too much of metaphysical disquisition in your work, though as the larger part of the disquisition is historical, it will doubtless be both interesting and instructive to many to whose unprepared minds your speculations on the esemplastic power would be utterly unintelligible. Be assured, if you do publish this Chapter in the present work, you will be reminded of Bishop Berkeley's *Siris*, announced as an

Essay on Tar-water, which beginning with Tar ends with the Trinity, the omne scibile forming the interspace. I say in the present work. In that greater work to which you have devoted so many years, and study so intense and various, it will be in its proper place. Your prospectus will have described and announced both its contents and their nature; and if any persons purchase it, who feel no interest in the subjects of which it treats, they will have themselves only to blame.

"I could add to these arguments one derived from pecuniary motives, and particularly from the probable effects on the sale of your present publication; but they would weigh little with you compared with the preceding. Besides, I have long observed, that arguments drawn from your own personal interests more often act on you as narcotics than as stimulants, and that in money concerns you have some small portion of pig-nature in your moral idiosyncrasy, and, like these amiable creatures, must occasionally be pulled backward from the boat in order to make you enter it. All success attend you, for if hard thinking and hard reading are merits, you have deserved it.

Your affectionate, etc."

In consequence of this very judicious letter, which produced complete conviction on my mind, I shall content myself for the present with stating the main result of the chapter, which I have reserved for that future publication, a detailed prospectus of which the reader will find at the close of the second volume.

The Imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phaenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

2.2. The Structure of *Biographia Literaria*:

"I can assert," Thomas DeQuincey declared in 1834, "upon my long and intimate knowledge of Coleridge's mind, that logic, the most severe, was as inalienable from his modes of thinking, as grammar from his language". What, then, is the "logic" of the *Biographia Literaria*? How, and on what principles, is the work structured -- or, indeed, has it any structure at all?

Adverse criticism begins (as is not unusual) with Coleridge himself, who deprecatingly refers to *Biographia Literaria* as an "immethodical miscellany" and a "semi-narrative" (BL, i 64, 110). Early reviewers took the author at his word: the kindest epithet any of them could manage for the work was "strange medley", and usually they were searing in their condemnation of its rambling structure. The legacy of these early reviewers persisted unchallenged until well into the present century. T. S. Eliot, for example, saw reflected in *Biographia Literaria* the "state of lethargy" produced by "the disastrous effects of long dissipation and stupefaction of [Coleridge's] powers in transcendental metaphysics"; and Maurice Carpenter, for whom the book was "a long monologue" of incorrigible heterogeneity, felt justified as late as 1954 in dismissing it as "the most exasperating book in the English language". The first serious attempt to dispel the prevailing notion of *Biographia* as "a whimsical and absent-minded improvisation, a mushroom growth in which toughness of fibre is scarcely to be expected", was made by George Whalley in 1953.

Whalley's defence of the structural integrity of *Biographia Literaria* proceeds along two lines. First, he refutes the view that it was a hasty improvisation by pointing out that the issues which it explores had been in Coleridge's mind for well over a decade and that the work "has many indelible marks of prolonged, patient, and mature consideration". Second, he stresses the centrality of Wordsworth, both in the early development and in the final execution of *Biographia Literaria*. The original motivation to compose the work was rooted in Coleridge's desire to explain the novel power of Wordsworth's art and the related desire to solve the "radical Difference" between his own and Wordsworth's theoretical opinions about poetry. Both these desires come to fruition in

Biographia Literaria and, in the final analysis, it is Coleridge's view of Wordsworth that imparts unity and purpose of design to this soi-disant "immethodical miscellany". A substantial portion of the work, of course, is devoted to a critical appraisal and exposition of Wordsworth's theory and poetic achievement. Most of the second volume (chs 14-22) deals directly with these matters. The largely philosophic first volume, on the other hand, prepares the ground for the literary analysis to follow and deals, sometimes directly, sometimes by implication, with Wordsworth. Certainly, the philosophical chapters are not gratuitous metaphysical embroidery unrelated to the book's central concerns, and (as Whalley observes) it is not often enough remembered that "the centre of the philosophical critique -- the distinction between Fancy and Imagination -- arose from Wordsworth's poetry and was intended to elucidate it". In short, then, Wordsworth is omnipresent; and Whalley argues convincingly that, with the long examination of Wordsworth's work in chapters 14-22, "the *Biographia Literaria* comes full circle, spun upon the firm centre of Coleridge's poetic and philosophic life, his admiration for Wordsworth's work, his need to utter forth an intuition [fancy-imagination] that had long haunted and enlightened his thinking".

Although dissenting voices may still be heard, Whalley's position has been endorsed -- sometimes enthusiastically -- by most recent commentators. Subsequent readers have often wished to modify or qualify Whalley's conclusions, or to adjust the emphasis of the argument by focusing on other unifying threads in *Biographia Literaria*. Thus, J.E. Barcus, for example, argues that "if the *Biographia Literaria* is read in the light of Coleridge's own literary principles, it becomes a practical demonstration of the principles he was propagating"; and George Watson, although part of his argument is untenable, finds in the work a "peculiarly Coleridgean" unity in the fact that here Coleridge succeeds for the first and (so far) for the last time in English criticism in marrying the twin studies of

philosophy and literature, not simply by writing about both within the boards of a single book or by insisting that such a marriage should be, but in discovering a causal link between the two in the century-old preoccupation of English critics with the theory of the poet's imagination. (BL[W], p. xix)

What Whalley has taught us to see (wherever we may choose to place the emphasis) is that *Biographia Literaria* is not without method or purpose. The point no longer is whether or not the book is unified, but rather to identify the nature (and degree) of its thematic and structural organisation.

Coleridge's success is, of course, debatable: some critics (most notably J.A. Appleyard) regard the *Biographia* as "a remarkable failure, an important fragment"; others, such as Lynn M. Grow, find it to be "a coherent expression . . . a cogent and compelling statement". These opposing arguments, in their elaboration, often show the defects of their qualities; and a true assessment lies in a middle ground where these extremes meet.

In the opening paragraph of *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge states, clearly and concisely, the scope and purpose of his book:

It will be found, that the least of what I have written concerns myself personally. I have used the narration chiefly for the purpose of giving a continuity to the work, in part for the sake of the miscellaneous reflections suggested to me by particular events, but still more as introductory to the statement of my principles in Politics, Religion, and Philosophy, and an application of the rules, deduced from philosophical principles, to poetry and criticism. But of the objects, which I proposed to myself, it was not the least important to effect, as far as possible, a settlement of the long continued

controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction; and at the same time to define with the utmost impartiality the real poetic character of the poet, by whose writings this controversy was first kindled, and has since been fuelled and fanned. (BL, i 1-2)

The book is not, then, an autobiography in any usual sense of the term. Rather, autobiography is a thread used to give continuity to the central themes and concerns of the work:

(a) a statement of Coleridge's principles in politics, religion, philosophy, and literary theory,

(b) a philosophic investigation of the principles governing poetry and criticism,

(c) the practical application of these principles, once established, to the poetry and poetic theory of Wordsworth.

At the heart of the book stands, not Coleridge himself, but Coleridge's principles -- the general laws which underlie and direct his judgement. *Biographia Literaria*, then, is not an expository outline of its author's life and times, but an exploration of the formative stages of his intellectual development. It is, too, a selective history of mental and moral growth, concentrating on poetry; however, the homogeneity of the principles to which he has been guided (and which he hopes to explicate and to illustrate) allows him without being irrelevant to explore their exfoliation into the fields of politics, theology and philosophy. But this procedure is not without its difficulties and drawbacks. It involves Coleridge, for example, in a paradox -- for he finds himself engaged simultaneously in the two quite different activities of exploring and expounding

fundamental principles. That is, he sees his task as the philosophic deduction of principles; yet, at the same time, he is concerned with applying to politics and religion and (especially) literary theory the very principles that he is involved in deducing. "One has the sense", as M.G. Cooke observes, "of his reporting his universe in order to be able to see it". The dilemma of *Biographia Literaria* is that it is both process and product. Whether or not Coleridge is able to reconcile these methodological difficulties, and the degree of his success, are debatable issues.

Although *Biographia Literaria* is concerned primarily with Coleridge's response to Wordsworth, the introductory chapters deal with preliminary matters and acknowledge debts predating his association with Wordsworth.

The opening chapter emphasises the formative influence exerted on Coleridge's understanding of poetry by James Boyer and William Lisle Bowles. From Boyer, his headmaster at Christ's Hospital, Coleridge learned that poetry was fundamentally and formally distinct from other modes of writing and that it possessed "a logic of its own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive causes" (BL, i 4). From Bowles, whom he considered the first modern poet to combine "natural thoughts with natural diction", he learned that poetry could (and should) bring together thought and feeling, that it should reconcile the workings of both the head and the heart. In the poetry of Bowles he first caught the accents of the true voice of feeling, and what he heard led him to appreciate that the epigrammatic couplets of fashionable eighteenth-century verse were artificial and were characterized "not so much by poetic thoughts, as by thoughts translated into the language of poetry" (BL, i 11). These insights from Boyer and Bowles originated in Coleridge's mind the whole question of the nature of poetry, and they

prompted him to labour at establishing "a solid foundation, on which permanently to ground my opinions, in the component faculties of the human mind itself, and their comparative dignity and importance" (BL, i 14). From the outset, then, philosophy and psychology were intimately connected with poetry and poetic experience in the search for aesthetic principles and an individual poetic vision.

In chapters 2 and 3, which superficially appear gratuitously digressive, Coleridge exposes the malicious inadequacy of the pseudo-criticism of anonymous reviewers, whose views, unsupported by sound principles, are both wrongheaded and uncritical. Since Coleridge's purpose in *Biographia Literaria* is to establish sound critical principles as the basis for literary judgement, these chapters are far from irrelevant.

In chapter 4 Coleridge returns to the early formation of his poetic creed and to the third (and most important) influence upon it -- the poetry of Wordsworth. Boyer and Bowles provided indispensable preliminary insights, but Wordsworth struck him with the disturbing force of radical revelation. While still at Cambridge, Coleridge had read Wordsworth's *Descriptive Sketches*, and "seldom, if ever," (he declared) "was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced" (BL, i 56). The full revelation of Wordsworth's genius and power, however, came two years later in September or October 1795, when, at their first meeting, Wordsworth recited his manuscript poem *Guilt and Sorrow*. The effect of this reading on Coleridge was instant, profound and revolutionary: what made "so unusual an impression on my feelings immediately, and subsequently on my judgement" was the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common

view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dewdrops. (BL, i 59)

Here was the seminal insight, though Coleridge found it difficult to define its nature precisely. To a degree unknown in English literature since Milton, Wordsworth had unified thought and feeling in poetic utterance, had both realised and idealised the commonplace, had made the reader see man and nature as if he were seeing them for the first time. Wherein lay the source of this "freshness of sensation"? What was it in Wordsworth's poetry, what power there manifested itself, that distinguished his poetry from that of eighteenth-century writers? "Repeated meditations", says Coleridge, anticipating yet laying the ground-work for arguments and illustrations to follow, led me first to suspect, (and a more intimate analysis of the human faculties, their appropriate marks, functions, and effects matured my conjecture into full conviction,) that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or, at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power. (BL, i 60-1)

The desynonymisation of fancy and imagination lies at the heart of *Biographia Literaria* and is, in a very real sense, its *raison d'être*. Coleridge's object in the work is "to investigate the seminal principle" of imagination and, in so doing, "to present an intelligible statement of my poetic creed; not as my opinions, which weigh for nothing, but as deductions from established premises" (BL, i 65). The terminus a quo of this investigation is largely Wordsworth, whose *Guilt and Sorrow* first directed Coleridge's attention to the subject of poetic imagination; the terminus ad quem, which will follow the philosophic deduction of the imagination, is a mature assessment of Wordsworth's poetic achievement.

Chapters 5-13 constitute the philosophic core of the *Biographia Literaria* -- and the major stumbling-block for the majority of its readers. They are, certainly, difficult reading; but they are integral to the book's purpose and meaning. They trace the growth of Coleridge's philosophic consciousness, his rejection of empirical epistemology and the influence on his thought of German idealism, and they lead, in chapter 12, to an outline (heavily dependent on Schelling) of his own "dynamic" philosophy -- an outline intended as the metaphysical substratum from which was to arise the promised (but undelivered) deduction of a theory of imagination. Chapters 5-7 are devoted to a detailed refutation of associationist psychology, especially that of David Hartley, among whose fervent adherents Coleridge had once (and Wordsworth still) counted himself; chapter 8 deals, briefly but effectively, with the problem of Cartesian dualism and the inadequacy of post-Cartesian materialism; and chapter 9 sketches Coleridge's intellectual obligations, in breaking free of materialism and associationism, to the mystics (such as Jacob Boehme) who "contributed to keep alive the heart in the head", to Immanuel Kant who "took possession of me as with a giant's hand", and to the post-Kantian idealists, especially Schelling, in whose work "I first found a genial coincidence with much that I had toiled out for myself, and a powerful assistance in what I had yet to do" (BL, i 98-9, 102). There is, as J.A. Appleyard observes, an imbalance in these chapters (5-9) that is not easily explained and is, in the final analysis, unsatisfactory:

This ninth chapter disappoints the reader who hopes to find in the *Biographia* some clue to the extent of the idealist influence on Coleridge's thinking. What he gives by way of comment amounts to not much more than a hasty outline, a cartoon that will not do where a finished painting is demanded The fact is that Coleridge devotes most of four chapters to a long and very circumstantial refutation of associationist psychology, but only one short chapter to the influence of the whole idealist tradition on his thought.

To say that there is a structural imbalance in these chapters is not, however, to say that they are irrelevant. Indeed, both their relevance and their peculiar emphasis on philosophical positions that Coleridge rejects rather than on those he accepts may be explained -- though perhaps not excused -- by bearing in mind two things. First, Coleridge's theory of the imagination as a vital, active, poietic ("making") power was achieved only after he had exploded the doctrine of passive perception on which the associationist hypothesis depended. In England the prevailing epistemology was stolidly empirical, holding that the human mind was merely a passive receiver of external impressions through the senses; and Coleridge, for whom perception involved an active and vital interchange between the perceiver and the perceived, was only too conscious that he was swimming against the current. Given the intellectual climate of the day and the philosophic preconceptions of English readers (who knew little or nothing of German transcendentalism), it is not surprising that Coleridge considered a detailed confutation of associationism more important than a lengthy acknowledgement of his obligations to obscure or unknown foreign thinkers. In the second place, the emphasis on associationism in Chapters 5-8 is partly to be explained as an answer to Wordsworth's indistinct but essentially Hartleian doctrine of association in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. Since 1802 Coleridge had regarded this tenet of his friend's theory as inadequate and jejune; it formed part of the "radical Difference" that he perceived and came gradually to understand between their theoretical views on poetry. In later chapters of the *Biographia* Coleridge would deal with the other areas of his disagreement with Wordsworth's theory (namely, the problems of poetic diction and metre); but here, on the threshold of the proposed deduction of imagination, it was necessary to explore in detail the failure of associationism -- a doctrine which had encumbered Wordsworth's theory in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* and which, in Wordsworth's 1815 *Preface*, had led him

to muddle and misconstrue Coleridge's fancy-imagination distinction. Obviously, such a doctrine could not go unchallenged.

Chapters 10 and 11 are confessedly digressive. Like the "Landing-Place" essays in *The Friend*, they are largely anecdotal interludes interposed for amusement, retrospect and preparation. They shift our attention in an engaging manner from Coleridge's intellectual history to more personal episodes in his biography, narrating with relish such events as his trials with enrolling subscribers for his early periodical *The Watchman* and the now legendary "Spy-Nosy" incident belonging to his Somerset years with Wordsworth. They stress, too, with respect to his political and theological thinking especially -- and this is not often enough noticed -- his lifelong commitment to the "establishment of principles . . . by [which] all opinions must be ultimately tried" (BL, i 124). More is meant, more is implied in these apparently unassuming chapters, than meets the eye of a purely casual reader. They are digressive, it is true, but they are not without purpose -- for they pursue and consolidate insights already gained, applying them to other of Coleridge's myriad-minded interests, and so prepare the ground indirectly for insights still to come.

Chapters 12 and 13, the most difficult and perplexing in the book, resume the discussion of Imagination. No summary of their contents is possible, although some rudimentary signposts and milestones may help the belabyrinthed traveller keep his bearings and hold the journey's end in sight. Chapter 12, heavily indebted to Schelling's *Abhandlungen und System des transcendentalen Idealismus*,¹⁶ is concerned with establishing the postulates of the dynamic (as opposed to mechanistic) philosophy upon which Coleridge's theory of imagination depends. The chapter is very heavy reading, full of what James Joyce would call "abstrusities". From anyone familiar with Carlyle's comically vindictive portrait

of Coleridge snuffling about "sum-m-mject" and "om-m-mject", it elicits an involuntary shudder of recognition:

I have heard Coleridge talk, with eager musical energy, two stricken hours, his face radiant and moist, and communicate no meaning whatsoever to any individual of his hearers He began anywhere: you put some question to him, made some suggestive observation: instead of answering this, or decidedly setting out towards an answer of it, he would accumulate formidable apparatus, logical swim-bladders, transcendental life-preservers and other precautionary and vehiculatory gear, for setting out; perhaps did at last get under way He had knowledge about many things and topics, much curious reading; but generally all topics led him, after a pass or two, into the high seas of theosophic philosophy, the hazy infinitude of Kantian transcendentalism, with its "sum-m-jects" and "om-m-mjects".

In chapter 12 Coleridge (via Schelling) postulates the existence and the simultaneous reality of two diverse states of being, which he distinguishes as SUBJECT and OBJECT. By subject he means human intelligence, the self and self-consciousness, the I AM; by object he means external Nature, the non-self, the IT IS. The existence and reality of these polarities are assumed (on the basis of experience) as axioms, and the problem is to discover the relationship between the subjective and the objective in any act of knowledge. If the perceiving subject and the perceived object are equally "real" yet equally distinct, then (a) what is a perception (the product of their union), and (b) how does it come about? To the first question Coleridge answers, satisfactorily enough, that in all acts of perception there is an interpenetration of self and non-self resulting in a tertium aliquid or third entity partaking of both. Perceptions, then, are modifications of self-consciousness: the perceiver knows himself in and through the objects which he perceives. This hypothesis yields, as Coleridge says, the paradox that true idealism "is only so far idealism, as it is at the same time, and on that very

account, the truest and most binding realism" (BL, i 178). So far, so good -- but how (turning to the second question) does this fusion of subject and object take place? Coleridge does not say. At the crucial point of his argument he defers "the demonstrations and constructions of the Dynamic Philosophy" to the third treatise of his projected "Logosophia" and is content to restate, in the categorical form of ten "theses" (largely appropriated from Schelling), the main conclusions already reached. Now, we know from chapter 7 (esp. i 85-6) of *Biographia Literaria*, as well as from elsewhere in his writings, that Coleridge proposed to defend his "true and original realism" and explain the relationship between thoughts and things by positing the existence of "an intermediate faculty [of the mind], which is at once both active and passive". This faculty is, of course, the imagination. Why, then, does he draw up short in chapter 12, asking us to "assume such a power as [a] principle" (BL, i 188) so that he can deduce from it in his next chapter what is, after all, merely another aspect or degree (i.e. the poetic imagination) of the very power he wishes us to assume as an axiom? Perhaps he was too short of time with the printer snapping at his heels to elaborate such a complex argument; perhaps, in a work concerned with his literary opinions, he felt it improper to develop in the detail required so purely philosophical a proposition; perhaps, as Father Appleyard maintains, he was himself confused by his own arguments and found it necessary (in 1815) to resort to Schelling in order "to bolster a not very satisfactory theory which he had obligated himself to explain". Perhaps all of these factors were involved.

