

The great work “Lyrical Ballads” by ‘William Wordsworth’ and ‘Samuel T. Coleridge

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Abstract ‘Lyrical Ballads’ (1789) is a combined work of autobiography, philosophy and literary criticism. It presents Coleridge and Wordsworth’s theories of the creative imagination. The following entry presents criticism of Coleridge and Wordsworth's poetry collection, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). For further information on Samuel Taylor Coleridge see also, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* Criticism and “Kubla Khan” Criticism. Literary historians consider the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) a seminal work in the ascent of Romanticism and a harbinger of trends in the English poetry that followed it. The poetic principles discussed by Wordsworth in the “Preface” to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* constitute a key primary document of the Romantic era because they announce a revolution in critical notions about poetic language, poetic subject matter, and the role of the poet.

The purpose of writing *Lyrical Ballads* is to examine the long continued debate concerning the true nature of poetic diction and to discuss with almost impartiality the real poetic character of the poet. They also learn that in truly great poets there is a reason assignable not only for every word but for the position of every word. A considerable part of *Lyrical Ballades* is an attack on Wordsworth and Coleridge’s theory of poetic diction. In the opinion of Wordsworth, the language of poetry must not be separated from the language of men in real life. Figures, metaphors and similes and other such decoration must not be used unnecessarily. 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. The same Coleridge was the first critic to pounce upon Wordsworth’s theory of language and to expose its much weakness. He pointed out first that a language so selected and purified, as Wordsworth recommends. *Lyrical Ballades* was the great work done by these both brainy poets. In their work, they discussed the elements of writing and what 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.

KEYWORDS: - lyrical ballads, phraseology, pounce upon, diction, brainy.

INTRODUCTION:-

William Wordsworth, the second of five children, was born on April 6th, 1770 at Cockermouth in Cumberland, at eight years, he was sent to school at Hawkshead. The second period of Wordsworth's life begins with his joining St. John College at the University of Cambridge in 1787. Coleridge was born in Devon in 1772. At the age of ten, he was sent to Christ's Hospital, a boarding school in London where he was befriended by fellow student Charles Lamb. Later, he was awarded a scholarship to Jesus College, Cambridge University, where he got a chance to meet Wordsworth in 1796 and their friendship turned to the great task, called "Lyrical Ballads". In the "Advertisement" to the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge state that the poems in the collection were intended as a deliberate experiment in style and subject matter. Wordsworth elaborated on this idea in the "Preface" to the 1800 and 1802 editions which outline his main ideas of a new theory of poetry. Rejecting the classical notion that poetry should be about elevated subjects and should be composed in a formal style, Wordsworth instead championed more democratic themes—the lives of ordinary men and women, farmers, paupers, and the rural poor. In the "Preface" Wordsworth also emphasizes his commitment to writing in the ordinary language of people, not a highly crafted poetical one. True to traditional ballad form, the poems depict realistic characters in realistic situations, and so contain a strong narrative element. Wordsworth and Coleridge were also interested in presenting the psychology of the various characters in the *Lyrical Ballads*. The poems, in building sympathy for the disenfranchised characters they describe, also implicitly criticize England's Poor Laws, which made it necessary for people to lose all material possessions before they could receive any kind of financial assistance from the community. Wordsworth also discussed the role of poetry itself, which he viewed as an aid in keeping the individual "sensitive" in spite of the effects of growing alienation in the new industrial age. The poet, as Wordsworth points out, is not a distant observer or moralist, but rather "a man speaking to men," and the production of poetry is the result of "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," recollected in tranquility, not the sum total of rhetorical art. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, meanwhile, were also exploring the implications of the French Revolution. Wordsworth, who lived in France in 1791–92 and fathered an illegitimate child there, was distressed when, soon after his return, Britain declared war on the republic, dividing his allegiance. For the rest of his career, he was to brood on those events, trying to develop a view of humanity that would be faithful to his twin sense of the pathos of individual human fates and the unrealized potentialities in humanity as a whole. The first factor emerges in his early manuscript poems "The Ruined Cottage" and "The Peddler" (both to form part of the later *Excursion*); the second was developed from 1797, when he and his sister, Dorothy, with whom he was living in the west of England, were in close contact with Coleridge. Stirred simultaneously by Dorothy's immediacy of feeling, manifested everywhere in her *Journals* (written 1798–1803, published 1897), and by Coleridge's imaginative and speculative genius, he produced the poems collected in *Lyrical*

