



## Comparative Study of Sonnets of Wordsworth and Keats

KUMARI SUBHRA RANI SIL  
Asstt. Prof. SBMTTC, Hazaribag, (Jh.)

### Abstract:

*William Wordsworth and John Keats, who are considered the landmark figures of romantic poetry, responded to the revolution through their literary works such as "I wandered lonely as a cloud" and "Ode to a Nightingale." Wordsworth poetry derives its strength from the passion with which he views nature.*

*One of Wordsworth's poems which Keats read and remembered was a Prefatory Sonnet:*

*Nuns fret not at their Convent's narrow room;  
And Hermits are contented with their Cells;*

.....  
*Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
Should find short solace there, as I have found.*

*William Wordsworth brought out a new, two-volume edition of his poems in 1815 and Keats bought a copy some time that autumn. Wordsworth was not, in 1815, the giant of English poetry that he would later become. He was both the Comptroller of Stamps for Westmorland and the writer (in collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge) of a book of poetry called Lyrical Ballads, a book that was now 16 years old. Wordsworth's poetry had always been read with ambivalence by the critics because on the one hand it was occasionally unfathomable – plain, abstruse and rustic – but on the other it contained some beautiful sentiments, and Wordsworth's deep love of the natural world (and his almost mystical connection with it) always shone through. Poetry 'as consolation for the afflictions of life' was exactly what Keats had been thinking about even before he had arrived in Southwark. Here, in Wordsworth, Keats was discovering a kindred spirit, a poet with the depth and gravity that Keats himself aspired to.*

### 1. Introduction

Wordsworth and Keats are romantic poets; they express ideas on nature and send us the message to respect it. They say we have to admire the beauty of nature in different ways. ... Keats instead, uses much more complex language to describe and express his ideas, so we know he aimed his poems to the educated

According to Victor Hugo 'Romanticism' is 'liberalism in literature.' Romanticism is that idea which can be understood as an expression of life having imagination. Wordsworth and Keats took nature as an infinite source and for them it was like lovely imaginings. In his poetry Wordsworth portrayed mountains as the symbol of loneliness and Keats' portrayal of darkness reflecting glooms and windy mossy ways made both the poets different from other poets who wrote about nature.

One of Wordsworth's poems which Keats read and remembered was a Prefatory Sonnet:

*Nuns fret not at their Convent's narrow room;  
And Hermits are contented with their Cells;  
And Students with their pensive Citadels:  
Maids at the Wheel, the Weaver at his Loom,*

Sit blithe and happy; Bees that soar for bloom,  
 High as the highest peak of Furness Fells,  
 Will murmur by the hour in Foxglove bells:  
 In truth, the prison, unto which we doom  
 Ourselves, no prison is: and hence to me,  
 In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound  
 Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground:  
 Pleas'd if some Souls (for such there needs must be)  
 Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
 Should find short solace there, as I have found.

**William Wordsworth (7 April 1770 – 23 April 1850)** was an English Romantic poet who, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped to launch the Romantic Age in English literature with their joint publication *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Wordsworth is the leader of Romanticism and true son of Romantic Revival. Wordsworth's historical background and his poetry are the best introduction of 19th century Romanticism. "Both Wordsworth and Coleridge formulated that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful human feeling" (Goodman, 2007, p.50). They believe that the subjects of the poetry should be only nature and human nature and its objects should be the reflection of emotions stimulated by the World and humanity. Wordsworth's lyrics odes and sonnets make him a great romantic poet (Goodman, 2007, p.50).

Wordsworth's Romanticism gives an extraordinary contrast because he categories the sublime and the ridiculous. He has a kind of middle style; at its best it has grace and dignity, a heart searching simplicity, and a certain magical enlightenment of phrase that is all his own.

His position and influence are due partly to the fact that he greatly enlarged the boundaries of poetry giving it, as subject matter; themes varying from the joys and sorrows of the simple, homely lives to the transcendental interests of soul in communion with nature and God, partly to his development of a poetic style befitting such material.