Chapter 13 "On the imagination, or esemplastic power", is fragmentary and disappointing, and its failure is doubtless to be explained as a flow-on from the untidy and inconclusive arguments of chapter 12. After a brief excursus into Kant and Schelling, Coleridge abruptly breaks in with a "letter from a friend" advising him to postpone his deduction of imagination to fuller consideration in his "Logosophia". (This letter, as Coleridge told Thomas Curtis in April 1817, he

had written himself "without taking my pen off the paper except to dip it in the inkstand" -- CL, iv 728). Chapter 13 stops (rather than ends) by "stating the main result" of the unwritten chapter in the celebrated definitions of Primary Imagination, Secondary Imagination, and Fancy.

This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the meaning and critical utility of these distinctions. However, one or two brief explanatory notes will not be out of place. From a structural point of view, the three definitions constitute a watershed between the philosophy of chapters 5-13 and the literary criticism of chapters 14-22. In opposition to the empirical philosophies of the followers of Locke and Hume, for whom the mind was like an inert block of wax or a blank sheet of paper on which external objects imprint themselves, Coleridge asserts that the mind is active in perception. This activity, which is subconscious and is the common birthright of all men, is the work of the Primary Imagination, which may be defined as the inborn power of perceiving that makes it possible for us to know things. This vital, synthesising power effects a coalescence of subject (self) and object (non-self), yielding, as its product, a modified combination of the percipient and the thing-perceived; by blending and fusing "thoughts" and "things", self and non-self, Man and Nature, this esemplastic power generates new realities in which opposites are reconciled, unity is drawn from diversity, and parts are shaped into wholes. Moreover, since the Primary Imagination is "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (BL, i 202), it has a theological as well as a philosophical dimension: Coleridge insists, as he had done for over a decade (see CL, ii 1034), that the activity of the perceiving mind is an analogue, at a finite level, of the eternally generative activity of God. And finally, by denominating the power of perception as "primary Imagination", Coleridge establishes at one stroke the intimate relationship between philosophy and poetry: like the poetic or Secondary Imagination, the Primary Imagination is poetical -- that is to say, seeing is making.

The Secondary Imagination is, in effect, the poetic imagination. It differs from the Primary Imagination in degree, but not in kind. While all men possess the Primary Imagination, only some men possess the heightened degree of that universally human power to which the poet lays claim. Secondary Imagination differs in two important respects from Primary Imagination. First, Primary Imagination is subconscious, while Secondary Imagination coexists "with the conscious will" and involves, therefore, elements of conscious and subconscious activity. Poetic "making" -- I take it that this is Coleridge's meaning -- blends conscious selection with subconscious infusion: a poem is both predetermined and preterdetermined, some elements intentionally chosen while others are mysteriously given or supplied from the deep well of the poet's subconscious mind. Indeed, the two impulses may (and probably do) operate simultaneously in many instances: for example, a poet may consciously choose a particular image or expression without being consciously aware of its full implications -- such an image or expression, therefore, being both voluntary and involuntary. Second, the Secondary Imagination is described as a power that "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate" (BL, i 202). Dissolves what? Presumably, it dissolves the original union of subject and object effected by the Primary Imagination, a union which most of us take for granted, and then reintegrates the components in a new way that draws attention to their coalescence. In works of genius, this idealising and unifying power operates (as Coleridge had noted in chapter 4) by producing "the strongest impressions of novelty, while it rescues the most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission" (BL, i 60). Through the agency of the Secondary Imagination, as Shelley (in a very Coleridgean moment) observes, poetry reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we

perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration.

Fancy, on the other hand, is distinguished from Imagination (both Primary and Secondary) because it is not poietic. Fancy differs from Imagination in kind. Imagination is coadunative, blending Man and Nature in modified educts participating in, and bridging the gap between, the divided and distinguished worlds of spirit and matter. Imaginative writing is characterised by its seamless fusion of perception, intellect, feeling (or passion), memory, association and language. Fancy, however, is merely aggregative and associative; it is a "mode of Memory" receiving "all its materials ready made from the law of association" (BL, i 202). In other words, Fancy joins without blending, yokes together pre-existing sensations without creating anything organically new, fabricates without refashioning the elements which it combines.

An image or illustration may be useful in clarifying these abstractions. Take two metal rods, one of tin, the other of copper. If we simply weld these two rods together, then we produce a single rod which is half tin and half copper, in which the elements are joined yet still separate: this is an emblem of the operation of Fancy. If, however, we put the two rods (one copper, one tin) into a crucible together and melt them down, we shall end up producing a bronze rod in which the original elements of copper and tin have coadunated to form a third form (a *tertium aliquid*) which is both and yet neither: this is an emblem of the blending, synthesising power of Imagination. Fancy, which manifests itself in poetry chiefly through formal similes, is (Coleridge would argue) inferior to Imagination, which operates primarily through symbols.²⁴ However -- and this is important -- he would maintain that both Fancy and Imagination are appropriate to poetry and that both modes may coexist in a single poet or an individual poem; but

Imagination is the higher mode and the most predominant characteristic of "great" poetry. "A Poet's Heart & Intellect", he told William Sotheby in September 1802, should be combined, intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature -- & not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal Similies. I do not mean to exclude these formal Similies -- there are moods of mind, in which they are natural -- pleasing moods of mind, & such as a Poet will often have, & sometimes express; but they are not his highest, & most appropriate moods. (CL, ii 864)

The bridge between philosophy and aesthetics provided in the fancy-imagination distinction is followed, in chapters 14-22, by a detailed examination -- an analysis promised from the beginning -- of Wordsworth's theory and art. Coleridge's method in these chapters is interesting. Basically, as R.H. Fogle has pointed out, Coleridge establishes an ideal Wordsworth, or an idea of Wordsworth, and finds him at fault when he does not measure up to this ideal That is to say, Coleridge attempts to provide not a Wordsworth of literal actuality, but rather an interpretation in which something of himself is infused. Along with an idea of Wordsworth go an idea of poetry and an idea of criticism. The ideal poetry is characterized by universality, and the ideal criticism is a reconciliation of a deduction from critical principles with an induction or intuitive apprehension of the body of poetry to be criticized.

In other words, Coleridge's object in these chapters is, by using Wordsworth as an example and an ideal, to establish the ground-rules or fixed principles of poetic criticism generally. Such a procedure allows Coleridge (a) to articulate what poetry should ideally be and on what fundamental criteria it should be judged or assessed; (b) to measure Wordsworth's poetry and poetic theory against the ideal on the basis of these criteria; (c) to identify and explore discrepancies between Wordsworth's theory and actual poetry, and to mark out

clearly Coleridge's disagreement with aspects of Wordsworth's theory and its poetic application; and (d) to demonstrate how Wordsworth's critics have erred because they have not assessed his achievement in the light of fixed canons of criticism. The movement in these chapters is from the general to the particular, from the establishment of critical principles to their application to Wordsworth's poetry. Coleridge's concern is not to provide "recipes" for writing poems or "rules" to be used in passing judgement on them; rather, he proposes, like Aristotle in the *Poetics* or Sidney in his *Apologie for Poetrie*, to deduce from an existing body of poetry the principles of its construction.

In chapter 14 Coleridge outlines his poetic creed. All the major issues to be discussed are raised here. He begins by recalling how conversations with Wordsworth on "the two cardinal points of poetry" (namely, "the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination" -- BL, ii 5) had originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*; and he describes how their different contributions to the volume were intended as explorations of different ideas about poetry. He then turns to Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, declaring that with "many parts" of it he had "never concurred; but on the contrary objected to them as erroneous in principle, and as contradictory (in appearance at least) both to other parts of the same preface, and to the author's own practice in the greater number of the poems themselves" (BL, ii 8). While it is necessary for Coleridge to state where he differs from Wordsworth, it is imperative first to state the essential tenets of his own position. This he accomplishes in the famous definitions of poem and poet. Both definitions describe an ideal against which to set particular examples. A poem he defines as an organic construct which, unlike works of science, proposes "for its immediate object pleasure, not truth" (BL, ii 10). In other words, while truth is the ultimate end of poetry, pleasure is its immediate end: Coleridge is reversing

the emphasis in the Christian humanist poetic dictum *docere cum delectatione*, "to teach with delight", in which the didactic element is pre-eminent both as immediate and ultimate end, while pleasure or delight is a kind of sugar-coating to help the moral pill go down. Coleridge's second definition, that of the ideal poet, is characterised by its emphasis on imagination (and it repeats in formal terms his earlier description, in chapter 4, of the impact of Wordsworth on him in 1795):

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, controul (*laxis effertur habenis*) reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities (BL, ii 12)

In a final image, poetic genius is described in the organic metaphor of a human figure in which the various elements are united in "one graceful and intelligent whole": Imagination (the unifying power) is the omnipresent soul, Good Sense (sound logic, meaning, and judgement) forms the body, and Fancy provides the superficial drapery in which this living, moving figure is clothed.

Chapter 15, substantially a reproduction of Coleridge's 1811 lecture on Shakespeare's early narrative poems (see CN, iii 4115), at first seems wantonly excursive. But it is not. In fact, two important things are happening. First (and most obviously), the discussion of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and selected sonnets allows Coleridge to apply the critical principles of chapter 14 to the greatest of English poets and to demonstrate how his poetic genius manifested itself in even his earliest productions before he turned to dramatic writing. Second, there is an oblique admonition of Wordsworth's theory and practice that

both anticipates and prepares the ground for the criticism in the following chapters. At the end of chapter 15 Coleridge distinguishes two imaginative modes: the centrifugal imagination of Shakespeare and the centripetal imagination of Milton. While Shakespeare (especially in his dramatic works) "darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion", Milton "attracts all forms and things to himself, into the unity of his own IDEAL" (BL, ii 20). The Miltonic mode is explained in more detail in Coleridge's *Table Talk* (18 Aug 1833):

In the *Paradise Lost* -- indeed in every one of his poems -- it is Milton himself whom you see; his Satan, his Adam, his Raphael, almost his Eve -- are all John Milton; and it is a sense of this intense egotism that gives me the greatest pleasure in reading Milton's works. The egotism of such a man is a revelation of spirit. (TT, pp. 267-8)

Now, in Coleridge's view, Wordsworth's particular genius was Miltonic, not Shakespearean; his strength lay, as *The Prelude* had demonstrated, in impressing the stamp of his own mind and character on all that he chose to write about. The "egotistical sublime" (as Hazlitt and Keats later deprecatingly denominated it) was the mark of his mind and the proper province of his poetic voice. In *The Excursion*, however, which Coleridge had criticised in letters to Lady Beaumont and Wordsworth himself (CL, iv 564, 572-4), Wordsworth had adopted unsuccessfully a pseudo-Shakespearean mode of refracting his own personality through externalised, theoretically "dramatic" characters. Some of the *Lyrical Ballads* had also suffered from Wordsworth's "undue predilection for the dramatic form". And Coleridge's dicta on Shakespeare in chapter 15 are, as U.C. Knoepfelmacher has demonstrated convincingly, "as integral to the explanation of [Coleridge's] reservations about Wordsworth's theories as they are to his wider efforts to reclaim Wordsworth from practicing forms of poetry unsuited to a peculiarly Miltonic genius".

Chapter 16 is transitional. In it, by detailing some of the "striking points of difference between the Poets of the present age and those of the 15th and 16th centuries", Coleridge prepares the ground for examining the specific qualities of Wordsworth. In chapters 17-20 Coleridge concentrates on those aspects of Wordsworthian theory in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* with which he disagrees -- specifically, the theories of poetic diction and metre. Both are misguided, because both falsify Wordsworth's true inclinations, aptitude, and actual practice in the best of his poetry. In these four technical chapters Coleridge believed, as he told R.H. Brabant in July 1815, that "I have done my Duty to myself and to the Public, in (as I believe) compleatly subverting the Theory & in proving that the Poet himself has never acted on it except in particular Stanzas which are the Blots of his Compositions" (CL, iv 579). His purpose in refuting Wordsworth's theories of poetic diction and metre was twofold: on the one hand, he wished to make clear his own position and to settle "the long continued controversy" (BL, i 1) between himself and Wordsworth on these issues; on the other hand, he wished (as Nathaniel Teich has said) "to restore critical perspective and rescue Wordsworth from the incomplete and misleading theorizing that left him vulnerable to attack and ridicule" in the contemporary journals. While not all recent commentators would accept that Coleridge is entirely fair or accurate in his analysis of Wordsworth's theory, most (if not all) readers would accept R.H. Fogle's general assessment of Coleridge's critique. According to Coleridge's account, Fogle says, Wordsworth's defects both of theory and of practice are defects of his positive qualities. His faults of theory are truths that have been carried beyond their proper limits; his faults of practice are virtues inadequately controlled and realized. They arise from imperfect knowledge of the craft of poetry, and from imperfect knowledge of himself as a poet. Coleridge would not have said of Wordsworth, as he did of Shakespeare, that his judgment was equal to his genius.

Having admonished in chapter 21 the journals (in particular the *Edinburgh Review*) for their want of critical principles and their wanton ad hominem vituperation, Coleridge turns in chapter 22 to "a fair and philosophical inquisition into the character of Wordsworth, as a poet, on the evidence of his published works" (BL, ii 85). His examination, based on the fixed principles established in earlier chapters, takes the form of an illustrated exploration of Wordsworth's characteristic poetic defects and strengths. Of the five "defects" listed, the two most important are (1) "matter-of-factness", which reveals itself either "in a laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects" or in "a biographical attention to probability, and an anxiety of explanation and retrospect" (BL, ii 101, 103); and (2) a form of "mental bombast" in which thoughts or images -- such as the panegyric on the child-philosopher in stanzas 7 and 8 of the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* -- are "too great for the subject" (BL, ii 109). Wordsworth's poetic excellences, which set his work apart from all other contemporary poets, are six in number: (1) "an austere purity of language" in which there is "a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning" (BL, ii 115), (2) a fine balancing of "Thoughts and Sentiments, won -- not from books, but -- from the poet's own meditative observation" (BL, ii 118), (3) "the frequent curiosa felicitas of his diction" (BL, ii 121), (4) "the perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions, as taken immediately from nature" (BL, ii 121), (5) "a meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility; a sympathy with man as man" (BL, ii 122), and (6) lastly and pre-eminently, "the gift of IMAGINATION in the highest and strictest sense of the word" -- although in "the play of Fancy, Wordsworth, to my feelings, is not always graceful, and sometimes recondite" (BL, ii 124). One has only to set this assessment against that of any other contemporary or, for that matter, modern commentator on Wordsworth to appreciate the sensitivity and acuity of Coleridge's criticism. On Wordsworth in particular, and on poetry in general, Coleridge first said what most of us now take for granted.

Chapter 22 is followed by "Satyrane's Letters" and the critique of Maturin's Bertram, both of which (as makeweight materials) we may disregard. Chapter 24, the "Conclusion", however, merits a word, although it was not part of the book conceived and written in the summer and early autumn of 1815. This chapter was added in the spring of 1817, shortly before printing of the volumes was completed by Rest Fenner, Coleridge's London publisher. It is partly exculpation, partly explanation, partly assertion. Coleridge declares that the long delay in publication has not been due to any laziness or neglect on his part; he defends Christabel and laments the "malignity and spirit of personal hatred" by which it had been assailed in the *Edinburgh Review* without motive, without substance, without principle; and he laments, too, that much that has appeared under his name in print has been "condemned beforehand, as predestined metaphysics" (BL, ii 212). *The Statesman's Manual* had excited such motiveless malignity, even before its publication, from the pen of William Hazlitt.

What then is to be done? Nothing, nothing more. Coleridge has prompted the age to quit its clogs, to judge by principles in geniality of spirit, but the age has chosen to ignore him. The truths which he has sought to propagate are, however, none the less true -- in politics, in philosophy, in literary criticism, and, most of all, in religion; and he closes by asserting that Christianity,

though not discoverable by human Reason, is yet in accordance with it; . . . that Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only where the eye of Reason has reached its own Horizon; and that Faith is then but its continuation: even as the Day softens away into the sweet Twilight, and Twilight, hushed and breathless, steals into the Darkness. (BL, ii 218) Truth, known in the pulses of the heart and corroborated by the activity of the head, is a goal and a refuge beyond the reach of scorners, beyond the quills of Hazlitt, beyond the myopic temporising of the unimaginative and the unprincipled.

Sources/Suggested Reading:

1. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/125261/Samuel-Taylor-Coleridge>

2. Coleridge

Companion:

<http://www.english.uga.edu/~nhilton/232/stc/comp6b.htm>

3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Taylor_Coleridge

4. The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism by Richard Hart Fogle

PAPER VII

UNIT IV

VICTORIAN THEORY & CRITICISM

1.0. Introduction:

The Victorian Age: An Overview

The Victorian era, spanning from 1830–1901, was a period of dramatic change the world over, and especially in England, with the rapid extension of colonialism through large portions of Africa, Asia, and the West Indies, making England a preeminent center of world power and relocating the perceived center of Western Civilization from Paris to London. The rapid growth of London, with a population of 6.5 million by the time of Victoria's death, evidenced a marked change due to industrialization away from a way of life based on the ownership of land to a modern urban economy based on trade and manufacturing. Dramatic changes in manufacturing, rapid growth of the British economy, and seemingly continual expansion of England's colonized territories resulted in mixed sentiments, with some writers such as Thomas Babbington Macauley applauding change and the superior civilization of England and other writers such as Mathew Arnold and Thomas Carlyle expressing more trepidation and concern about this era of change. In addition to general economic and political change, there were advancements made in the promotion of women's rights, especially in terms of improving labor conditions and their rights in marriage.

The Victorian early period (1830–48) can be described as a time of dramatic change with the improvement of the railroads and the country's first Reform Parliament, but it was also a time of economic distress. Even with the Reform Bill of 1832, extending voting privileges to the lower middle classes and redistributing parliamentary representation to break up the conservative landowner's monopoly of power, England's economic troubles could not be entirely solved. By the end of this Time of Troubles, the Chartists, among others, succeeded in introducing important economic reforms, such as the repeal of the Corn Laws and the introduction of a system of Free Trade.

The historian Asa Briggs refers to the following period of the Victorian era as "The Age of Improvement. Although the mid- Victorian period (1848–70) was not free of the previous period's problems, it was a time of overall prosperity and general social satisfaction with further growth of the empire improving trade and economic conditions. This was also a period in which industry, technology, and science were celebrated with renewed vigor in such events as the Great Exhibition of Hyde Park. By this point, however, the Church of England had evolved into three major divisions, with conflicting beliefs about religious practice. There were also some rationalist challenges to religion, including Utilitarianism, developed by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, and science in the work of Thomas Henry Huxley and Charles Darwin. "Higher Criticism" had a similar effect in its perception of the Bible as a mere historical text.