Ballads (1798). The volume began with Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," continued with poems displaying delight in the powers of nature and the humane instincts of ordinary people, and concluded with the meditative "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth's attempt to set out his mature faith in nature and humanity. His investigation of the relationship between nature and the human mind continued in the long autobiographical poem addressed to Coleridge and later titled *The Prelude* (1798–99 in two books; 1804 in five books; 1805 in 13 books; revised continuously and published posthumously, 1850). Here he traced the value for a poet of having been a child "fostered alike by beauty and by fear" by an upbringing in sublime surroundings. *Prelude* constitutes the most significant English expression of the Romantic discovery of the self as a topic for art and literature. The poem also makes much of the work of memory, a theme explored as well in the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." In poems such as "Michael" and "The Brothers," by contrast, written for the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Wordsworth dwelt on the pathos and potentialities of ordinary lives.

Coleridge's poetic development during these years paralleled Wordsworth's. Having briefly brought together images of nature and the mind in "The Eolian Harp" (1796), he devoted himself to more-public concerns in poems of political and social prophecy, such as "Religious Musings" and "The Destiny of Nations." Becoming disillusioned in 1798 with his earlier politics, however, and encouraged by Wordsworth, he turned back to the relationship between nature and the human mind. Poems such as "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," "The Nightingale," and "Frost at Midnight" (now sometimes called the "conversation poems" but collected by Coleridge himself as "Meditative Poems in Blank Verse") combine sensitive descriptions of nature with subtlety of psychological comment. "Kubla Khan" (1797 or 1798, published 1816), a poem that Coleridge said came to him in "a kind of Reverie," represented a new kind of exotic writing, which he also exploited in the supernaturalism of "The Ancient Mariner" and the unfinished "Christabel." After his visit to Germany in 1798–99, he renewed attention to the links between the subtler forces in nature and the human psyche; this attention bore fruit in letters, notebooks, literary criticism, theology, and philosophy. Simultaneously, his poetic output became sporadic. "Dejection: An Ode" (1802), another meditative poem, which first took shape as a verse letter to Sara Hutchinson, Wordsworth's sister-in-law, memorably describes the suspension of his "shaping spirit of Imagination." Coleridge composed-

The wedding-guest sate on a stone
He cannot chose but hear,
And thus spoke on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

And he shone bright, and on the right,
Went down into the Sea.

(The Rime of Ancient Mariner)

Biographia Literaria:-

In addition to his poetry, Coleridge also wrote influential pieces of literary criticism including *Biographia Literaria*, a collection of his thoughts and opinions on literature which he published in 1817. The work delivered both biographical explanations of the author's life as well as his impressions on literature. The collection also contained an analysis of a broad range of philosophical principles of literature ranging from Aristotle to Immanuel Kant and Schelling and applied them to the poetry of peers such as William Wordsworth. Coleridge's explanation of metaphysical principles were popular topics of discourse in academic communities throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and T.S. Eliot stated that he believed that Coleridge was "perhaps the greatest of English critics, and in a sense the last." Eliot suggests that Coleridge displayed "natural abilities" far greater than his contemporaries, dissecting literature and applying philosophical principles of metaphysics in a way that brought the subject of his criticisms away from the text and into a world of logical analysis that mixed logical analysis and emotion. However, Eliot also criticizes Coleridge for allowing his emotion to play a role in the metaphysical process, believing that critics should not have emotions that are not provoked by the work being studied. Hugh Kenner in *Historical Fictions* discusses Norman Fruman's *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* and suggests that the term "criticism" is too often applied to *Biographia Literaria*, which both he and Fruman describe as having failed to explain or help the reader understand works of art. To Kenner, Coleridge's attempt to discuss complex philosophical concepts without describing the rational process behind them displays a lack of critical thinking that makes the volume more of a biography than a work of criticism.

In *Biographia Literaria* and his poetry, symbols are not merely "objective correlatives" to Coleridge, but instruments for making the universe and personal experience intelligible and spiritually covalent. To Coleridge, the "clique spotted spider," making its way upstream "by fits and starts," *Biographia Literaria* is not merely a comment on the intermittent nature of creativity, imagination, or spiritual progress, but the journey and destination of his life. The spider's five legs represent the central problem that Coleridge lived to resolve, the conflict between Aristotelian logic and Christian philosophy. Two legs of the spider represent the "me-not me" of thesis and antithesis, the idea that a thing cannot be itself and its opposite simultaneously, the basis of the clockwork Newtonian world view that Coleridge rejected. The remaining three legs exothesis, aesthesis and synthesis or the Holy trinity represent the idea that things can diverge without being contradictory. Taken together, the five legs with synthesis in the center, form the Holy Cross of Ramist logic.