The instinct to perceive nature and human life in transcendental terms was early manifested in Wordsworth. This habit of mind sobered and strengthened by reflection, pervades all his poetry and gives to it a peculiarly stimulating character (Goodman, 2007, p.51).

His Romanticism is deeply rooted in realism. His great poems are saturated with the very breath and spirit of life. In a lonely highland meadow Wordsworth saw the solitary girl, making hay and heard her singing at her work. Normally, there was nothing unusual in those rustic notes of the peasant girl to quicken thought or inspire expression.

But to Wordsworth imagination, the doleful strains of the forlorn reaper seemed to derive a pensive sorrow from memories of old, unhappy, far off things and battles long ago. He has the gift of imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word (Goodman, 2007, p.51). Wordsworth always saw beauty in nature rather than any man-made objects (*Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, 2011, p.2).

### 1. William Wordsworth, 'My heart leaps up'.

My heart leaps up when I behold  
 A rainbow in the sky:  
 So was it when my life began;  
 So is it now I am a man;  
 So be it when I shall grow old,  
 Or let me die ...

This simple nine-line poem describes how the poet is filled with joy when he sees a rainbow, and how he hopes he will always keep that sense of enchantment with the natural world. The poem contains Wordsworth's famous declaration, 'The Child is father of the Man', highlighting how important childhood experience was to the Romantics in helping to shape the human beings they became in adult life.

## 2. William Wordsworth, 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'.

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze ...

Often known simply as 'The Daffodils' or 'Wordsworth's daffodils poem', this is also one of the most famous poems of English Romanticism, and sees Wordsworth (1770-1850) celebrating the 'host of golden daffodils' he saw while out walking. The poem was actually a collaboration between Wordsworth, his sister Dorothy (whose notes helped to inspire it), and Wordsworth's wife, Mary.

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Similarly, Wordsworth is also recalling his previous visit to the banks of the River Wye in 'Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey'. In both the poems the similarity of thoughts about nature between both the poets can be seen clearly. In both poems both the poets enjoy the time spent with nature. In 'Tintern Abbey' Wordsworth becomes sentimental and the opening lines of the poem establish the tone of the whole poem (Terrall, 2008):

"Five years have past; five summers with the length  
of five long winters! and again I hear  
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs  
With a soft inland murmur."

In the whole poem Wordsworth has used the combination of time, memory and nature. He is very definite about using the length of time. He is connected with past in 'Tintern Abbey' and makes all the time frames important in this poem like: seasons, years, days, hours and minutes.

But here we can find some difference in Wordsworth and Keats of using time in their poetry. As Wordsworth is connected with past, Keats is more related with future. The following lines from Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' depict his thoughts on time (Terrall, 2008):

"Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal-yet, do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!" (15-20)

**John Keats ( 31 October 1795 – 23 February 1821)**

He was an English Romantic poet. ... today his poems and letters remain among the most popular and analysed in English literature. Especially acclaimed are "Ode to a Nightingale", "Sleep and Poetry" and the famous sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer".

**1. Keats's poem, 'I Stood Tip-Toe Upon a Little Hill':**

"The breezes were ethereal, and pure,  
And crept through half closed lattices to cure  
The languid sick; it cool's their fevers' sleep,  
And soothed them into slumbers full and deep.  
Soon they awoke cleared eyed: nor burnt with thirsting,  
Nor with hot fingers, nor with temples bursting":

In above lines Keats is showing compassion how air affects physical health (Ngiewih, 2008). The most important feature of the English Romantic Movement, which is very popular, is 'Return to Nature' that will be analysed in relation to Wordsworth (Goodman, 2007, p.22).

The main feature of Romantic poets was to use time and memory in their poetry. Wordsworth and Keats also used these two themes in their poetry. In his 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' Keats description of pastoral imagery which is painted on an urn shows his thoughts about nature of time.