The later period (1870–1901) was a time of changing attitudes about colonialism, industrialization, and scientific advancement. Rebellions and war in the colonial territories made the public increasingly more aware of the costs of

empire. Various events challenged the sense of England's endless prosperity as a world power, such as the emergence of Bismarck's Germany and its threats to English naval and military positions and the expansion of the American grain industry, driving down the price of English grain. Socialist movements grew out of this discontentment, as well as a melancholy spirit in the writing of the end of the century. Oscar Wilde's making a pun of "earnest," a typical and sincerely used mid-Victorian word, is typical of a dying Victorianism.

In addition to social and economic changes, dramatically affecting the content of literature during the Victorian era, other technological changes in publishing shaped literary production in other ways. The conditions of publishing, including the prominence of the periodical press, dramatically shaped the form of literature. Serialization of novels, for example, allowed for an author to alter the shape of his narrative based on public response to earlier installments. In the later years of the era, authors started to position themselves in opposition to this broad reading public and serialization gave way to three-volume editions. The Victorian novel was primarily concerned with representing a social reality and the way a protagonist sought and defined a place within this reality. The increased popularity of periodicals also allowed nonfiction to become a widespread and popular literary genre. Victorian poetry was also published in periodicals and underwent its own dramatic changes during the era, with Victorian poets seeking to represent psychology in new ways. Theater, on the other hand, was a popular form of entertainment, but did not flourish aesthetically until the end of the Victorian era.

1.1. Industrialism-Progress or Decline?

The Industrial Revolution — the changes in the making of goods that resulted from substituting machines for hand labor — began with a set of inventions for spinning and weaving developed in England in the eighteenth century. At first this new machinery was operated by workers in their homes, but in the 1780s the introduction of the steam engine to drive the machines led manufacturers to install them in large buildings called at first mills and later factories. Mill towns quickly grew in central and northern England; the population of the city of Manchester, for example, increased by ten times in the years between 1760 and 1830.

By the beginning of the Victorian period, the Industrial Revolution had created profound economic and social changes. Hundreds of thousands of workers had migrated to industrial towns, where they made up a new kind of working class. Wages were extremely low, hours very long — fourteen a day, or even more. Employers often preferred to hire women and children, who worked for even less than men. Families lived in horribly crowded, unsanitary housing. Moved by the terrible suffering resulting from a severe economic depression in the early 1840s, writers and men in government drew increasingly urgent attention to the condition of the working class. In her poem *The Cry of the Children*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning portrays the suffering of children in mines and factories. In *The Condition of the Working Class*, Friedrich Engels describes the conclusions he drew during the twenty months he spent observing industrial conditions in Manchester. His 1845 book prepared the ground for his work with Karl Marx on *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), which asserts that revolution is the necessary response to the inequity of industrial capitalist society. Elizabeth Gaskell, wife of a Manchester minister, was inspired to begin her writing career with the novel *Mary*

Barton (1848) in order to portray the suffering of the working class. In *Hard Times* (1854), Charles Dickens created the fictional city of Coketown to depict the harshness of existence in the industrial towns of central and northern England. During the 1830s and 1840s a number of parliamentary committees and commissions introduced testimony about the conditions in mines and factories that led to the beginning of government regulation and inspection, particularly of the working conditions of women and children.

Other voices also testified powerfully to the extremities of working-class existence in industrial England. *Poverty Knock*, a nineteenth-century British folk song, catalogs the hardships of the weaver's job. Correspondent Henry Mayhew's interviews with London's poor portray the miseries of life on the streets. Drawing an analogy from popular travel writings, reformer William Booth's *In Darkest England* compares the dense and gloomy urban slums to the equatorial forests of Africa. Especially dramatic are the contrasting accounts of C. Duncan Lucas, who writes in 1901 about the pleasant "beehive of activity" that he sees as the typical London factory, and crusader Annie Besant, who passionately analyzes the economic exploitation of workers by wealthy capitalists. Ada Nield Chew's letter about conditions in a factory in Crewe states strongly the case for improving wages for the tailoresses who "ceaselessly work" six days of the week. These sharply different perspectives define an important argument in the debate over industrialism: Was the machine age a blessing or a curse? Did it make humanity happier or more wretched?

1.2. The Woman Question:

Many of the historical changes that characterized the Victorian period motivated discussion and argument about the nature and role of woman — what the Victorians called "The Woman Question." The extension of the franchise by the Reform Bills of 1832 and 1867 stimulated discussion of women's political rights. Although women in England did not get the vote until 1918, petitions to Parliament advocating women's suffrage were introduced as early as the 1840s. Equally important was the agitation to allow married women to own and handle their own property, which culminated in the passing of the Married Women's Property Acts (1870–1908).

The Industrial Revolution resulted in changes for women as well. The explosive growth of the textile industries brought hundreds of thousands of lower-class women into factory jobs with grueling working conditions. The new kinds of labor and poverty that arose with the Industrial Revolution presented a challenge to traditional ideas of woman's place. Middle-class voices also challenged conventional ideas about women. In *A Woman's Thoughts About Women*, the novelist Dinah Maria Mulock compares the prospects of Tom, Dick, and Harry, who leave school and plunge into life, with those of "the girls," who "likewise finish their education, come home, and stay at home." They have, she laments, "literally nothing to do." Likewise in *Cassandra*, Florence Nightingale, who later became famous for organizing a contingent of nurses to take care of sick and wounded soldiers during the Crimean War, writes passionately of the costs for women of having no outlet for their heroic aspirations.

Popular representations of Florence Nightingale, "The Lady with the Lamp," reflect the paradox of her achievement. While her organization of nurses was an important advance in hospital treatment, the image of her tending the wounded seems to reflect a traditional view of woman's mission. Even Queen Victoria herself represents a similar paradox. Though she was queen of the British Empire, paintings and photographs of her, such as Winterhalter's *The Royal Family* in 1846, represent her identity in conventional feminine postures and relationships.

Texts in this topic address both the hardships faced by women forced into new kinds of labor and the competing visions of those who exalted domestic life and those who supported women's efforts to move beyond the home. Journalist Henry Mayhew's interviews with a seamstress and a fruit seller vividly portray the difficulties of their lives. In *Of Queen's Gardens* John Ruskin celebrates the "true wife," and Elizabeth Eastlake's "Lady Travellers" proposes her as a national ideal, while in *The Girl of the Period* Eliza Lynn Linton satirizes the modern woman. In contrast, two fictional characters, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and George Gissing's Miss Barfoot, from *The Odd Women*, speak passionately of the wish that their existence be "quickened with all of incident, life, fire, and feeling." All of these texts show how complex the debate was on what the Victorians called "The Woman Question."

1.3. The Painterly Image in Poetry:

Nineteenth-century aesthetic theory frequently makes the eye the preeminent means by which we perceive truth.

- In *The Hero as Poet* (1840), Thomas Carlyle writes, "Poetic creation, what is this but seeing the thing sufficiently? The word that will describe the thing follows of itself from such clear intense sight of the thing."
- In his definition of the pathetic fallacy (1856), which to him characterizes bad poetry, John Ruskin differentiates "between the ordinary, proper, and true appearances of things to us; and the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion."
- In *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* (1865), Matthew Arnold defines the ideal in all branches of knowledge as "to see the object as in itself it really is."

This emphasis in nineteenth-century aesthetic theory on seeing the object as it really is has a counterpart in the importance of illustrating literature, particularly novels. Dickens worked most frequently with two great illustrators, George Cruikshank and Phiz (the pseudonym of Hablot Knight Browne). William Makepeace Thackeray drew his own illustrations. In the works of these authors and others, the juxtaposition of text and picture creates a characteristic nineteenth-century style, which the critic Martin Meisel defines in his book *Realizations* as a union of pictorialism with narrative, creating richly detailed scenes that at once imply the stories that precede and follow and symbolize their meaning.

At the same time, developments in visual technology made it possible to see more and in new ways. Nineteenth century optical devices, creating illusions of various sorts, were invented near the beginning of the century: the thaumatrope, the phenakistoscope, the zoetrope, the stroboscope, the kaleidoscope, the diorama, and the stereoscope. Other inventions — such as the camera lucida, the graphic telescope, the binocular telescope, the binocular microscope, the stereopticon, and the kinoscope — projected, recorded, or magnified images. Most important, the photographic camera provided an entirely new way of recording objects and people and transformed many areas of life and work.

The selections in this topic concentrate on one aspect of the Victorian visual imagination: the visual illustration of poetry through the accumulation of visual detail. In *Mariana*, for example, Tennyson conveys Mariana's despair through the objects that surround her. In a review, Arthur Henry Hallam uses the term "picturesque" to describe Tennyson's first volume of poems. Contrasted with the descriptive, which gives an objective account of appearances, the picturesque presents objects through the medium of emotion. Such poetry lends itself to illustration, and nineteenth-century editions of poetry, such as Moxon's *Illustrated Tennyson* or Macmillan's 1862 edition of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, frequently contained illustrations, much as novels did.

Illustration's importance in nineteenth-century literary theory created a particularly close connection between painting and poetry. Dante Gabriel Rossetti painted portraits to illustrate his poems, such as *The Blessed Damozel*, and created pairs of poems and paintings such as *Lilith*, *Sibylla Palmifera*, and *Astarte Syriaca*. Poets also frequently took painting as the subject of their poetry, as in Robert Browning's *Fra Lippo Lippi* or *Andrea del Sarto*. Similarly, a number of

writers created prose descriptions of great paintings that were almost a kind of prose poetry, like John Ruskin's description of J. M. W. Turner's *The Slave Ship* or Walter Pater's description of Leonardo Da Vinci's *La Gioconda*. Nineteenth-century artists felt a kinship between picture-making with words and picture-making with images that linked the sister arts of poetry and painting in close relationship.

1.4. Victorian Imperialism:

Great Britain during Victoria's reign was not just a powerful island nation. It was the center of a global empire that fostered British contact with a wide variety of other cultures, though the exchange was usually an uneven one. By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly one-quarter of the earth's land surface was part of the British Empire, and more than 400 million people were governed from Great Britain, however nominally. An incomplete list of British colonies and quasi-colonies in 1901 would include Australia, British Guiana (now Guyana), Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, Egypt, Gambia, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Hong Kong, British India (now Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), Ireland, Kenya, Malawi, the Malay States (Malaysia), Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somaliland (Somalia), South Africa, the Sudan, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and Trinidad and Tobago. Queen Victoria's far-flung empire was a truly heterogeneous entity, governed by heterogeneous practices. It included Crown Colonies like Jamaica, ruled from Britain, and protectorates like Uganda, which had relinquished only partial sovereignty to Britain. Ireland was a sort of internal colony whose demands for home rule were alternately entertained and discounted. India had started the century under the control of the East India Company, but was directly ruled

from Britain after the 1857 Indian Mutiny (the first Indian war of independence), and Victoria was crowned Empress of India in 1877. Colonies like Canada and Australia with substantial European populations had become virtually self-governing by the end of the century and were increasingly considered near-equal partners in the imperial project. By contrast, colonies and protectorates with large indigenous populations like Sierra Leone, or with large transplanted populations of ex-slaves and non-European laborers like Trinidad, would not gain autonomy until the twentieth century.

As Joseph Chamberlain notes in *The True Conception of Empire*, the catastrophic loss of the American colonies had given rise to a certain disenchantment with empire-building. But despite a relative lack of interest in the British imperial project during the early nineteenth century, the Empire continued to grow, acquiring a number of new territories as well as greatly expanding its colonies in Canada and Australia and steadily pushing its way across the Indian subcontinent. A far more rapid expansion took place between 1870 and 1900, three decades that witnessed a new attitude towards and practice of empire-building known as the new imperialism and which would continue until World War I. During this period Britain was involved in fierce competition for new territories with its European rivals, particularly in Africa. It was becoming increasingly invested, imaginatively and ideologically, in the idea of empire. It found itself more and more dependent on a global economy and committed to finding (and forcing) new trading partners, including what we might call virtual colonies, nations that were not officially part of the Empire but were economically in thrall to powerful Great Britain. All of these motives helped fuel the new imperialism. British expansion was not allowed to progress unchallenged — the Empire went to war with the Ashanti, the Zulus, and the Boers, to

name a few, and critics like J. J. Thomas and John Atkinson Hobson denounced imperialism as a corrupt and debasing enterprise — but it progressed at an astonishing pace nonetheless.

The distinction between imperialism and colonialism is difficult to pin down, because the two activities can seem indistinguishable at times. Roughly speaking, imperialism involves the claiming and exploiting of territories outside of one's own national boundaries for a variety of motives. For instance, Great Britain seized territories in order to increase its own holdings and enhance its prestige, to secure trade routes, to obtain raw materials such as sugar, spices, tea, tin, and rubber, and to procure a market for its own goods. Colonialism involves the settling of those territories and the transformation — the Victorians would have said reformation — of the social structure, culture, government, and economy of the people found there. Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" gives us a good sense of this kind of interventionist colonialism at work.

The Empire did not found colonies in all of its possessions, nor were colony populations necessarily interested in anglicizing the indigenous peoples they shared space with, as is clear from Anthony Trollope's dismissive assessment of the Australian aborigines. But in general Great Britain was able to justify its expansion into other peoples' lands by claiming a civilizing mission based on its own moral, racial, and national superiority. As we see from the selections by Edward Tylor and Benjamin Kidd, late-Victorian science sought to prove that non-Europeans were less evolved, biologically and culturally, and thus unable properly to govern themselves or develop their own territories. Other writers like W. Winwood Reade and Richard Marsh described the imperfectly evolved colonial subjects as fearsome cannibals and beasts, hardly human at all. Thus they were

patently in need of taming, and taking on this job was "The White Man's Burden" in Rudyard Kipling's famous phrase.

1.5. Race and Victorian Science:

In *The Control of the Tropics* (1898), the social evolutionist Benjamin Kidd asserts that the indigenous inhabitants of the tropics "represent the same stage in the history of the development of the race that the child does in the history of the development of the individual." Thus Africa, India, and so on simply could not be economically developed by their own populations; instead, "the white man" must improve and govern the tropics "as a trust for civilization." Victorian imperialism received ample confirmation of its own justness from the nineteenth-century human sciences, which were concerned with quantifying and accurately describing racial and cultural difference among the world's people. Beliefs about the intrinsic inferiority of subject peoples inevitably shaped ethnological studies like Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), which in turn could be used as proof of that inferiority.

Influenced by Darwinian ideas about the mutability of species, Tylor is interested in the development of human culture from simple to complex, primitive to advanced. Modern-day races can be measured along the same continuum, and deemed "savage" or "civilized" depending on how far they have progressed toward the high state of culture enjoyed by the "educated world of Europe and America." Charles Darwin also wrote of the "struggle for existence" whereby some species came to prevail over others, and social evolutionists like Kidd and Herbert Spencer argued similarly that some races were destined to be the losers in the global struggle for predominance, or might even be eliminated through natural selection.

The Royal Geographical Society's *Hints to Travellers* (1883) included an article on field anthropology by Tylor, urging the naturalists, sportsmen, and tourists who visited the tropics to gather scientific data about native physiognomy and exotic customs. In other words, any educated European man was fit to make confident pronouncements about the nature of the "lesser" races. For instance, the historian J. A. Froude argued in *The English in the West Indies* (1888) that the black descendants of slaves were a congenitally lazy and shiftless lot who "would in a generation or two relapse into savages," and thus were not fit to govern themselves. The black Trinidadian intellectual J. J. Thomas wrote *Froudacity* (1889) as a riposte to such "miserable skin and race doctrine." Thomas defends the "soundness and nobility" of the African character, and suggests that exploitation by Europeans has interrupted the natural progress of subject peoples, not their own inherent limitations. Moreover, the British Empire hardly represents the triumphant climax of human development, for history teaches us that many great empires rose and fell in centuries past. Turning the arguments of social evolutionism to his own purposes, Thomas speculates that the scattered populations of the African diaspora, with their transcultural and global perspective, may be uniquely suited to form the next great world civilization.

1.6. The Crisis of Faith:

“Belief in God or in the doctrines or teachings of religion; a system of religious belief: *the Christian faith; the Jewish faith*; the trust in God and in His promises as made through Christ and the Scriptures by which humans are justified or saved;” (Webster Online)

Whereas religion is defined as,

“The practice of religious beliefs; ritual observance of faith or the body of persons adhering to a particular set of beliefs and practices.” (Webster Online)

The Victorian Era was one of change and growth, which both helped and hurt society as a whole. The change and growth was seen in railway construction, a boom in factory and industry, a female Queen, scientific discoveries, and higher education for females. These factors showed advancements in several areas, but these advancements brought about many questions and concerns. Children as young as nine were working, instead of going to school, to help support their families, regular churchgoers were beginning to question their faith due to Darwinism, and women were leaving their role as caregiver to pursue an education.

The Victorian Era was known as the “age of energy and invention; the age of doubt in faith and industry; the age of reform in politics and social class status, along with the reform of a woman’s role; the age of empire; the age of reading; and the age of self-scrutiny” (Longman, 1102-1117). But, for the most part, this era was the age of prosperity and economic expansion which caused the Victorians to struggle with many questions and doubts about religion, and life as they once knew it. This doubt led to the writing of much poetry centering on the faith crisis, including *Dover Beach* by Matthew Arnold and *God’s Grandeur* by Gerard Manley Hopkins, both of which contemplate religion and science during their era.

Victorian England was extremely religious. Families during this time period were usually large, hard-working, respectable, and were taught religion at home. They were frequent church goers and read the *Bible* regularly. While

church attendance during this era contributed to a family's social standing, the lower middle and upper working class felt left out because they were not socially accepted at churches with the upper class citizens who formed the Anglican Church or Church of England. To profess to be Roman Catholic during this era was to proclaim that you were poor and low class. You "were excluded from political office and suffered other penalties" (xxxi). This caused the two lower classes of citizens to form the Methodist and Nonconformist churches that are still prominent in today's society. Although Nonconformists and Anglicanism was always an option in religion, many people became Methodists when they left home and branched out on their own. These new churches were run by Evangelicals and middle-class philanthropists. They attracted the working-class who were taught to read the Bible, and gave them the opportunity to socialize with the opposite sex, which was largely unheard of at this time. Although the churches were fuller than before, most middle and working-class people still felt that they were not welcome; therefore, attending church could bring them attention they did not want because they did not have the money to give the church like the upper class did. Many people today still do not attend church for this same reason. Certain churches are still considered for the "wealthy only" and those with a poorer background do not feel that they would be welcome. Religion was considered a middle-class proprietary or luxury, although most were still married in a church and children were still christened there.

During this time, churches began programs to help provide food, clothing, shelter, monetary assistance, and a copy of their own Bible in an attempt to help the working class rise above their situation. This is equivalent to the programs now run by, not only churches in this area, but Agape, Good Samaritan and the Jesus Community Center which provides food, shelter, clothing, and financial assistance to the working poor in Logan County. The down-side to this was the

fact that the working poor began to learn how to “work the system” to their advantage because they were felt that they were owed what the churches gave to them. After working as a church secretary for several years, I realized that those who are still considered the working class or working poor, along with those caught up in the welfare system, still feel that they are owed certain rights from the church and “work the system” to take advantage of things that will benefit them.