The clique-spotted spider is Coleridge's emblem of holism, the quest and substance of Coleridge's thought and spiritual life.

Wordsworth and Coleridge set out to overturn what they considered the priggish, learned and highly sculpted forms of 18th century English poetry and bring poetry within the reach of the average person by writing the verses using normal, everyday language. They place an emphasis on the vitality of the living voice that the poor use to express their reality. Using this language also helps assert the universality of human emotions. Even the title of the collection recalls rustic forms of art – the word "lyrical" links the poems with the ancient rustic bards and lends an air of spontaneity, while "ballads" are an oral mode of storytelling used by the common people.

In the 'Advertisement' included in the 1798 edition, Wordsworth explained his poetical concept:

The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purpose of poetic pleasure

If the experiment with vernacular language was not enough of a departure from the norm, the focus on simple, uneducated country people as the subject of poetry was a signal shift to modern literature. One of the main themes of "Lyrical Ballads" is the return to the original state of nature, in which people led a purer and more innocent existence. Wordsworth subscribed to Rousseau's belief that humanity was essentially good but was corrupted by the influence of society. This may be linked with the sentiments spreading through Europe just prior to the French Revolution.

Major Themes

In the "Advertisement" to the 1798 edition of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth and Coleridge state that the poems in the collection were intended as a deliberate experiment in style and subject matter. Wordsworth elaborated on this idea in the "Preface" to the 1800 and 1802 editions which outline his main ideas of a new theory of poetry. Rejecting the classical notion that poetry should be about elevated subjects and should be composed in a formal style, Wordsworth instead championed more democratic themes—the lives of ordinary men and women, farmers, paupers, and the rural poor. In the "Preface" Wordsworth also emphasizes his commitment to writing in the ordinary language of people, not a highly crafted poetical one. True to traditional ballad form, the poems depict realistic characters in realistic situations, and so contain a strong narrative element. Wordsworth and Coleridge were also interested in presenting the psychology of the various characters in the Lyrical Ballads. The poems, in building sympathy for the disenfranchised characters they describe, also implicitly criticize England's Poor Laws, which made it necessary for people to lose all material possessions before they could receive any kind of financial assistance from the community. Wordsworth also discussed the role of poetry itself, which he viewed as an aid in keeping the individual "sensitive" in spite of the effects

of growing alienation in the new industrial age. The poet, as Wordsworth points out, is not a distant observer or moralist, but rather “a man speaking to men,” and the production of poetry is the result of “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” recollected in tranquility, not the sum total of rhetorical art.

CONCLUSION:-

Early critical reception of *The Lyrical Ballads* was mostly negative and at times even hostile. Reviewers cited uninteresting subject themes and the unread ability of *The Ancient Mariner*, with its archaic style and murky philosophical theme. Francis Jeffrey, one of the chief reviewers for the influential *Edinburgh Review*, was so offended by Wordsworth's flaunting of poetic convention in the *Lyrical Ballads* that he engaged in a long and vitriolic campaign against what he termed the “Lake School of Poetry.” While this initial critical response impeded acceptance of the *Lyrical Ballads* and its authors, acknowledgment did come eventually. Other reviewers praised the earnestness and simplicity of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* and their focus on the usually neglected subject of the rural poor. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Victorian critics demonstrated a special interest in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* as a moral and philosophical puzzle, and Wordsworth and Coleridge already figured as preeminent English poets, the leaders of the first wave of Romanticism. Critical interest in the *Lyrical Ballads* has continued into the twentieth century, with scholars fully recognizing the role of the collection in bringing about new ideas regarding poetry and society. The language and style of the *Lyrical Ballads* remains a central focus of criticism, with such scholars as Marjorie Latta Barstow, W. J. B. Owen, and Stephen Maxfield Parrish probing Wordsworth's and Coleridge's experimental form. Mary Jacobs and Heather Glen, among others, have explored the handling of specific themes in the *Lyrical Ballads*, while Stephen Prickett and James H. Averill have addressed questions of unity in the collection as a whole. The interplay between natural and supernatural imagery in the individual poems has recently been studied by Roger N. Murray and Susan Eilenberg. Scholars have investigated some of the influences on the *Lyrical Ballads* as well, including those of Horace, the events of the French Revolution, and contemporary anti-Jacobin satire. Many critics have studied the collection in terms of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's artistic and intellectual development and have highlighted paradoxes and inconsistencies in their critical thinking as evidenced by the “Preface.”

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