This simple nine-line poem describes how the poet is filled with joy when he sees a rainbow, and how he hopes he will always keep that sense of enchantment with the natural world. The poem contains Wordsworth's famous declaration, 'The Child is father of the Man', highlighting how important childhood experience was to the Romantics in helping to shape the human beings they became in adult life.

English Romanticism tends to be dominated by a few names: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats. Here, we've tried to strike a balance and offer ten of the very best Romantic poems from English literature, which ensures that these canonical figures are well-represented, while also broadening that canon to include some important but slightly less famous voices. We hope you like this short introduction to Romanticism told through ten classic Romantic poems...

So begins this great meditative poem. Wordsworth's great collaborator on the 1798 collection Lyrical Ballads was Coleridge. Written in 1798, the same year that Coleridge's landmark volume of poems, Lyrical Ballads (co-authored with Wordsworth), appeared, 'Frost at Midnight' is a night-time meditation on childhood and raising children, offered in a conversational manner and focusing on several key themes of Romantic poetry: the formative importance of childhood and the way it shapes who we become, and the role nature can play in our lives.

**2. John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale'.**

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness,—  
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees  
In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease ...

From its opening simile likening the poet's mental state to the effects of drinking hemlock, to the poem's later references to 'a draught of vintage' and 'a beaker full of the warm South', Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' is one of the most drink-sodden poems produced by the entire Romantic period. The contrast between mortality and immortality, between the real world and the enchanted world the nightingale's song seems to open a window onto (like one of those magic casements Keats refers to), is a key one for the poem. We have analysed this poem here.

John Keats was essentially a Romantic poet. His poetry is the meeting ground of old Hellenism and medieval romanticism and even his Hellenism is romantic. His romance is largely derived from English and Italian romancers of the Middle ages (Goodman, 2007, p.134).

Keats always admired Spenser and Boccaccio and his imagination was always influenced after reading both the poets' poetry. Keats poetry showed the romance of three worlds: the antique; the medieval and the modern where his poetry had rich and pictorial expressions.

The Romantic element in Keats appears less in his choice of subjects than in his manner of treating them. 'Hyperion', 'Endymion', 'Lamia' is old classical in story but at the same time they have romantic element too. On the other hand, 'The Eve of St. Agnes', 'Isabelle', 'La Belle Dams Sans Marci' are drawn from the Middle of ages in which romance breathes more freely.

Keats had no interest in men. In the passion and struggle of ordinary human life he discussed his feelings for poetry. To him poetry was the world of the imagination only, realm of enchantment where only those might dwell who saw visions and dreamed dreams- a land of voluptuous languor, where magic filled the air and life passed like a dream, measured only by the exquisiteness of its sensations and the intensity of its delights.

Keats' principle was "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty". He was passionate about beautiful things in an intellectual manner not in a sentimental way. Keats had intense romantic fervour. His Romanticism had an outlook different from that of his colleagues Byron looked around and criticized; Shelly looked forward and aspired; and Keats looked backward into the romantic past and sighed (Goodman, 2007, p.146). Keats wanted to become a pure, simple and natural poet (Sen, 2009, p. 23-24). He was simply a poet. Neither was he a teacher nor a preacher.

## 2. Differences between Wordsworth and Keats

Six great Romantic poets are divided in to two groups, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Scott belong to the elder group, while Byron, Shelly and Keats are of the younger group. The first group poets were all similar in many ways but the younger group had differences due to belonging to different generation and age. The ideas and aspirations which Wordsworth first embraced had kindled humanitarian passions even in the artist Keats.

Wordsworth put emphasis on spontaneity and imagination. He focused on the element of thought that should be used in poetry. He gave a particular shape and direction to English Romanticism.