Geologists, physicists, and other scientists started delving into religion, questioning the writings of the oldest book known to man, the Bible. This was very hard on the people of this time because science and religion had once worked hand in hand; making it seem like the world was in harmony. Now, all that they held near and dear was causing great debate. Charles Darwin did not make things any better with his work, *The Origin of Species*, better known as the Darwinism theory. Darwinism is a theory of biological evolution stating that, “all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce.” (Webster Online) This brought about the term ‘survival of the fittest’, or predominance by any one species, from British economist Herbert Spencer, who paralleled his ideas of economics with Charles Darwin's theories of evolution by what Darwin termed natural selection. Survival of the fittest enhanced the belief that fate knew that people would not be able to handle every little thing that is thrown at them; therefore, for the sake of survival people don’t always say what they want. People wear masks, observe boundaries, and say some things to some people and other things to other people in order to not reveal too much about themselves. This theory added to the belief from the Romantic Age that people should not have more children than they can afford to raise on what little money they made. Darwinism, coupled with the new science discoveries being made, posed serious problems for the church and society, causing people to challenge

their religious beliefs and have many doubts. Although Darwinism has been refuted and proven to be wrong, the speculation and questioning has continued from the nineteenth century, all the way through to the twenty-first century.

Although Arnold and Hopkins both try to find some sort of religious truth in their poems by using vivid imagery, setting the tone and discussing their view of religion, both manage to arrive at different conclusions. Arnold's poem almost spells doom for the world, whereas Hopkins' poem gives one a feeling of hope.

The poem, *Dover Beach* by Matthew Arnold, is about religion. It seems to talk about the lack of spiritual values during that the era and the loss of faith due to existentialism, materialism, socialism, and Darwinism caused a downward spiral in the Christian faith. Arnold uses the sea to demonstrate a promise of eternity, continuity, and stability; his real view of the church, but the crisis comes in the poem when he talks about the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, retreating..." (1662). These lines give a feeling of lost hope, abandoned faith, and a longing to return to the days of old before faith as he knew it is gone forever. The "...pebbles which the wave draw back, and fling..." (Longman, 1662) symbolizes the people in that, 'what goes out always come back in'. People may leave the church, or their religion and faith behind because of the waves of science, but somehow and somehow, they are always drawn back to their beliefs for some reason. Arnold mentions Sophocles and compares Sophocles' belief that the water is like human emotion as he states, "...the turbid ebb and flow of human misery..." (Longman, 1662), because the sound of the waves is compared to human sorrow, which is a reference to Sophocles' *Antigone*. The sea is also unpredictable, and Darwin's theory of evolution caused more disillusion to the crisis of religious faith they were already going through. *Dover Beach* tries to

show that the world would be a sad place if people stopped believing in the existence of God and took the side of science. Arnold tried to express, through this poem, that philosophy and religion should be a comfort in a world where there are no guarantees.

Gerard Manley Hopkins also used his poem, *God's Grandeur*, to talk about the negative turn Victorian people had taken from God and religion, but he offers hope by speaking of how things could get better. He begins by talking about the world being "...charged with the grandeur of God...shining from shook foil..." (Longman, 1792). This is a metaphor for God's light in reference to electricity or flashes of light as in lightning bolts, but the Biblical meaning would include:

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." (NIV, Psalm 119:105)

His next symbol of Biblical meaning, "...the ooze of oil crushed..." means richness, and refers to the sacrament of olives that were used for food, medicine, lamplight, and religious purposes. This is evident in the following verse:

"...olive oil for the light..." (NIV, Exodus 35:8)

So far, Hopkins' poem is very light in discussing God's presence in our world. He then tells the world to beware as he states, "...Why do men then now not reckon his rod? Generations have trod, have trod, have trod..." (Longman,

1792). Hopkins reminds us that "...nature is never spent..." (Longman, 1793), which reminds us that there are always things to remind us of the beauty God has put on earth, it is continually renewed each season, and God promised us His grace through rebirth with each season. Hopkins uses nature, and the abuse of nature from each generation, to lay blame and show us what needs to be changed in order for God to bless His children again.

Science, industry, and religion all played vital roles in the Victorian Era, but while science and industry were on the rise, religion felt a terrible decline. Scientists were finding advances in medicine; geologists were finding that the earth was older than previously thought and disputing all Biblical teachings; the theory of Darwinism put further religious doubt into their minds; and industry was moving more toward machines which caused the working class to have to work harder and longer hours. These factors managed to keep all but the higher social classes out of church. Although new labor laws, amendments, and acts were introduced, it did very little to diminish the stereotype of the working poor. With twelve hour workdays for men, women, and children of the lower class, there was often little time left over for religion; and what little faith they did have was diminished by their social status.

Arnold and Hopkins used their poetry to convey to the world, through words, imagery, and symbols, to urge the Victorians to return to the religious ways of the Romantic Era. They stress that the abuse of previous generations, along with the modernization of science, technology, industry, and the Darwinism theory, are to blame for the deterioration of religion and faith. All of these factors are still true today. God continues to have his hand on the world, and His people,

but He is slowly withdrawing it due to the moral dilemmas that we face without seeking His guidance.

2.0. Nineteenth Century Aesthetic Theory:

Aestheticism (also the Aesthetic Movement) is an art movement supporting the emphasis of aesthetic values more than social-political themes for literature, fine art, music and other arts. It was particularly prominent in Europe during the 19th century, but contemporary critics are also associated with the movement, such as Harold Bloom, who has recently argued against projecting social and political ideology onto literary works, which he believes has been a growing problem in humanities departments over the last century.

In the 19th century, it was related to other movements such as symbolism or decadence represented in France, or decadentismo represented in Italy, and may be considered the British version of the same style.

The British decadent writers were much influenced by the Oxford professor Walter Pater and his essays published during 1867–68, in which he stated that life had to be lived intensely, with an ideal of beauty. His text *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) was very well regarded by art-oriented young men of the late 19th century. Writers of the Decadent movement used the slogan "Art for Art's Sake" (L'art pour l'art), the origin of which is debated. Some claim that it was invented by the philosopher Victor Cousin, although Angela Leighton in the publication *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism and the Legacy of a Word* (2007) notes

that the phrase was used by Benjamin Constant as early as 1804. It is generally accepted to have been promoted by Théophile Gautier in France, who interpreted the phrase to suggest that there was not any real association between art and morality.

The artists and writers of Aesthetic style tended to profess that the Arts should provide refined sensuous pleasure, rather than convey moral or sentimental messages. As a consequence, they did not accept John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold's conception of art as something moral or useful. Instead, they believed that Art did not have any didactic purpose; it need only be beautiful. The Aesthetes developed a cult of beauty, which they considered the basic factor of art. Life should copy Art, they asserted. They considered nature as crude and lacking in design when compared to art. The main characteristics of the style were: suggestion rather than statement, sensuality, great use of symbols, and synaesthetic effects—that is, correspondence between words, colours and music. Music was used to establish mood.

Predecessors of the Aesthetics included John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley, and some of the Pre-Raphaelites. In Britain the best representatives were Oscar Wilde and Algernon Charles Swinburne, both influenced by the French Symbolists, and James McNeill Whistler and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The style and these poets were satirised by Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Patience* and other works, such as F. C. Burnand's drama *The Colonel*, and in comic magazines such as *Punch*.

Compton Mackenzie's novel *Sinister Street* makes use of the type as a phase through which the protagonist passes as he is influenced by older, decadent individuals. The novels of Evelyn Waugh, who was a young participant of aesthete society at Oxford, describe the aesthetes mostly satirically, but also as a former participant. Some names associated with this assemblage are Robert Byron, Evelyn Waugh, Harold Acton, Nancy Mitford, A.E. Housman and Anthony Powell.

Oscar Wilde carried the torch of Aestheticism into the public eye, becoming one of its most popular and controversial figures. He would become such an essential part of this period in art and literature that many use his 1900 death to mark the end of the Aesthetic movement (Brookes). In literature, Aestheticism manifested itself in the depiction of ennui, nostalgia, and a recurring sense of loss. There was also a focus on the particularly ornate or perverse and on the notion of living life as art. References to Rome and Egypt also abound in Aesthetic literature, but unlike in previous artistic movements, these allusions were used entirely for artistic effect (Landow). In one form another, each of these defining characteristics pops up in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, making it one of the best examples we have of the beliefs and feelings of aesthetes like Wilde.

On June 30, 1883, Wilde delivered a lecture on Aestheticism to art students of the Royal Academy. Here are some of the highlights:

- On Beauty: “We want to create it, not to define it. The definition should follow the work: the work should not adapt itself to the definition.”

- “Such an expression as English art is a meaningless expression. One might just as well talk of English mathematics. Art is the science of beauty, and Mathematics the science of truth: there is no national school of either. Indeed, a national school is a provincial school, merely. Nor is there any such thing as a school of art even. There are merely artists, that is all.”
- “All that you should learn about art is to know a good picture when you see it and a bad picture when you see it. As regards the date of the artist, all good work looks perfectly modern: a piece of Greek sculpture, a portrait of Velasquez---they are always modern, always of our time. And as regards the nationality of the artist, art is not national but universal.”
- “Whatever is popular is wrong.”
- “The sign of a Philistine age is the cry of immorality against art.”
- “Nothing is worth doing except what the world says is impossible.”
- “Religion springs from religious feeling, art from artistic feeling: you never get one from the other; unless you have the right root you will not get the right flower; and, if a man sees in a cloud the chariot of an angel, he will probably paint it very unlike a cloud.”

- “To paint what you see is a good rule in art, but to see what is worth painting is better.”
- “What is a picture? Primarily, a picture is a beautifully coloured surface, merely, with no more spiritual message or meaning for you than an exquisite fragment of Venetian glass or a blue tile from the wall of Damascus. It is, primarily, a purely decorative thing, a delight to look at. All archaeological pictures that make you say ‘How curious!’ all sentimental pictures that make you say, ‘How sad!’ all historical pictures that make you say ‘How interesting!’ all pictures that do not immediately give you such artistic joy as to make you say ‘How beautiful!’ are bad pictures.”
- “If a man is an artist he can paint everything.”
- “A picture is finished when all traces of work, and of the means employed to bring about the result, have disappeared.”
- “Art should have no sentiment about it but its beauty, no technique except what you cannot observe. One should be able to say of a picture not that it is ‘well painted,’ but that it is ‘not painted.’”

3.0. Victorian Critical Theory:

Victorian critical theory reflected the ideological upheaval that was present within society as a whole. New advances in empirical sciences such as biology and

geology gave rise to questions about the nature of reality and previous ideas about religion and truth were called into question. Increased overcrowding, poverty, and disease, in addition to a climate of materialism and mechanization resulted in a generalized cultural feeling of anxiety. Given this milieu, the proper function of literature and of criticism became a subject of widespread debate. Critics of the day examined literature in relationship to other modes of discourse, such as science, religion, and art. According to Alba H. Warren, Jr., the post-Romantic critics “recognized few common aims.” Terry Eagleton explains that Victorian literary critics were conflicted with respect to their role in the culture of the time, stating that “either criticism strives to justify itself at the bar of public opinion by maintaining a general humanistic responsibility for the culture as a whole, the amateurism of which will prove increasingly incapacitating as bourgeois society develops; or it converts itself into a species of technological expertise, thereby establishing its professional legitimacy at the cost of renouncing any wider social relevance.”

Matthew Arnold, perhaps the most influential critic of the Victorian era, saw cultural expressions such as art and literature as having an important impact on the overall well-being of society. He felt that great literature conveyed deep and everlasting truths about the human condition. These works, combined with detached, objective criticism, would naturally move culture toward intellectual, moral and spiritual perfection. Arnold also attempted to address societal anxieties regarding new science and the threat to religion by proposing that people look to poetry for inspiration and as a buffer of sorts from bleak reality. In the view of Patrick Parrinder, it was Arnold who “bore the brunt of propagandizing for literary culture in the Victorian age. He saw literature as embodying the spiritual life of modern society and taking over the edifying and consoling functions of religion.” T. S. Eliot, however, claims that Arnold's work as a critic is weakened by his

“conjuring trick” whereby he considered poetry as substitute for both religion and philosophy. Eliot posits that Arnold's reputation as a literary critic is overblown and unsubstantial, a viewpoint that Lionel Trilling challenges in his essay, “The Spirit of Criticism.”

Later in the century, in contrast to previous concerns with science, culture, and religion, came the development of the Aesthetic Movement with its credo of “Art for Art's Sake.” The movement centered on Walter Pater’s Preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), which was written after a trip to Italy where Pater became quite impressed with the vitality and sensuality of Italian culture and Renaissance art. The Aesthetic Movement pivoted on the belief that, since the absolutes of religion and morality were rendered relative and mutable, the purpose of life had necessarily changed as well. Pater wrote that, since life was so short, it was imperative to seek, “not the fruit of experience, but experience itself.” According to the Aesthetes, to be truly alive was to be immersed in “ecstatic experience,” with free enjoyment being the supreme priority and “beauty” a central focus. Aesthetic critics became concerned with seeking and identifying beauty, not as an absolute, but as a “relative, ever-changing” quality. Albert J. Farmer claims that “the aim of the aesthetic critic should be, therefore, to find, not some inadequate universal formula, but the formula which expresses beauty in this or that individual case, under these or those particular circumstances.” Other notable Aesthetes included Algernon Charles Swinburne and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Critic Parrinder acknowledges that the doctrine of art for art's sake had appeared earlier in the nineteenth century, but that “it was not until the time of Pater and Swinburne that aestheticism emerged as a coherent force in England.” Although several modern critics align Swinburne with aestheticism, Clyde K. Hyder suggests that Swinburne's position is not quite that simple. “Though Swinburne emphasized aesthetic criteria in judging literature,”

Hyder comments, “it is an error to suppose that he disregarded moral standards or historic considerations.” Swinburne is also known for popularizing poets and novelists that other critics had dismissed. “Who among English critics has done so much to awaken interest in so many different authors?” asks Hyder, crediting him with recognizing the value of William Blake, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Lord Byron, Robert Browning, and Charles Dickens well in advance of most other scholars and critics. Even Eliot, while categorizing Swinburne as an “imperfect critic,” acknowledged that “he was sufficiently interested in his subject-matter and knew quite enough about it; and this is a rare combination in English criticism.”

In addition to Arnold, Pater and Swinburne, there were a number of other scholars who contributed to critical thought during the Victorian period. According to René Wellek, George Henry Lewes was the first to promote the use of realism in a novel. Lewes believed that all art should closely reflect reality, although Wellek points out that he did not insist on literal portrayals and, in fact, disliked what he called “detailism.” Instead, he advocated that the purpose of the artist was to obtain “the necessary coherence of reality,” while allowing for artistic license. In the 1840s, John Ruskin published *Modern Painters*. Although the book was primarily a criticism of visual art, Ruskin’s theory on imagination is widely considered one of the more important critical developments for literary criticism as well. It is described by Alba H. Warren, Jr. as, “a theory of a penetrative function by which the imagination seizes the object in its very core of reality and meaning.” With the publication of *The Gay Science* (1866), Eneas Sweetland Dallas posited his own ambitious theory on imagination. He claimed that real imagination occurs through the unconscious and that a poet who possesses this gift will display it in his work. To this end, Dallas attempted a scientific approach to poetry, creating classifications of “genres in a triadic scheme.” Wellek writes, “Oddly enough, the scheme overlays a highly irrationalistic psychology that

locates the origin of art in the unconscious or the 'hidden soul.' The incongruous mixture of psychology of the unconscious with insistently symmetrical schematization makes Dallas' books piquant dishes not to be missed by connoisseurs of the history of criticism."

3.1. Eminent Victorian Critics:

3.2. Matthew Arnold:

The "eternal objects of poetry" are actions: "human actions; possessing an inherent interest in themselves."

The poet must not deal with the outer circumstances of a man's life, but with the "inward man; with [his] feelings and behavior in certain tragic situations."

Criticism prepares the way for great poetry by "see[ing] the object as in itself it really is."

Criticism strips away political agendas and makes "an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself."

"For the creation of a masterwork of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment."

Criticism's primary quality is to be disinterestedness.

The law of criticism's being is "the idea of a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world."

For a poem to be of real quality, it must possess both a "higher truth" and a "higher seriousness."

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), the Victorian poet and critic, was 'the first modern critic', and could be called 'the critic's critic', being a champion not only of great poetry, but of literary criticism itself. The purpose of literary criticism, in his view, was 'to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas', and he has influenced a whole school of critics including new critics such as T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, and Allen Tate. He was the founder of the sociological school of criticism, and through his touchstone method introduced scientific objectivity to critical evaluation by providing comparison and analysis as the two primary tools of criticism.

Arnold's evaluations of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats are landmarks in descriptive criticism, and as a poet-critic he occupies an eminent position in the rich galaxy of poet-critics of English literature.

T. S. Eliot praised Arnold's objective approach to critical evaluation, particularly his tools of comparison and analysis, and Allen Tate in his essay *Tension in Poetry* imitates Arnold's touchstone method to discover 'tension', or the proper balance between connotation and denotation, in poetry. These new critics have come a long way from the Romantic approach to poetry, and this change in attitude could be attributed to Arnold, who comes midway between the two schools.

For Arnold, the "eternal objects of poetry" are actions: "human actions; possessing an inherent interest in themselves." Those actions are "most excellent . . . which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections." Arnold believes that there is an elementary and shared part of human nature--"our passions." "That which is great and passionate is eternally interesting . . . A great human action of a thousand years ago is more interesting . . . than a smaller human action of today." In keeping with this necessity to appeal to human passion, the poet must not deal with the outer circumstances of a man's life, but with the "inward man; with [his] feelings and behavior in certain tragic situations." Arnold regarded the classical poets as superior to the moderns in this respect: the classical poets emphasized "the poetical character of the action in itself," while the moderns emphasize "the separate thoughts and images which occur in the treatment of an action." The classical authors "regarded the whole." The moderns "regard the parts." Arnold also prefers the simplicity of classical poetic language to the "overcuriousness of expression" found in Shakespeare, who "appears in his language to have tried all styles except that of simplicity."

Function of Criticism:

Criticism is, for Arnold, a secondary pursuit, inferior to the creative function of writing good poetry. Criticism prepares the way for great poetry (John the Baptist as a voice crying out in the literary wilderness) by "see[ing] the object as in itself it really is." In this way, criticism strips away political agendas and makes "an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself." It establishes "an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces; to make the best ideas prevail." (This is now called--in the terminology stolen from Thomas Kuhn--a paradigm shift.) Out of the "stir and growth" of criticism "come the creative epochs of literature. Great literature cannot simply be written by anyone at anytime: "for the creation of a masterwork of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment." Great artists must be nourished by their times in order to produce great art. "The English poetry of the first quarter of the [19th] century . . . did not know enough." The times in England were not conducive to great poetry: "In the England of the first quarter of this century there was neither a national glow of life and thought . . . nor yet a culture and a force of learning and criticism."

Criticism's primary quality is to be disinterestedness. It is to keep "aloof from what is called the practical view of things" by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a "free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches." It is resolutely to avoid political polemics of the sort which dominate criticism in the late 20th century: "**Criticism must maintain its independence of the practical spirit and its aims.**" The law of criticism's being is "the idea of a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world."

The Study of Poetry:

This is where Arnold apotheosizes poetry:

"More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, so sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry."

Arnold outlines three ways in which poems may have importance: 1) they "may count to us historically"; 2) "they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves"; 3) "they may count to us really." A poem may be regarded as important due to its position in the development of a language--but this does not say anything about its intrinsic merit. A poem may appeal to readers for personal reasons which have nothing to do with intrinsic merit. For a poem to be of real quality, it must possess both a "higher truth" and a "higher seriousness." Chaucer is out.

In *The Study of Poetry*, (1888) which opens his *Essays in Criticism: Second series*, in support of his plea for nobility in poetry, Arnold recalls Sainte-Beuve's reply to Napoleon, when latter said that charlatanism is found in everything. Sainte-Beuve replied that charlatanism might be found everywhere else, but not in the field of poetry, because in poetry the distinction between sound and unsound, or only half-sound, truth and untruth, or only half-truth, between the excellent and the inferior, is of paramount importance.

For Arnold there is no place for charlatanism in poetry. To him poetry is the criticism of life, governed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. It is in the criticism of life that the spirit of our race will find its stay and consolation. The

extent to which the spirit of mankind finds its stay and consolation is proportional to the power of a poem's criticism of life, and the power of the criticism of life is in direct proportion to the extent to which the poem is genuine and free from charlatanism.

In *The Study of Poetry* he also cautions the critic that in forming a genuine and disinterested estimate of the poet under consideration he should not be influenced by historical or personal judgements, historical judgements being fallacious because we regard ancient poets with excessive veneration, and personal judgements being fallacious when we are biased towards a contemporary poet. If a poet is a 'dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best . . . enjoy his work'.

As examples of erroneous judgements he says that the 17th century court tragedies of the French were spoken of with exaggerated praise, until Pellisson reproached them for want of the true poetic stamp, and another critic, Charles d' Hricault, said that 17th century French poetry had received undue and undeserving veneration. Arnold says the critics seem to substitute 'a halo for physiognomy and a statue in the place where there was once a man. They give us a human personage no larger than God seated amidst his perfect work, like Jupiter on Olympus.'

He also condemns the French critic Vitet, who had eloquent words of praise for the epic poem *Chanson de Roland* by Tuoldus, (which was sung by a jester, Taillefer, in William the Conqueror's army), saying that it was superior to Homer's Iliad. Arnold's view is that this poem can never be compared to Homer's work, and

that we only have to compare the description of dying Roland to Helen's words about her wounded brothers Pollux and Castor and its inferiority will be clearly revealed.

The Study of Poetry: a shift in position - the touchstone method

Arnold's criticism of Vitet above illustrates his 'touchstone method'; his theory that in order to judge a poet's work properly, a critic should compare it to passages taken from works of great masters of poetry, and that these passages should be applied as touchstones to other poetry. Even a single line or selected quotation will serve the purpose.

From this we see that he has shifted his position from that expressed in the preface to his *Poems* of 1853. In *The Study of Poetry* he no longer uses the acid test of action and architectonics. He became an advocate of 'touchstones'. 'Short passages even single lines,' he said, 'will serve our turn quite sufficiently'.

Some of Arnold's touchstone passages are: Helen's words about her wounded brother, Zeus addressing the horses of Peleus, suppliant Achilles' words to Priam, and from Dante; Ugolino's brave words, and Beatrice's loving words to Virgil.

From non-Classical writers he selects from *Henry IV* Part II (III, i), Henry's expostulation with sleep - 'Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast . . . '. From *Hamlet* (V, ii) 'Absent thee from felicity awhile . . . '. From Milton's *Paradise Lost* Book 1, 'Care sat on his faded cheek . . . ', and 'What is else not to be overcome . . . '

' Matthew Arnold, the greatest of the Victorian critics, has been both eulogized and condemned by scholars. In recent times too T.S. Eliot has criticized him. He calls him a propagandist, a salesman, a clever advertiser, rather than a great critic. He finds him lacking in the power of connected reasoning at any length says that "his flights are short flights or circular flights." F.R. Leavis accuses him of "high pamphleteering". Prof. Garrod, who otherwise is an admirer of Arnold, feels that Arnold became a critic only by accident (the accident of Oxford Professorship), and names him "the vendor of Frenchified disinterestedness."

His Shortcomings

Arnold's limitations as a critic can be summarized in the following manner:—

(1) He is incapable of connected reasoning at any length, and often contradicts himself. Thus first he lays down the test of total impression for judging the worth of a poet, but soon after contradicts himself and prescribes the well-known, "Touchstone method."

(2) There is a certain want of logic and method in Arnold's criticism. He is not a scientific critic. Often he is vague, and fails to define or state clearly his views. Often he is lop-sided as in his Essay on Shelley which is all biography except a brief concluding paragraph. His criticism is often gappy; before he has fully established a point, he would hastily hurry onto another.

(3) He frowns upon mere literary criticism. He mixes literary criticism with socio-ethical considerations and regards it as an instrument of culture. Purely literary criticism with him has no meaning and significance.

(4) There is some truth in the criticism that he was a propagandist and a salesman. As Wimsatt and Brooks point out, “very simply, very characteristically, and repetitiously, Arnold spent his career in hammering the thesis that poetry is a, “criticism of life.” All his practical criticism is but an illusion of this view.

(5) His criticism is lacking in originality. Practically all of his critical concepts are borrowed. In his emphasis on ‘action’ and high seriousness,’ he merely echoes Aristotle; his concept of “grand style” is exactly the same thing as, ‘the sublime,’ of Longinus and his biographical method is the method of the French Saint-Beuve. As George Watson says, “he plagiarises too heavily.”

(6) He might be learned, but his learning is neither exact, nor precise. He does not collect his facts painstakingly. His illustrations of his touchstone method are’ all misquotations. Similarly, his biographical data are often inaccurate.

(7) He is in favour of biographical interpretation; he is also conscious of the importance of “the moment,” and yet he is against the historical method of criticism.

(8) He advocates ‘disinterestedness,’ but ties the critic to certain socio-ethical interests. He would like him to rise above ‘practical’ and ‘personal’ interests, but he wants him to establish a current of great and noble ideas and thus promote culture. But disinterestedness means that the critic should have no interests except aesthetic appreciation.

(9) He speaks of the moral effects of poetry, of its ‘high seriousness,’ but never of its pleasure, the ‘aesthetic pleasure’ which a poet must impart, and which is the true test of its excellence. His standards of judgment are not literary.

(10) His literary criticism is vitiated by his moral, classical, and continental prejudices. He is sympathetic only to the classical, he rates the continental poets higher than the great English poets, and the moral test which he applies often

makes him neglect the literary qualities of a poet. The immoral in the life of a poet, prejudices him against his poetry.

Arnold's faults are glaring, but more important are his merits and achievements. He is the most imposing figure in Victorian criticism. In his own day, and for years afterwards, he was venerated and respected almost like Aristotle. After him the cry, for years, was, "Arnold has said so." "For half a century, Arnold's position in this country was comparable with that of the venerable Greek, in respect of the wide influence he exercised, the mark he impressed upon criticism, and the blind faith with which he was trusted by his votaries." (Scott-James). Another critic praises him because his criticism is more "compellingly alive", more thought-provoking than that of any other critic of his age. Herbert Paul goes to the extent of saying that Arnold did not merely criticize books, he taught others to criticize books.

Judged historically, Arnold rendered a great service to criticism. He rescued it from the disorganized state in which it had fallen by stressing the need of system in critical judgment. He also waged a relentless battle against the intrusion of personal, religious, or political considerations in the judgment of authors and works. Lastly, he raised criticism to a higher level than was ever thought by making it the care-taker of literature in epochs unfavorable to its growth. But more than one critic has been struck by the incongruity between Arnold, the more or less romantic poet, and Arnold, the more or less classical critic.

In certain respects, as shown by Scott-James, Arnold is superior to Aristotle. Aristotle knew none but the classics of Greece, the only literary models

available to him, whilst Arnold, having the literature of many nations and ages before him, was limited only, of his own choice, to, “the best that is known and thought in the world.” Further, Arnold repudiated the idea that the critic should be an “abstract lawgiver.” Above all, “Aristotle shows us the critic in relation to art. Arnold shows us the critic in relation to the public. Aristotle dissects a work of art Arnold dissects a critic.” The one gives us the principles which govern the making of a poem : the other, the principles by which the best poems should be selected and made known. Aristotle’s critic owes allegiance to the Artist, but Arnold’s critic has a duty to society. He is a propagandist tilling the soil so that ‘the best ideas.’ may prevail, making “an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself.

3.3. John Ruskin:

John Ruskin, (born February 8, 1819, London, England—died January 20, 1900, Coniston, Lancashire), English critic of art, architecture, and society who was a gifted painter, a distinctive prose stylist, and an important example of the Victorian Sage, or Prophet: a writer of polemical prose who seeks to cause widespread cultural and social change.

After the publication of the first volume of *Modern Painters* in 1843, Ruskin became aware of another avant-garde artistic movement: the critical rediscovery of the painting of the Gothic Middle Ages. He wrote about these Idealist painters (especially Giotto, Fra Angelico, and Benozzo Gozzoli) at the end of the second volume of *Modern Painters*, and he belatedly added an account of them to the third edition of the first volume in 1846. These medieval religious artists could provide, he believed, in a way in which the Dutch, French, and Italian

painters of the 17th and 18th centuries could not, an inspiring model for the art of the “modern” age.

This medievalist enthusiasm was one reason that Ruskin was so ready to lend his support to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB), a group of young English artists formed in 1848 to reject the Neoclassical assumptions of contemporary art schools. Ruskin published an enthusiastic pamphlet about the PRB (in which he misleadingly identified them as the natural heirs of Turner) in 1851, wrote letters to the *Times* in 1851 and 1854 to defend them from their critics, and recommended their work in his *Edinburgh Lectures* of 1853 (published 1854).

But medievalism was even more important in the field of architecture, where the Gothic Revival was as direct an expression of the new Romantic spirit as the landscape painting of Turner or Constable. Ruskin had been involved in a major Gothic Revival building project in 1844, when George Gilbert Scott redesigned Ruskin’s parents’ parish church, St. Giles’s Camberwell. In 1848, newly married to Euphemia (Effie) Gray, Ruskin went on a honeymoon tour of the Gothic churches of northern France and began to write his first major book on buildings, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849). Conceived in the disturbing context of the European revolutions of 1848, the book lays down seven moral principles (or “Lamps”) to guide architectural practice, one of which, “The Lamp of Memory,” articulates the scrupulous respect for the original fabric of old buildings that would inspire William Morris and, through him, the conservation movement of the 20th century. In November Ruskin went abroad again, this time to Venice to research a more substantial book on architecture.

The Stones of Venice was published in three volumes, one in 1851 and two more in 1853. In part it is a laboriously researched history of Venetian architecture, based on long months of direct study of the original buildings, then in a condition of serious neglect and decay. But it is also a book of moral and social polemic with the imaginative structure of a Miltonic or Wordsworthian sublime epic. Ruskin's narrative charts the fall of Venice from its medieval Eden, through the impiety and arrogance (as Ruskin saw it) of the Renaissance, to its modern condition of political impotence and social frivolity. As such, the book is a distinguished late example of the political medievalism found in the work of William Cobbett, Robert Southey, Thomas Carlyle, and the Young England movement of the 1840s. Ruskin differs from these predecessors both in the poetic power of his prose and in his distinctive—and widely influential—insistence that art and architecture are, necessarily, the direct expression of the social conditions in which they were produced. Here, as elsewhere, the Aesthetic movement, with its view of art as a rebellious alternative to the social norm and its enthusiasm for Renaissance texts and artifacts, stands in direct contrast to Ruskin's Theoretic views.

The Stones of Venice was influential in other ways as well. Its celebration of Italian Gothic encouraged the use of foreign models in English Gothic Revival architecture. By 1874 Ruskin would regret the extent to which architects had “dignified our banks and drapers’ shops with Venetian tracery.” But, for good or ill, his writing played a key part in establishing the view that the architectural style of Venice, the great maritime trading nation of the medieval world, was particularly appropriate for buildings in modern Britain. The other enduring influence derived, more subtly, from a single chapter in the second volume, “The Nature of Gothic.” There Ruskin identified “imperfection” as an essential feature of Gothic art, contrasting it with the mechanical regularity of Neoclassical

buildings and modern mass production. Gothic architecture, he believed, allowed a significant degree of creative freedom and artistic fulfillment to the individual workman. We could not, and should not, take pleasure in an object that had not itself been made with pleasure. In this proposition lay the roots both of Ruskin's own quarrel with industrial capitalism and of the Arts and Crafts movement of the later 19th century.

Turner died in 1851. Ruskin's marriage was dissolved, on grounds of nonconsummation, in 1854, leaving the former Effie Gray free to marry the Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais. Ruskin withdrew somewhat from society. He traveled extensively in Europe and, from 1856 to 1858, took on a considerable body of administrative work as the chief artistic executor of Turner's estate. He contributed both financially and physically to the construction of a major Gothic Revival building: Benjamin Woodward's Oxford University Museum. In 1856 he published the third and fourth volumes of *Modern Painters*, with their penetrating inquiry into the reasons for the predominance of landscape painting in 19th-century art and their invention of the important critical term "pathetic fallacy." His annual *Academy Notes* (a series of pamphlets issued by an English publisher from 1855 to 1859) sustained his reputation as a persuasive commentator on contemporary painting. But by 1858 Ruskin was beginning to move on from the specialist criticism of art and architecture to a wider concern with the cultural condition of his age. His growing friendship with the historian and essayist Thomas Carlyle contributed to this process. Like Carlyle, Ruskin began to adopt the "prophetic" stance, familiar from the Bible, of a voice crying from the wilderness and seeking to call a lapsed people back into the paths of righteousness.

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This marginal role as a disenchanted outsider both legitimized and, to an extent, required a ferocity and oddness that would be conspicuous features of Ruskin's later career. In 1858 Ruskin lectured on "The Work of Iron in Nature, Art and Policy" (published in *The Two Paths*, 1859), a text in which both the radical-conservative temper and the symbolic method of his later cultural criticism are clearly established. Beginning as an art critic, Ruskin contrasts the exquisite sculptured iron grilles of medieval Verona with the mass-produced metal security

railings with which modern citizens protect their houses. The artistic contrast is, of course, also a social contrast, and Ruskin goes rapidly beyond this to a symbolic assertion of the “iron” values involved in his definition of the just society. By wearing the fetters of a benignly neofeudalist social order, men and women, Ruskin believed, might lead lives of greater aesthetic fulfillment, in an environment less degraded by industrial pollution.

These values are persistently restated in Ruskin’s writings of the 1860s, sometimes in surprising ways. *Unto This Last* and *Munera Pulveris* (1862 and 1872 as books, though published in magazines in 1860 and 1862–63) are attacks on the classical economics of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. Neither book makes any significant technical contribution to the study of economics (though Ruskin thought otherwise); both memorably express Ruskin’s moral outrage at the extent to which the materialist and utilitarian ethical assumptions implicit in this new technique for understanding human behaviour had come to be accepted as normative. *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) would become notorious in the late 20th century as a stock example of Victorian male chauvinism. In fact, Ruskin was using the conventional construction of the feminine, as pacific, altruistic, and uncompetitive, to articulate yet another symbolic assertion of his anticapitalist social model. *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866, enlarged in 1873) collects some of the best specimens of Ruskin’s Carlylean manner, notably the lecture “Traffic” of 1864, which memorably draws its audience’s attention to the hypocrisy manifested by their choice of Gothic architecture for their churches but Neoclassical designs for their homes.

The dogmatic Protestantism of Ruskin’s childhood had been partially abandoned in 1858, after an “unconversion” experience in Turin. Ten years later,

in a moving lecture on “The Mystery of Life and Its Arts,” Ruskin reflected on his returning sense of the spiritual and transcendent. In *The Queen of the Air* (1869) he attempted to express his old concept of a divine power in Nature in new terms calculated for an age in which assent to the Christian faith was no longer automatic or universal. Through an account of the Greek myth of Athena, Ruskin sought to suggest an enduring human need for—and implicit recognition of—the supernatural authority on which the moral stresses of his artistic, political, and cultural views depend.

His father’s death in 1864 had left Ruskin a wealthy man. He used his wealth, in part, to promote idealistic social causes, notably the Guild of St. George, a pastoral community first planned in 1871 and formally constituted seven years later. From 1866 to 1875 he was unhappily in love with a woman 30 years his junior, Rose La Touche, whose physical and mental deterioration caused him acute distress. During these years he began, himself, to show signs of serious psychological illness. In 1871 he bought Brantwood, a house in the English Lake District (now a museum of his work) and lived there for the rest of his life.

Ruskin’s appointment as Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford in 1870 was a welcome encouragement at a troubled stage of his career, and in the following year he launched *Fors Clavigera*, a one-man monthly magazine in which, from 1871 to 1878 and 1880 to 1884 he developed his idiosyncratic cultural theories. Like his successive series of Oxford lectures (1870–79 and 1883–84), *Fors* is an unpredictable mixture of striking insights, powerful rhetoric, self-indulgence, bigotry, and occasional incoherence. As a by-product of the *Fors* project, however, Ruskin wrote his last major work: his autobiography, *Praeterita* (1885–89). Unfinished, shamelessly partial (it omits, for example, all mention of his

marriage), and chronologically untrustworthy, it provides a subtle and memorable history of the growth of Ruskin's distinctive sensibility.

4.0. Conclusion:

According to Bruce Haley, nineteenth-century theories of moral physiology permeated both "the specialized language of science" and also but literary criticism. "In both cases morality, psychology, and health were related concerns. Macaulay traced the luxuries of Walpole's prose to an "unhealthy and disorganized mind;" Rousseau's books, wrote Carlyle, "like himself, are what I call unhealthy; not the good sort of Books"; Richard Holt Hutton found in Clough's verse an "almost morbid craving for a firm base on the absolute realities of life;" Leslie Stephen confessed that his gorge rose whenever he encountered Swift's "morbid interest in the physically disgusting."

Victorian critics, in other words, often took a medical approach to literature, assuming that they could — and should — "diagnose a work, looking for signs of disease or soundness, then looking further for cause of the disclosed condition. To read new poetry, Walter Bagehot declared, one must surrender his mind to the "delicate task of detecting the healthiness of unhealthiness of familiar states of feeling." Today that sort of clinical vocabulary strikes us as crude and unpalatable." Since these methods were based on commonly shared assumptions about the healthy mind, examining them tells us much about Victorian conceptions of the human.

"The greatest poetry," Leslie Stephen wrote, "like the highest morality, is the product of a thoroughly healthy mind." His comparison between moral and

creative excellence is not casually made. Like most Victorian critics, he believed that they should be--and are in the "healthy" mind--functionally related. What F. W. Roe has said of Carlyle's critical theory may be almost universally applied: "Art is moral because intellect and morality are indistinguishable in the sound mind. . . . The pathological use of the term "moral" in those days was very broad. The "moral" cause of a disease might include, say, venality or gluttony, but also anxiety and overwork. In its most general sense the moral condition was the state of the psyche induced by a pattern of life and a pattern of thought. Likewise, a person who was "morally insane" had of course lost the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, but at the same time his other faculties were affected. His perceptions generally were unreliable. More important, his will was impaired and with it the internal, responsible direction of his own conduct. Volitional paralysis, delusion, and immorality were all symptoms of the same degenerative process. . . . [By contrast], in the "thoroughly healthy mind" perceptions and concepts are given shape and direction by moral volition--whatever external reality the healthy mind contemplates--social, natural, or divine--it perceives not only variety, movement, and palpability, but also structure or design. To live harmoniously within ourselves, we must, in [Matthew] Arnold's words, see life steadily and see it whole--we must take in life coherently. Victorian critics put special stress on the artist's ability to get hold of his subject mentally, to master it. --Bruce Haley. *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978

Sources/Suggested Reading:

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PAPER- VII

UNIT V

ARNOLD'S 'THE STUDY OF POETRY'

1.0. Introduction:

Matthew Arnold was one of the foremost poets and critics of the 19th century. While often regarded as the father of modern literary criticism, he also wrote extensively on social and cultural issues, religion, and education. Arnold was born into an influential English family—his father was a famed headmaster at Rugby—and graduated from Balliol College, Oxford. He began his career as a school inspector, traveling throughout much of England on the newly built railway system. When he was elected professor of poetry at Oxford in 1857, he was the first in the post to deliver his lectures in English rather than Latin. Walt Whitman famously dismissed him as a “literary dude,” and while many have continued to disparage Arnold for his moralistic tone and literary judgments, his work also laid the foundation for important 20th century critics like T.S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, and Harold Bloom. His poetry has also had an enormous, though underappreciated, influence; Arnold is frequently acknowledged as being one of the first poets to display a truly Modern perspective in his work.

Perhaps Arnold's most famous piece of literary criticism is his essay “The Study of Poetry.” In this work, Arnold is fundamentally concerned with poetry's “high destiny;” he believes that “mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us” as science and

philosophy will eventually prove flimsy and unstable. Arnold's essay thus concerns itself with articulating a "high standard" and "strict judgment" in order to avoid the fallacy of valuing certain poems (and poets) too highly, and lays out a method for discerning only the best and therefore "classic" poets (as distinct from the description of writers of the ancient world). Arnold's classic poets include Milton, Shakespeare, Dante, and Homer; and the passages he presents from each are intended to show how their poetry is timeless and moving. For Arnold, feeling and sincerity are paramount, as is the seriousness of subject: "The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner." An example of an indispensable poet who falls short of Arnold's "classic" designation is Geoffrey Chaucer, who, Arnold states, ultimately lacks the "high seriousness" of classic poets.

At the root of Arnold's argument is his desire to illuminate and preserve the poets he believes to be the touchstones of literature, and to ask questions about the moral value of poetry that does not champion truth, beauty, valor, and clarity. Arnold's belief that poetry should both uplift and console drives the essay's logic and its conclusions.

1.1. Life:

Matthew was the eldest son of the renowned Thomas Arnold, who was appointed headmaster of Rugby School in 1828. Matthew entered Rugby (1837) and then attended Oxford as a scholar of Balliol College; there he won the Newdigate Prize with his poem *Cromwell* (1843) and was graduated with second-class honours in 1844. For Oxford Arnold retained an impassioned affection. His

Oxford was the Oxford of John Henry Newman—of Newman just about to be received into the Roman Catholic Church; and although Arnold's own religious thought, like his father's, was strongly liberal, Oxford and Newman always remained for him joint symbols of spiritual beauty and culture.

In 1847 Arnold became private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, who occupied a high cabinet post during Lord John Russell's Liberal ministries. And in 1851, in order to secure the income needed for his marriage (June 1851) with Frances Lucy Wightman, he accepted from Lansdowne an appointment as inspector of schools. This was to be his routine occupation until within two years of his death. He engaged in incessant travelling throughout the British provinces and also several times was sent by the government to inquire into the state of education in France, Germany, Holland, and Switzerland. Two of his reports on schools abroad were reprinted as books, and his annual reports on schools at home attracted wide attention, written, as they were, in Arnold's own urbane and civilized prose.

1.2. Poetic Achievement:

The work that gives Arnold his high place in the history of literature and the history of ideas was all accomplished in the time he could spare from his official duties. His first volume of verse was *The Strayed Reveller, and Other Poems*. By A. (1849); this was followed (in 1852) by another under the same initial: *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*. In 1853 appeared the first volume of poems published under his own name; it consisted partly of poems selected from the earlier volumes and also contained the well-known preface explaining (among other things) why *Empedocles* was excluded from the selection: it was a

dramatic poem “in which the suffering finds no vent in action,” in which there is “everything to be endured, nothing to be done.” This preface foreshadows his later criticism in its insistence upon the classic virtues of unity, impersonality, universality, and architectonic power and upon the value of the classical masterpieces as models for “an age of spiritual discomfort”—an age “wanting in moral grandeur.” Other editions followed, and *Merope*, Arnold’s classical tragedy, appeared in 1858, and *New Poems* in 1867. After that date, though there were further editions, Arnold wrote little additional verse.

Not much of Arnold’s verse will stand the test of his own criteria; far from being classically poised, impersonal, serene, and grand, it is often intimate, personal, full of romantic regret, sentimental pessimism, and nostalgia. As a public and social character and as a prose writer, Arnold was sunny, debonair, and sanguine; but beneath ran the current of his buried life, and of this much of his poetry is the echo:

From the soul’s subterranean depth upborne

As from an infinitely distant land,

Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey

A melancholy into all our day.

“I am past thirty,” he wrote a friend in 1853, “and three parts iced over.” The impulse to write poetry came typically when

A bolt is shot back somewhere in the breast,

And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.

Though he was “never quite benumb’d by the world’s sway,” these hours of insight became more and more rare, and the stirrings of buried feeling were associated with moods of regret for lost youth, regret for the freshness of the early world, moods of self-pity, moods of longing for

The hills where his life rose

And the sea where it goes.

Yet, though much of Arnold’s most characteristic verse is in this vein of soliloquy or intimate confession, he can sometimes rise, as in “Sohrab and Rustum,” to epic severity and impersonality; to lofty meditation, as in “Dover Beach”; and to sustained magnificence and richness, as in “The Scholar Gipsy” and “Thyrsis”—where he wields an intricate stanza form without a stumble.

In 1857, assisted by the vote of his godfather (and predecessor) John Keble, Arnold was elected to the Oxford chair of poetry, which he held for 10 years. It was characteristic of him that he revolutionized this professorship. The keynote was struck in his inaugural lecture: “On the Modern Element in Literature,” “modern” being taken to mean not merely “contemporary” (for Greece was “modern”), but the spirit that, contemplating the vast and complex spectacle of life, craves for moral and intellectual “deliverance.” Several of the lectures were afterward published as critical essays, but the most substantial fruits of his professorship were the three lectures *On Translating Homer* (1861)—in which he recommended Homer’s plainness and nobility as medicine for the modern world, with its “sick hurry and divided aims” and condemned Francis Newman’s recent translation as ignoble and eccentric—and the lectures *On the Study of Celtic*

Literature (1867), in which, without much knowledge of his subject or of anthropology, he used the Celtic strain as a symbol of that which rejects the despotism of the commonplace and the utilitarian.

1.3. Arnold as a Critic:

It is said that when the poet in Arnold died, the critic was born; and it is true that from this time onward he turned almost entirely to prose. Some of the leading ideas and phrases were early put into currency in *Essays in Criticism* (First Series, 1865; Second Series, 1888) and *Culture and Anarchy*. The first essay in the 1865 volume, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," is an overture announcing briefly most of the themes he developed more fully in later work. It is at once evident that he ascribes to "criticism" a scope and importance hitherto undreamed of. The function of criticism, in his sense, is "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas." It is in fact a spirit that he is trying to foster, the spirit of an awakened and informed intelligence playing upon not "literature" merely but theology, history, art, science, sociology, and politics, and in every sphere seeking "to see the object as in itself it really is."

In this critical effort, thought Arnold, England lagged behind France and Germany, and the English accordingly remained in a backwater of provinciality and complacency. Even the great Romantic poets, with all their creative energy, suffered from the want of it. The English literary critic must know literatures other than his own and be in touch with European standards. This last line of thought Arnold develops in the second essay, "The Literary Influence of Academies," in

which he dwells upon “the note of provinciality” in English literature, caused by remoteness from a “centre” of correct knowledge and correct taste. To realize how much Arnold widened the horizons of criticism requires only a glance at the titles of some of the other essays in *Essays in Criticism* (1865): “Maurice de Guérin,” “Eugénie de Guérin,” “Heinrich Heine,” “Joubert,” “Spinoza,” “Marcus Aurelius”; in all these, as increasingly in his later books, he is “applying modern ideas to life” as well as to letters and “bringing all things under the point of view of the 19th century.”

The first essay in the 1888 volume, “The Study of Poetry,” was originally published as the general introduction to T.H. Ward’s anthology, *The English Poets* (1880). It contains many of the ideas for which Arnold is best remembered. In an age of crumbling creeds, poetry will have to replace religion. More and more, we will “turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us.” Therefore we must know how to distinguish the best poetry from the inferior, the genuine from the counterfeit; and to do this we must steep ourselves in the work of the acknowledged masters, using as “touchstones” passages exemplifying their “high seriousness,” and their superiority of diction and movement.

The remaining essays, with the exception of the last two (on Tolstoy and Amiel), all deal with English poets: Milton, Gray, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley. All contain memorable things, and all attempt a serious and responsible assessment of each poet’s “criticism of life” and his value as food for the modern spirit. Arnold has been taken to task for some of his judgments and omissions: for his judgment that Dryden and Pope were not “genuine” poets because they composed in their wits instead of “in the soul”; for calling Gray a “minor classic” in an age of prose and spiritual bleakness; for paying too much attention to the

man behind the poetry (Gray, Keats, Shelley); for making no mention of Donne; and above all for saying that poetry is “at bottom a criticism of life.” On this last point it should be remembered that he added “under the conditions fixed...by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty,” and that if by “criticism” is understood (as Arnold meant) “evaluation,” Arnold’s dictum is seen to have wider significance than has been sometimes supposed.

Culture and Anarchy is in some ways Arnold’s most central work. It is an expansion of his earlier attacks, in “The Function of Criticism” and “Heinrich Heine,” upon the smugness, philistinism, and mammon worship of Victorian England. Culture, as “the study of perfection,” is opposed to the prevalent “anarchy” of a new democracy without standards and without a sense of direction. By “turning a stream of fresh thought upon our stock notions and habits,” culture seeks to make “reason and the will of God prevail.”

Arnold’s classification of English society into Barbarians (with their high spirit, serenity, and distinguished manners and their inaccessibility to ideas), Philistines (the stronghold of religious nonconformity, with plenty of energy and morality but insufficient “sweetness and light”), and Populace (still raw and blind) is well known. Arnold saw in the Philistines the key to the whole position; they were now the most influential section of society; their strength was the nation’s strength, their crudeness its crudeness: Educate and humanize the Philistines, therefore. Arnold saw in the idea of “the State,” and not in any one class of society, the true organ and repository of the nation’s collective “best self.” No summary can do justice to this extraordinary book; it can still be read with pure enjoyment, for it is written with an inward poise, a serene detachment, and an infusion of mental laughter, which make it a masterpiece of ridicule as well as a

searching analysis of Victorian society. The same is true of its unduly neglected sequel, *Friendship's Garland* (1871).

1.4. Religious Writings:

Lastly Arnold turned to religion, the constant preoccupation and true centre of his whole life, and wrote *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873), *God and the Bible* (1875), and *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877). In these books, Arnold really founded Anglican “modernism.” Like all religious liberals, he came under fire from two sides: from the orthodox, who accused him of infidelity, of turning God into a “stream of tendency” and of substituting vague emotion for definite belief; and from the infidels, for clinging to the church and retaining certain Christian beliefs of which he had undermined the foundations. Arnold considered his religious writings to be constructive and conservative. Those who accused him of destructiveness did not realize how far historical and scientific criticism had already riddled the old foundations; and those who accused him of timidity failed to see that he regarded religion as the highest form of culture, the one indispensable without which all secular education is in vain. His attitude is best summed up in his own words (from the preface to *God and the Bible*): “At the present moment two things about the Christian religion must surely be clear to anybody with eyes in his head. One is, that men cannot do without it; the other, that they cannot do with it as it is.” Convinced that much in popular religion was “touched with the finger of death” and convinced no less of the hopelessness of man without religion, he sought to find for religion a basis of “scientific fact” that even the positive modern spirit must accept. A reading of Arnold’s *Note Books* will convince any reader of the depth of Arnold’s spirituality and of the

degree to which, in his “buried life,” he disciplined himself in constant devotion and self-forgetfulness.

2.0. The Study of Poetry: The Text

‘THE FUTURE of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialised itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry.’

Let me be permitted to quote these words of my own, as uttering the thought which should, in my opinion, go with us and govern us in all our study of poetry. In the present work it is the course of one great contributory stream to the world-river of poetry that we are invited to follow. We are here invited to trace the stream of English poetry. But whether we set ourselves, as here, to follow only one of the several streams that make the mighty river of poetry, or whether we seek to know them all, our governing thought should be the same. We should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret

life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it. For finely and truly does Wordsworth call poetry 'the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science'; and what is a countenance without its expression? Again, Wordsworth finely and truly calls poetry 'the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge'; our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now; our philosophy, pluming itself on its reasonings about causation and finite and infinite being; what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge? The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge' offered to us by poetry.

But if we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry, to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence. We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment. Sainte-Beuve relates that Napoleon one day said, when somebody was spoken of in his presence as a charlatan: 'Charlatan as much as you please; but where is there not charlatanism?'—'Yes' answers Sainte-Beuve, 'in politics, in the art of governing mankind, that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought, in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance; herein lies the inviolableness of that noble portion of man's being.' It is admirably said, and let us hold fast to it. In poetry, which is thought and art in one, it is the glory, the eternal honour, that charlatanism shall find no entrance; that this noble sphere be kept inviolate and inviolable. Charlatanism is for confusing or obliterating the distinctions between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true. It is charlatanism, conscious or unconscious,

whenever we confuse or obliterate these. And in poetry, more than anywhere else, it is unpermissible to confuse or obliterate them. For in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance. It is of paramount importance because of the high destinies of poetry. In poetry, as in criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true.

The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can. A clearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, is the most precious benefit which we can gather from a poetical collection such as the present. And yet in the very nature and conduct of such a collection there is inevitably something which tends to obscure in us the consciousness of what our benefit should be, and to distract us from the pursuit of it. We should therefore steadily set it before our minds at the outset, and should compel ourselves to revert constantly to the thought of it as we proceed.

Yes; constantly in reading poetry, a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, should be present in our minds and should govern our estimate of what we read. But this real estimate, the only true one, is liable to be superseded, if we are not watchful, by two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate, both of which are fallacious. A poet or a poem may count to us historically, they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves, and they may count to us really. They may count to

us historically. The course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a poet's work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticising it; in short, to overrate it. So arises in our poetic judgments the fallacy caused by the estimate which we may call historic. Then, again, a poet or poem may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings and circumstances, have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we overrate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated. And thus we get the source of a second fallacy in our poetic judgments—the fallacy caused by an estimate which we may call personal.

Both fallacies are natural. It is evident how naturally the study of the history and development of poetry may incline a man to pause over reputations and works once conspicuous but now obscure, and to quarrel with a careless public for skipping, in obedience to mere tradition and habit, from one famous name or work in its national poetry to another, ignorant of what it misses, and of the reason for keeping what it keeps, and of the whole process of growth in its poetry. The French have become diligent students of their own early poetry, which they long neglected; the study makes many of them dissatisfied with their so-called classical poetry, the court-tragedy of the seventeenth century, a poetry which Pellisson long ago reproached with its want of the true poetic stamp, with its *politesse stérile et rampante*, but which nevertheless has reigned in France as absolutely as if it had been the perfection of classical poetry indeed. The dissatisfaction is natural; yet a lively and accomplished critic, M. Charles d'Héricault, the editor of Clément Marot, goes too far when he says that 'the cloud

of glory playing round a classic is a mist as dangerous to the future of a literature as it is intolerable for the purposes of history.' 'It hinders,' he goes on, 'it hinders us from seeing more than one single point, the culminating and exceptional point; the summary, fictitious and arbitrary, of a thought and of a work. It substitutes a halo for a physiognomy, it puts a statue where there was once a man, and hiding from us all trace of the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures, it claims not study but veneration; it does not show us how the thing is done, it imposes upon us a model. Above all, for the historian this creation of classic personages is inadmissible; for it withdraws the poet from his time, from his proper life, it breaks historical relationships, it blinds criticism by conventional admiration, and renders the investigation of literary origins unacceptable. It gives us a human personage no longer but a God seated immovable amidst His perfect work, like Jupiter on Olympus; and hardly will it be possible for the young student to whom such work is exhibited at such a distance from him, to believe that it did not issue ready—made from that divine head.'

All this is brilliantly and tellingly said, but we must plead for a distinction. Everything depends on the reality of a poet's classic character. If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word classic, classical), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character. This is what is salutary, this is what is formative; this is the great benefit to be got from the study of poetry. Everything which interferes with it, which hinders it, is injurious. True, we must read our classic with open eyes, and not with eyes blinded with superstition; we must perceive when his work comes short, when it drops out of the class of the very best, and we must rate it, in such cases, at its proper value. But the use of this negative criticism is not in itself, it is entirely in its enabling us

to have a clearer sense and a deeper enjoyment of what is truly excellent. To trace the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures of a genuine classic, to acquaint oneself with his time and his life and his historical relationships, is mere literary dilettantism unless it has that clear sense and deeper enjoyment for its end. It may be said that the more we know about a classic the better we shall enjoy him; and, if we lived as long as Methuselah and had all of us heads of perfect clearness and wills of perfect steadfastness, this might be true in fact as it is plausible in theory. But the case here is much the same as the case with the Greek and Latin studies of our schoolboys. The elaborate philological groundwork which we require them to lay is in theory an admirable preparation for appreciating the Greek and Latin authors worthily. The more thoroughly we lay the groundwork, the better we shall be able, it may be said, to enjoy the authors. True, if time were not so short, and schoolboys' wits not so soon tired and their power of attention exhausted; only, as it is, the elaborate philological preparation goes on, but the authors are little known and less enjoyed. So with the investigator of 'historic origins' in poetry. He ought to enjoy the true classic all the better for his investigations; he often is distracted from the enjoyment of the best, and with the less good he overbusies himself, and is prone to over-rate it in proportion to the trouble which it has cost him.

The idea of tracing historic origins and historical relationships cannot be absent from a compilation like the present. And naturally the poets to be exhibited in it will be assigned to those persons for exhibition who are known to prize them highly, rather than to those who have no special inclination towards them. Moreover, the very occupation with an author, and the business of exhibiting him, disposes us to affirm and amplify his importance. In the present work, therefore, we are sure of frequent temptation to adopt the historic estimate, or the personal estimate, and to forget the real estimate; which latter, nevertheless, we must employ if we are to make poetry yield us its full benefit. So high is that benefit,

the benefit of clearly feeling and of deeply enjoying the really excellent, the truly classic in poetry, that we do well, I say, to set it fixedly before our minds as our object in studying poets and poetry, and to make the desire of attaining it the one principle to which, as the Imitation says, whatever we may read or come to know, we always return. Cum multa legeris et cognoveris, ad unum semper oportet redire principium.

The historic estimate is likely in especial to affect our judgment and our language when we are dealing with ancient poets; the personal estimate when we are dealing with poets our contemporaries, or at any rate modern. The exaggerations due to the historic estimate are not in themselves, perhaps, of very much gravity. Their report hardly enters the general ear; probably they do not always impose even on the literary men who adopt them. But they lead to a dangerous abuse of language. So we hear Cædmon, amongst our own poets, compared to Milton. I have already noticed the enthusiasm of one accomplished French critic for 'historic origins.' Another eminent French critic, M. Vitet, comments upon that famous document of the early poetry of his nation, the *Chanson de Roland*. It is indeed a most interesting document. The jocator or jongleur Taillefer, who was with William the Conqueror's army at Hastings, marched before the Norman troops, so said the tradition, singing 'of Charlemagne and of Roland and of Oliver, and of the vassals who died at Roncevaux'; and it is suggested that in the *Chanson de Roland* by one Tuoldus or Théroulde, a poem preserved in a manuscript of the twelfth century in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, we have certainly the matter, perhaps even some of the words, of the chant which Taillefer sang. The poem has vigour and freshness; it is not without pathos. But M. Vitet is not satisfied with seeing in it a document of some poetic value, and of very high historic and linguistic value; he sees in it a grand and beautiful work, a monument of epic genius. In its general design he finds the grandiose conception, in its details he finds the constant union of simplicity with greatness, which are the

marks, he truly says, of the genuine epic, and distinguish it from the artificial epic of literary ages. One thinks of Homer; this is the sort of praise which is given to Homer, and justly given. Higher praise there cannot well be, and it is the praise due to epic poetry of the highest order only, and to no other. Let us try, then, the *Chanson de Roland* at its best. Roland, mortally wounded, lay himself down under a pine-tree, with his face turned towards Spain and the enemy—

‘De plusurs choses à remembrer li prist,

De tantes teres cume li bers cunquist,

De dulce France, des humes de sun lign,

De Carlemagne sun seignor ki l’nurrit.’

That is primitive work, I repeat, with an undeniable poetic quality of its own. It deserves such praise, and such praise is sufficient for it. But now turn to Homer—

[Greek]

We are here in another world, another order of poetry altogether; here is rightly due such supreme praise as that which M. Vitet gives to the *Chanson de Roland*. If our words are to have any meaning, if our judgments are to have any solidity, we must not heap that supreme praise upon poetry of an order immeasurably inferior.

Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one’s mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. Of course we are not to require this other poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them, when we have lodged them well in our minds, infallible

touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of his quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them. Short passages, even single lines, will serve our turn quite sufficiently. Take the two lines which I have just quoted from Homer, the poet's comment on Helen's mention of her brothers;—or take his

[Greek]

the address of Zeus to the horses of Peleus;—or take finally his

[Greek]

the words of Achilles to Priam, a suppliant before him. Take that incomparable line and a half of Dante, Ugolino's tremendous words—

‘Io no piangeva; sì dentro impietrai.

Piangevan elli...’

take the lovely words of Beatrice to Virgil—

‘Io son fatta da Dio, sua mercè, tale,

Che la vostra miseria non mi tange,

Nè fiamma d'esto incendio non m'assale...’

take the simple, but perfect, single line—

‘In la sua volontade è nostra pace.’

Take of Shakespeare a line or two of Henry the Fourth's expostulation with sleep—

‘Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast

Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains

In cradle of the rude imperious surge...'

and take, as well, Hamlet's dying request to Horatio—

'If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,

Absent thee from felicity awhile,

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain

To tell my story...'

Take of Milton that Miltonic passage:

'Darken'd so, yet shone

Above them all the archangel; but his face

Deep scars of thunder had intrench'd, and care

Sat on his faded cheek...'

add two such lines as—

'And courage never to submit or yield

And what is else not to be overcome...'

and finish with the exquisite close to the loss of Proserpine, the loss

'...which cost Ceres all that pain

To seek her through the world.'

These few lines, if we have tact and can use them, are enough even of themselves to keep clear and sound our judgments about poetry, to save us from fallacious estimates of it, to conduct us to a real estimate.

The specimens I have quoted differ widely from one another, but they have in common this: the possession of the very highest poetical quality. If we are thoroughly penetrated by their power, we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us, whatever poetry may be laid before us, to feel the degree in which a high poetical quality is present or wanting there. Critics give themselves great labour to draw out what in the abstract constitutes the characters of a high quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples;—to take specimens of poetry of the high, the very highest quality, and to say: The characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed there. They are far better recognised by being felt in the verse of the master, than by being perused in the prose of the critic. Nevertheless if we are urgently pressed to give some critical account of them, we may safely, perhaps, venture on laying down, not indeed how and why the characters arise, but where and in what they arise. They are in the matter and substance of the poetry, and they are in its manner and style. Both of these, the substance and matter on the one hand, the style and manner on the other, have a mark, an accent, of high beauty, worth, and power. But if we are asked to define this mark and accent in the abstract, our answer must be: No, for we should thereby be darkening the question, not clearing it. The mark and accent are as given by the substance and matter of that poetry, by the style and manner of that poetry, and of all other poetry which is akin to it in quality.

Only one thing we may add as to the substance and matter of poetry, guiding ourselves by Aristotle's profound observation that the superiority of poetry over history consists in its possessing a higher truth and a higher seriousness ([Greek]). Let us add, therefore, to what we have said, this: that the substances and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness. We may add yet further, what is in itself evident, that to the style and manner of the best poetry their special character, their accent, is given by their diction, and, even yet more, by

their movement. And though we distinguish between the two characters, the two accents, of superiority, yet they are nevertheless vitally connected one with the other. The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner. The two superiorities are closely related, and are in steadfast proportion one to the other. So far as high poetic truth and seriousness are wanting to a poet's matter and substance, so far also, we may be sure, will a high poetic stamp of diction and movement be wanting to his style and manner. In proportion as this high stamp of diction and movement, again, is absent from a poet's style and manner, we shall find, also, that high poetic truth and seriousness are absent from his substance and matter.

So stated, these are but dry generalities; their whole force lies in their application. And I could wish every student of poetry to make the application of them for himself. Made by himself, the application would impress itself upon his mind far more deeply than made by me. Neither will my limits allow me to make any full application of the generalities above propounded; but in the hope of bringing out, at any rate, some significance in them, and of establishing an important principle more firmly by their means, I will, in the space which remains to me, follow rapidly from the commencement the course of our English poetry with them in my view.

Once more I return to the early poetry of France, with which our own poetry, in its origins, is indissolubly connected. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that seedtime of all modern language and literature, the poetry of France had a clear predominance in Europe. Of the two divisions of that poetry, its productions in the *langue d'oïl* and its productions in the *langue d'oc*, the poetry of the *langue d'oc*, of southern France, of the troubadours, is of importance because of its effect on Italian literature;—the first literature of modern Europe to strike the true and grand note, and to bring forth, as in Dante and Petrarch it brought forth,

classics. But the predominance of French poetry in Europe, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is due to its poetry of the langue d'oïl, the poetry of northern France and of the tongue which is now the French language. In the twelfth century the bloom of this romance-poetry was earlier and stronger in England, at the court of our Anglo-Norman kings, than in France itself. But it was a bloom of French poetry; and as our native poetry formed itself, it formed itself out of this. The romance—poems which took possession of the heart and imagination of Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are French; 'they are,' as Southey justly says, 'the pride of French literature, nor have we anything which can be placed in competition with them.' Themes were supplied from all quarters; but the romance-setting which was common to them all, and which gained the ear of Europe, was French. This constituted for the French poetry, literature, and language, at the height of the Middle Age, an unchallenged predominance. The Italian Brunetto Latini, the master of Dante, wrote his Treasure in French because, he says, 'la parole en est plus delitable et plus commune a toutes gens.' In the same century, the thirteenth, the French romance-writer, Christian of Troyes, formulates the claims, in chivalry and letters, of France, his native country, as follows:—

‘Or vous ert par ce livre apris,
Que Gresse ot de chevalerie
Le premier los et de clergie;
Puis vint chevalerie à Rome,
Et de la clergie la some,
Qui ore est en France venue.
Diex doinst qu’ele i soit retenue,
Et que li lius li abelisse

Tant que de France n'isse

L'onor qui s'i est arestée!

‘Now by this book you will learn that first Greece had the renown for chivalry and letters: then chivalry and the primacy in letters passed to Rome, and now it is come to France. God grant it may be kept there; and that the place may please it so well, that the honour which has come to make stay in France may never depart thence!’

Yet it is now all gone, this French romance-poetry of which the weight of substance and the power of style are not unfairly represented by this extract from Christian of Troyes. Only by means of the historic estimate can we persuade ourselves not to think that any of it is of poetical importance.

But in the fourteenth century there comes an Englishman nourished on this poetry, taught his trade by this poetry, getting words, rhyme, metre from this poetry; for even of that stanza which the Italians used, and which Chaucer derived immediately from the Italians, the basis and suggestion was probably given in France. Chaucer (I have already named him) fascinated his contemporaries, but so too did Christian of Troyes and Wolfram of Eschenbach. Chaucer's power of fascination, however, is enduring; his poetical importance does not need the assistance of the historic estimate; it is real. He is a genuine source of joy and strength, which is flowing still for us and will flow always. He will be read, as time goes on, far more generally than he is read now. His language is a cause of difficulty for us; but so also, and I think in quite as great a degree, is the language of Burns. In Chaucer's case, as in that of Burns, it is a difficulty to be unhesitatingly accepted and overcome.

If we ask ourselves wherein consists the immense superiority of Chaucer's poetry over the romance-poetry—why it is that in passing from this to Chaucer we suddenly feel ourselves to be in another world, we shall find that his superiority is

both in the substance of his poetry and in the style of his poetry. His superiority in substance is given by his large, free, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life,—so unlike the total want, in the romance-poets, of all intelligent command of it. Chaucer has not their helplessness; he has gained the power to survey the world from a central, a truly human point of view. We have only to call to mind the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The right comment upon it is Dryden's: 'It is sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty.' And again: 'He is a perpetual fountain of good sense.' It is by a large, free, sound representation of things, that poetry, this high criticism of life, has truth of substance; and Chaucer's poetry has truth of substance.

Of his style and manner, if we think first of the romance-poetry and then of Chaucer's divine liquidness of diction, his divine fluidity of movement, it is difficult to speak temperately. They are irresistible, and justify all the rapture with which his successors speak of his 'gold dew-drops of speech.' Johnson misses the point entirely when he finds fault with Dryden for ascribing to Chaucer the first refinement of our numbers, and says that Gower also can show smooth numbers and easy rhymes. The refinement of our numbers means something far more than this. A nation may have versifiers with smooth numbers and easy rhymes, and yet may have no real poetry at all. Chaucer is the father of our splendid English poetry; he is our 'well of English undefiled,' because by the lovely charm of his diction, the lovely charm of his movement, he makes an epoch and founds a tradition. In Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, we can follow the tradition of the liquid diction, the fluid movement of Chaucer; at one time it is his liquid diction of which in these poets we feel the virtue, and at another time it is his fluid movement. And the virtue is irresistible.

Bounded as is my space, I must yet find room for an example of Chaucer's virtue, as I have given examples to show the virtue of the great classics.

I feel disposed to say that a single line is enough to show the charm of Chaucer's verse; that merely one line like this—

‘O martyr souted in virginitee!’

has a virtue of manner and movement such as we shall not find in all the verse of romance—poetry;—but this is saying nothing. The virtue is such as we shall not find, perhaps, in all English poetry, outside the poets whom I have named as the special inheritors of Chaucer's tradition. A single line, however, is too little if we have not the strain of Chaucer's verse well in our memory; let us take a stanza. It is from The Prioress' Tale, the story of the Christian child murdered in a Jewry—

‘My throte is cut unto my nekke-bone

Saidè this child, and as by way of kinde

I should have deyde, yea, longè time agone;

But Jesus Christ, as ye in bookès finde,

Will that his glory last and be in minde,

And for the worship of his mother dere

Yet may I sing O Alma loud and clere.’

Wordsworth has modernised this Tale, and to feel how delicate and evanescent is the charm of verse, we have only to read Wordsworth's first three lines of this stanza after Chaucer's—

‘My throat is cut unto the bone, I trow,

Said this young child, and by the law of kind

I should have died, yea, many hours ago.’

The charm is departed. It is often said that the power of liquidness and fluidity in Chaucer's verse was dependent upon a free, a licentious dealing with language, such as is now impossible; upon a liberty, such as Burns too enjoyed, of making words like neck, bird, into a disyllable by adding to them, and words like cause, rhyme, into a disyllable by sounding the e mute. It is true that Chaucer's fluidity is conjoined with this liberty, and is admirably served by it; but we ought not to say that it was dependent upon it. It was dependent upon his talent. Other poets with a like liberty do not attain to the fluidity of Chaucer; Burns himself does not attain to it. Poets, again, who have a talent akin to Chaucer's, such as Shakespeare or Keats, have known how to attain his fluidity without the like liberty.

And yet Chaucer is not one of the great classics. His poetry transcends and effaces, easily and without effort, all the romance-poetry of Catholic Christendom; it transcends and effaces all the English poetry contemporary with it, it transcends and effaces all the English poetry subsequent to it down to the age of Elizabeth. Of such avail is poetic truth of substance, in its natural and necessary union with poetic truth of style. And yet, I say, Chaucer is not one of the great classics. He has not their accent. What is wanting to him is suggested by the mere mention of the name of the first great classic of Christendom, the immortal poet who died eighty years before Chaucer,—Dante. The accent of such verse as

‘In la sua volontade è nostra pace...’

is altogether beyond Chaucer's reach; we praise him, but we feel that this accent is out of the question for him. It may be said that it was necessarily out of the reach of any poet in the England of that stage of growth. Possibly; but we are to adopt a real, not a historic, estimate of poetry. However we may account for its absence, something is wanting, then, to the poetry of Chaucer, which poetry must have before it can be placed in the glorious class of the best. And there is no doubt

what that something is. It is the [Greek], the high and excellent seriousness, which Aristotle assigns as one of the grand virtues of poetry. The substance of Chaucer's poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity; but it has not this high seriousness. Homer's criticism of life has it, Dante's has it, Shakespeare's has it. It is this chiefly which gives to our spirits what they can rest upon; and with the increasing demands of our modern ages upon poetry, this virtue of giving us what we can rest upon will be more and more highly esteemed. A voice from the slums of Paris, fifty or sixty years after Chaucer, the voice of poor Villon out of his life of riot and crime, has at its happy moments (as, for instance, in the last stanza of *La Belle Heaulmière*) more of this important poetic virtue of seriousness than all the productions of Chaucer. But its apparition in Villon, and in men like Villon, is fitful; the greatness of the great poets, the power of their criticism of life, is that their virtue is sustained.

To our praise, therefore, of Chaucer as a poet there must be this limitation; he lacks the high seriousness of the great classics, and therewith an important part of their virtue. Still, the main fact for us to bear in mind about Chaucer is his sterling value according to that real estimate which we firmly adopt for all poets. He has poetic truth of substance, though he has not high poetic seriousness, and corresponding to his truth of substance he has an exquisite virtue of style and manner. With him is born our real poetry.

For my present purpose I need not dwell on our Elizabethan poetry, or on the continuation and close of this poetry in Milton. We all of us profess to be agreed in the estimate of this poetry; we all of us recognise it as great poetry, our greatest, and Shakespeare and Milton as our poetical classics. The real estimate, here, has universal currency. With the next age of our poetrydivergency and difficulty begin. An historic estimate of that poetry has established itself; and the question is, whether it will be found to coincide with the real estimate.

The age of Dryden, together with our whole eighteenth century which followed it, sincerely believed itself to have produced poetical classics of its own, and even to have made advance, in poetry, beyond all its predecessors. Dryden regards as not seriously disputable the opinion ‘that the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers.’ Cowley could see nothing at all in Chaucer’s poetry. Dryden heartily admired it, and, as we have seen, praised its matter admirably; but of its exquisite manner and movement all he can find to say is that ‘there is the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect.’ Addison, wishing to praise Chaucer’s numbers, compares them with Dryden’s own. And all through the eighteenth century, and down even into our own times, the stereotyped phrase of approbation for good verse found in our early poetry has been, that it even approached the verse of Dryden, Addison, Pope, and Johnson.

Are Dryden and Pope poetical classics? Is the historic estimate, which represents them as such, and which has been so long established that it cannot easily give way, the real estimate? Wordsworth and Coleridge, as is well known, denied it; but the authority of Wordsworth and Coleridge does not weigh much with the young generation, and there are many signs to show that the eighteenth century and its judgments are coming into favour again. Are the favourite poets of the eighteenth century classics?

It is impossible within my present limits to discuss the question fully. And what man of letters would not shrink from seeming to dispose dictatorially of the claims of two men who are, at any rate, such masters in letters as Dryden and Pope; two men of such admirable talent, both of them, and one of them, Dryden, a man, on all sides, of such energetic and genial power? And yet, if we are to gain the full benefit from poetry, we must have the real estimate of it. I cast about for some mode of arriving, in the present case, at such an estimate without offence. And perhaps the best way is to begin, as it is easy to begin, with cordial praise.

When we find Chapman, the Elizabethan translator of Homer, expressing himself in this preface thus: "Though truth in her very nakedness sits in so deep a pit, that from Gades to Aurora and Ganges few eyes can sound her, I hope yet those few here will so discover and confirm that, the date being out of her darkness in this morning of our poet, he shall now gird his temples with the sun,"—we pronounce that such a prose is intolerable. When we find Milton writing: 'And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he, who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem,'—we pronounce that such a prose has its own grandeur, but that it is obsolete and inconvenient. But when we find Dryden telling us: 'What Virgil wrote in the vigour of his age, in plenty and at ease, I have undertaken to translate in my declining years; struggling with wants, oppressed with sickness, curbed in my genius, liable to be misconstrued in all I write,'—then we exclaim that here at last we have the true English prose, a prose such as we would all gladly use if we only knew how. Yet Dryden was Milton's contemporary.

But after the Restoration the time had come when our nation felt the imperious need of a fit prose. So, too, the time had likewise come when our nation felt the imperious need of freeing itself from the absorbing preoccupation which religion in the Puritan age had exercised. It was impossible that this freedom should be brought about without some negative excess, without some neglect and impairment of the religious life of the soul; and the spiritual history of the eighteenth century shows us that the freedom was not achieved without them. Still, the freedom was achieved; the preoccupation, an undoubtedly baneful and retarding one if it had continued, was got rid of. And as with religion amongst us at that period, so it was also with letters. A fit prose was a necessity; but it was impossible that a fit prose should establish itself amongst us without some touch of frost to the imaginative life of the soul. The needful qualities for a fit prose are

regularity, uniformity, precision, balance. The men of letters, whose destiny it may be to bring their nation to the attainment of a fit prose, must of necessity, whether they work in prose or in verse, give a predominating, an almost exclusive attention to the qualities of regularity, uniformity, precision, balance. But an almost exclusive attention to these qualities involves some repression and silencing of poetry.

We are to regard Dryden as the puissant and glorious founder, Pope as the splendid high priest, of our age of prose and reason, of our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century. For the purposes of their mission and destiny their poetry, like their prose, is admirable. Do you ask me whether Dryden's verse, take it almost where you will, is not good?

‘A milk-white Hind, immortal and unchanged,

Fed on the lawns and in the forest ranged.’

I answer: Admirable for the purposes of the inaugurator of an age of prose and reason. Do you ask me whether Pope's verse, take it almost where you will, is not good?

‘To Hounslow Heath I point, and Banstead Down

Thence comes your mutton, and these chicks my own.’

I answer: Admirable for the purposes of the high priest of an age of prose and reason. But do you ask me whether such verse proceeds from men with an adequate poetic criticism of life, from men whose criticism of life has a high seriousness, or even, without that high seriousness, has poetic largeness, freedom, insight, benignity? Do you ask me whether the application of ideas to life in the verse of these men, often a powerful application, no doubt, is a powerful poetic application? Do you ask me whether the poetry of these men has either the matter

or the inseparable manner of such an adequate poetic criticism; whether it has the accent of

‘Absent thee from felicity awhile...’

or of

‘And what is else not to be overcome...’

or of

‘O martyr soulded in virginitee!’

I answer: It has not and cannot have them; it is the poetry of the builders of an age of prose and reason. Though they may write in verse, though they may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose.

Gray is our poetical classic of that literature and age; the position of Gray is singular, and demands a word of notice here. He has not the volume or the power of poets who, coming in times more favourable, have attained to an independent criticism of life. But he lived with the great poets, he lived, above all, with the Greeks, through perpetually studying and enjoying them; and he caught their poetic point of view for regarding life, caught their poetic manner. The point of view and the manner are not self-sprung in him, he caught them of others; and he had not the free and abundant use of them. But, whereas Addison and Pope never had the use of them, Gray had the use of them at times. He is the scantiest and frailest of classics in our poetry, but he is a classic.

And now, after Gray, we are met, as we draw towards the end of the eighteenth century, we are met by the great name of Burns. We enter now on times where the personal estimate of poets begins to be rife, and where the real estimate of them is not reached without difficulty. But in spite of the disturbing pressures of

personal partiality, of national partiality, let us try to reach a real estimate of the poetry of Burns.

By his English poetry Burns in general belongs to the eighteenth century, and has little importance for us.

‘Mark ruffian Violence, distain’d with crimes,
Rousing elate in these degenerate times;
View unsuspecting Innocence a prey,
As guileful Fraud points out the erring way;
While subtle Litigation’s pliant tongue
The life-blood equal sucks of Right and Wrong!’

Evidently this is not the real Burns, or his name and fame would have disappeared long ago. Nor is Clarinda’s love-poet, Sylvander, the real Burns either. But he tells us himself: ‘These English songs gravel me to death. I have not the command of the language that I have of my native tongue. In fact, I think that my ideas are more barren in English than in Scotch. I have been at Duncan Gray to dress it in English, but all I can do is desperately stupid.’ We English turn naturally, in Burns, to the poems in our own language, because we can read them easily; but in those poems we have not the real Burns.

The real Burns is of course in this Scotch poems. Let us boldly say that of much of this poetry, a poetry dealing perpetually with Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners, A Scotchman’s estimate is apt to be personal. A Scotchman is used to this world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners; he has a tenderness for it; he meets its poet halfway. In this tender mood he reads pieces like the Holy Fair or Halloween. But this world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners is against a poet, not for him, when it is not a

partial countryman who reads him; for in itself it is not a beautiful world, and no one can deny that it is of advantage to a poet to deal with a beautiful world. Burns' world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners, is often a harsh, a sordid, a repulsive world: even the world of his Cotter's Saturday Night is not a beautiful world. No doubt a poet's criticism of life may have such truth and power that it triumphs over its world and delights us. Burns may triumph over his world, often he does triumph over his world, but let us observe how and where. Burns is the first case we have had where the bias of the personal estimate tends to mislead; let us look at him closely, he can bear it.

Many of his admirers will tell us that we have Burns, convivial, genuine, delightful, here—

‘Leeze me on drink! it gies us mair

Than either school or college;

It kindles wit, it waukens lair,

It pangs us fou o' knowledge.

Be't whisky gill or penny wheep

Or only stronger potion,

It never fails, on drinking deep,

To kittle up our notion

By night or day.’

There is a great deal of that sort of thing in Burns, and it is unsatisfactory, not because it is bacchanalian poetry, but because it has not that accent of sincerity which bacchanalian poetry, to do it justice, very often has. There is something in it

of bravado, something which makes us feel that we have not the man speaking to us with his real voice; something, therefore, poetically unsound.

With still more confidence will his admirers tell us that we have the genuine Burns, the great poet, when his strain asserts the independence, equality, dignity, of men, as in the famous song For a' that, and a' that—

‘A prince can mak’ a belted knight,

A marquis, duke, and a' that;

But an honest man's aboon his might,

Guid faith he mauna fa' that!

For a' that, and a' that,

Their dignities, and a' that, The pith o' sense, a pride o' worth,

Are higher rank than a' that.'

Here they find his grand, genuine touches; and still more, when this puissant genius, who so often set morality at defiance, falls moralising—

‘The sacred lowe o' weel-placed love

Luxuriantly indulge it;

But never tempt th' illicit rove,

Tho' naething should divulge it.

I waive the quantum o' the sin,

The hazard o' concealing,

But och! it hardens a' within,

And petrifies the feeling.’

Or in a higher strain—

‘Who made the heart, ’tis He alone

Decidedly can try us;

He knows each chord, its various tone;

Each spring, its various bias.

Then at the balance let’s be mute,

We never can adjust it;

What’s done we partly may compute,

But know not what’s resisted.’

Or in a better strain yet, a strain, his admirers will say, unsurpassable—

‘To make a happy fireside clime

To weans and wife,

That’s the true pathos and sublime

Of human life.’

There is criticism of life for you, the admirers of Burns will say to us; there is the application of ideas to life! There is, undoubtedly. The doctrine of the last—quoted lines coincides almost exactly with what was the aim and end, Xenophon tells us, of all the teaching of Socrates. And the application is a powerful one; made by a man of vigorous understanding, and (need I say?) a master of language.

But for supreme poetical success more is required than the powerful application of ideas to life; it must be an application under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. Those laws fix as an essential condition, in the poet's treatment of such matters as are here in question, high seriousness;—the high seriousness which comes from absolute sincerity. The accent of high seriousness, born of absolute sincerity, is what gives to such verse as

‘In la sua volontade e nostra pace...’

to such criticism of life as Dante's, its power. Is this accent felt in the passages which I have been quoting from Burns? Surely not; surely, if our sense is quick, we must perceive that we have not in those passages a voice from the very inmost soul of the genuine Burns; he is not speaking to us from these depths, he is more or less preaching. And the compensation for admiring such passages less, from missing the perfect poetic accent in them, will be that we shall admire more the poetry where that accent is found.

No; Burns, like Chaucer, comes short of the high seriousness of the great classics, and the virtue of matter and manner which goes with that high seriousness is wanting to his work. At moments he touches it in a profound and passionate melancholy, as in those four immortal lines taken by Byron as a motto for *The Bride of Abydos*, but which have in them a depth of poetic quality such as resides in no verse of Byron's own—

‘Had we never loved sae kindly,

Had we never loved sae blindly,

Never met, or never parted,

We had ne'er been broken-hearted.’

But a whole poem of that quality Burns cannot make; the rest, in the Farewell to Nancy, is verbiage.

We arrive best at the real estimate of Burns, I think, by conceiving his work as having truth of matter and truth of manner, but not the accent or the poetic virtue of the highest masters. His genuine criticism of life, when the sheer poet in him speaks, is ironic; it is not—

‘Thou Power Supreme, whose mighty scheme

These woes of mine fulfil,

Here firm I rest, they must be best

Because they are Thy will!’

It is far rather: Whistle owre the lave o’t! Yet we may say of him as of Chaucer, that of life and the world, as they come before him, his view is large, free, shrewd, benignant,—truly poetic therefore; and his manner of rendering what he sees is to match. But we must note, at the same time, his great difference from Chaucer. The freedom of Chaucer is heightened, in Burns, by a fiery, reckless energy; the benignity of Chaucer deepens, in Burns, into an overwhelming sense of the pathos of things;—of the pathos of human nature, the pathos, also, of non-human nature. Instead of the fluidity of Chaucer’s manner, the manner of Burns has spring, boundless swiftness. Burns is by far the greater force, though he has perhaps less charm. The world of Chaucer is fairer, richer, more significant than that of Burns; but when the largeness and freedom of Burns get full sweep, as in Tam o’ Shanter, or still more in that puissant and splendid production, The Jolly Beggars, his world may be what it will, his poetic genius triumphs over it. In the world of The Jolly Beggars there is more than hideousness and squalor, there is bestiality; yet the piece is a superb poetic success. It has a breadth, truth, and power which make the famous scene in Auerbach’s Cellar, of Goethe’s Faust,

seem artificial and tame beside it, and which are only matched by Shakespeare and Aristophanes.

Here, where his largeness and freedom serve him so admirably, and also in those poems and songs where to shrewdness he adds infinite archness and wit, and to benignity infinite pathos, where his manner is flawless, and a perfect poetic whole is the result,—in things like the address to the mouse whose home he had ruined, in things like Duncan Gray, Tam Glen, Whistle and I'll come to you, my Lad, Auld Lang Syne (this list might be made much longer),—here we have the genuine Burns, of whom the real estimate must be high indeed. Not a classic, nor with the excellent [Greek] of the great classics, nor with a verse rising to a criticism of life and a virtue like theirs; but a poet with thorough truth of substance and an answering truth of style, giving us a poetry sound to the core. We all of us have a leaning towards the pathetic, and may be inclined perhaps to prize Burns most for his touches of piercing, sometimes almost intolerable, pathos; for verse like—

‘We twa hae paidl’t i’ the burn

From mornin’ sun till dine;

But seas between us braid hae roar’d

Sin auld lang syne...’

where he is as lovely as he is sound. But perhaps it is by the perfection of soundness of his lighter and archer masterpieces that he is poetically most wholesome for us. For the votary misled by a personal estimate of Shelley, as so many of us have been, are, and will be,—of that beautiful spirit building his many-coloured haze of words and images

‘Pinnacled dim in the intense inane’—

no contact can be wholesomer than the contact with Burns at his archest and soundest. Side by side with the

‘On the brink of the night and the morning

My coursers are wont to respire,

But the Earth has just whispered a warning

That their flight must be swifter than fire...’

of Prometheus Unbound, how salutary, how very salutary, to place this from Tam Glen—

‘My minnie does constantly deave me

And bids me beware o’ young men;

They flatter, she says, to deceive me;

But wha can think sae o’ Tam Glen?’

But we enter on burning ground as we approach the poetry of times so near to us—poetry like that of Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth—of which the estimates are so often not only personal, but personal with passion. For my purpose, it is enough to have taken the single case of Burns, the first poet we come to of whose work the estimate formed is evidently apt to be personal, and to have suggested how we may proceed, using the poetry of the great classics as a sort of touchstone, to correct this estimate, as we had previously corrected by the same means the historic estimate where we met with it. A collection like the present, with its succession of celebrated names and celebrated poems, offers a good opportunity to us for resolutely endeavouring to make our estimates of poetry real. I have sought to point out a method which will help us in making them so, and to

exhibit it in use so far as to put any one who likes in a way of applying it for himself.

At any rate the end to which the method and the estimate are designed to lead, and from leading to which, if they do lead to it, they get their whole value,—the benefit of being able clearly to feel and deeply to enjoy the best, the truly classic, in poetry,—is an end, let me say it once more at parting, of supreme importance. We are often told that an era is opening in which we are to see multitudes of a common sort of readers, and masses of a common sort of literature; that such readers do not want and could not relish anything better than such literature, and that to provide it is becoming a vast and profitable industry. Even if good literature entirely lost currency with the world, it would still be abundantly worth while to continue to enjoy it by oneself. But it never will lose currency with the world, in spite of monetary appearances; it never will lose supremacy. Currency and supremacy are insured to it, not indeed by the world's deliberate and conscious choice, but by something far deeper,—by the instinct of self-preservation in humanity.

3.0. Summary of The Study of Poetry:

In his anthology of English poetry, Arnold illustrates the allegedly objective critical judgment of which he speaks in “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” in terms of his selection of those poets worthy in his view of being anthologised. In his preface to the anthology, he clarifies what he means by ‘judgment’ by turning his attention in particular to the questions of literary history and canons. The main criteria informing Arnold’s approach to literary history here are literature’s higher truth (i.e. the degree to which a work captures not the realities of this world but ideals, that is, the perfection found in the world beyond

this and which is the standard by which we ought to organise life in the here and now) and its moral value (i.e the impact for good which literature has on the reader). Only works that meet these criteria ought to be part of that canon of works worthy of being studied.

Using metaphors concerning rivers in what would prove subsequently to be a very influential way, Arnold begins by arguing that the “stream of English poetry” is only one “contributory stream to the world river of poetry”. He argues that we should “conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom”, that is, as “capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those in general which man has assigned to it hitherto”. He contends that we must “turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us” because, as Wordsworth put it, it is the ‘breath and finer spirit of all knowledge’ as a result of which it is superior to science, philosophy, and religion. To be “capable of fulfilling such high destinies”, however, poetry must be “of a high order of excellence”. In poetry, for this reason, the “distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance”. It is in poetry that conveys the “criticism of life” and which meets the “conditions fixed . . . by the laws of poetic truth and beauty” that the “spirit of our race will find . . . its consolation and stay”. The criticism of life “will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent, rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true”. The “best poetry” is that which has a “power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can”. Its “most precious benefit” is a “clearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it”. This sense should “govern our estimate of what we read”. Arnold contrasts this, what he terms the “real estimate”, with “two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate”, which are both “fallacies”. The former

calculates a poet's merit on historical grounds, that is, by "regarding a poet's work as a stage" in the "course and development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry" (this is view advanced by Hippolyte Taine). The latter calculates a poet's merit on the basis of our "personal affinities, likings and circumstances" which may make us "overrate the object of our interest" because the work in question "is, or has been, of high importance" to us personally. Many people, Arnold argues, skip "in obedience to mere tradition and habit, from one famous name or work in its national poetry to another, ignorant of what it misses, and of the reason for keeping what it keeps, and of the whole process of growth in poetry". All this misses, however, the indispensability of recognising the "reality of the poet's classic character", that is, the test whether his work "belongs to the class of the very best" and that appreciation of the "wide difference between it and all work which has not the same character". Arnold points out that "tracing historic origins and historical relationships" is not totally unimportant and that to some degree personal choice enters into any attempt to anthologise works. However, the 'real estimate,' from which derives the "benefit of clearly feeling and of deeply enjoying the really excellent, the truly classic in poetry" ought to be the literary historian's objective.

The question arises: how exactly does one recognise the poet's classic character? How should one determine whether a given poet meets those criteria which allow him to be ranked among the best? The answer: the critic must compare the work in question to the established classics, brief "passages, even single lines" drawn from which serve as a "touchstone" for assessment purposes. They, when memorised, function as an "infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry". Having to hand "concrete examples" and "specimens of poetry of . . . the very highest quality" suffices to "keep clear and sound our judgments

about poetry, to save us from fallacious estimates of it, to conduct us to a real estimate". Given that the "characters of a high quality are what is expressed there", Arnold contends that poetic quality is "far better recognised by being felt in the poetry of a master, than by being perused in the prose of the critic".

However, what exactly does it mean to say that this or that work possesses a 'high poetic quality'? Arnold answers that poetic quality resides in both the "substance and matter" and the "style and manner" which are "inseparable" from and "vitally connected" to each other. The former consists in what he terms somewhat vaguely as a "higher truth and a higher seriousness" while the latter consists in the equally vague "diction and movement". For the work to possess poetic quality, both substance and style must be present. In the early twentieth century, the influential British critic F. R. Leavis would apply Arnold's criteria to the study of British literature in his famous work of literary history and canon-formation, *The Great Tradition*. The Leavisite canon, his views on who was in and who was out, the necessity, for example, to abandon Milton in favour of Donne, Joyce in favour of Lawrence, shaped the views of generations of subsequent critics even here in the Caribbean.

4.0. The Future of Poetry:

In *The Study of Poetry*, (1888) which opens his *Essays in Criticism: Second series*, in support of the future of poetry. He writes, "THE FUTURE of poetry is immense, because in poetry, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its

emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry.”

We have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science is incomplete without poetry.

Wordsworth truly calls poetry ‘the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge’; poetry ‘the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science’

After giving this importance to poetry, he moves ahead to define canon for good poetry. To say in his own words, “But if we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry, to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence.”

Quoting from an anecdote (Napolean and Sainte-Beuve) he writes, “charlatanism might be found everywhere else, but not in the field of poetry, because in poetry the distinction between sound and unsound, or only half-sound, truth and untruth, or only half-truth, between the excellent and the inferior, is of paramount importance”. For Arnold there is no place for charlatanism in poetry. To him “poetry is the criticism of life, governed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty”. It is in the criticism of life that the spirit of our race will find its stay and consolation. The extent to which the spirit of mankind finds its stay and consolation is proportional to the power of a poem's criticism of life, and the power of the criticism of life is in direct proportion to the extent to which the poem is genuine and free from charlatanism.

Thus he is of the view that, “the best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can”.

In this essay he also cautions the critic that in forming a genuine and disinterested estimate of the poet under consideration he should not be influenced by historical or personal judgements, historical judgements being fallacious because we regard ancient poets with excessive veneration, and personal judgements being fallacious when we are biased towards a contemporary poet. If a poet is a 'dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best . . . enjoy his work'. He observes: “But this real estimate, the only true one, is liable to be superseded, if we are not watchful, by two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate, both of which are fallacious.

Arnold explains these fallacies in detail. He writes, “a poet or a poem may count to us historically, they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves, and they may count to us really. The course of development of a nation’s language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a poet’s work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticizing it; in short, to overrate it.

So arises in our poetic judgments the fallacy caused by the estimate which we may call historic.” He quotes words of M.Charles, editor of magazine, to prove his point. M.Charles wrote, ‘the cloud of glory playing round a classic is a mist as dangerous to the future of a literature as it is intolerable for the purposes of history’. As examples of erroneous judgements he says that the 17th century court tragedies of the French were spoken of with exaggerated praise, until Pellisson

reproached them for want of the true poetic stamp, and another critic, Charles d' Hricault, said that 17th century French poetry had received undue and undeserving veneration. Arnold says the critics seem to substitute 'a halo for physiognomy and a statue in the place where there was once a man. They give us a human personage no larger than God seated amidst his perfect work, like Jupiter on Olympus.'

He further writes, "then, again, a poet or poem may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings and circumstances, have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we overrate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated. And thus we get the source of a second fallacy in our poetic judgments—the fallacy caused by an estimate which we may call personal".

So to judge a good poetry wherein our estimate is not affected by fallacies, we should look for following attributes in the poetry:

1. The matter and substance of the poetry, and its manner and style. Both of these, the substance and matter on the one hand, the style and manner on the other, have a mark, an accent, of high beauty, worth, and power.

2. Only one thing we may add as to the substance and matter of poetry, guiding ourselves by Aristotle's profound observation that the superiority of poetry over history consists in its possessing a higher truth and a higher seriousness . Let us add, therefore, to what we have said, this: that the substances and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness.

Thus, the superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner.

So, a poet's criticism of life may have such truth and power that it triumphs over its world and delights us.

Later in the essay he adds, for supreme poetical success more is required than the powerful application of ideas to life; it must be an application under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. Those laws fix as an essential condition, in the poet's treatment of such matters as are here in question, high seriousness;—the high seriousness which comes from absolute sincerity.

Sources/Suggested Reading:

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