In the Romanticism of Wordsworth there is the consciousness and will of a return to natural sources. The disease that is preying upon poetry is the artificiality of the language in which the external and explicit means of conveying intensity have been worn out by the deadening effect of custom. The romantic idea had crystalized round these themes and these rhythms, which are still pregnant with the old-time vigour of the English genius (Legouis & Cazamian, 1926).

Wordsworth's original creativity lies in the revolutionary faith. He has been the promoter which revolution made him. He says that he not apathetic with anyone. His use of rural life in his poetry gives us a sensitive receptivity. Wordsworth's poetry conveys the message of intensity.



Wordsworth is the psychological poet par excellence; and by constantly shifting the domains of art into the realms of the implicit he has prepared the way for the supreme enrichment of modern literature (Legouis & Cazamian, 1926).

Wordsworth always believed that the poetry should be the voice of a common man that is why he has focused on mentioning rural life in his poetry and he never support the voice of an educated man in his poetry (A worksheet on reading Wordsworth and Romantic Poetry, n.d.).

Keats is the poet of sensations. His intellectual work includes working on notions, images and qualities. His balance between perfect classicism and romantic intensity is remarkable.

The favourite themes in Keats's Romanticism are set in the 'Odes' in short and elaborate forms, constructed with harmonious skill, sculptural grace of Greek attitudes, the nostalgia of the charming myths of Hellas, the changing seasons and the joys of the earth (Legouis & Cazamian, 1926).

English Romanticism attains in Keats the final stage of its progress, and this pessimism is deeper and more significant. It has not its secret source of any Tragic Mystery and it is thus much more inevitable. It springs from the satiety of a soul which yet has made no demands upon the more common joys of life; it is made up of the unconquerable feeling of the fragility of beautiful forms, as of the vanity of the effort through which desire seeks to transcend itself (Legouis & Cazamian, 1926).

Keats when he died, gave promise of becoming the greatest poet of his generation, and one who better than any other, would have united the free inspiration of Romanticism with the formal principle of the schools of the past (Legouis & Cazamian, 1926).

Keats does not think nature as noble as other phases of development but on the other hand he does not challenge nature's importance. That is why nature imagery is an important element in many of his poetry.

His choice of subjects differs from that of most of the other major romantic poets. His love of nature is intense and is constantly to be seen in the imagery of his poems but it involves none of the mystical worship of the 'mighty being' which we have seen in Wordsworth. Unlike Wordsworth, Keats made no attempt at a systematic formulation of his views on his art. His letters however give a clearer insight into his mind and artistic development than any formal treatise could have done (Albert, 2000).

Keats has been in two worlds-

Ideal Real

Tempe, Arcady, unruly life human passion, transience, death

The nightingale's forest Here

Beauty, Joy, Pleasure Melancholy

The immortal world: Crete the moral world: Corinth

La Belle Dame's elfin grot the knight's cold hill's side

A juvenile icon in the arsenal of literature John Keats could weave the threads of minerals for mere twenty-five years. He bestowed the showers of his masterpieces with a speed of a comet. With a vaulting intellectual aim, he has constructed for himself a house of notions and reflections. The sensuous, the beautiful and the sensitive- all shaped his entity being individual or an artist. The prudence, with which he handled nature, was through its senses.

### 3. Conclusion

Romanticism is not a pure psychology. English Romanticism cannot be considered as one artistic principle which stands in conflict with other principle. It does not have its own victory over other

principles. The personality of the poet is its main characteristic as it depends upon the poet's sensibility and imagination though one's intelligence is a general thing.

Romantic poets created the romantic meditative ode that was considered a new form of ode. The movement of the romantic ode focuses on the poets' showing unhappiness with the real world and then their acceptance of the ideal world (John Keats, Romanticism, n.d., p.1).

After struggling with his mental conflicts to go in real or ideal world, the poet comes back in the real world leaving the ideal world behind as he cannot live in that world and he is not happy what he has found in ideal world. Later he changes his thoughts after understanding the situation. What he started saying in the beginning of the poem completely changes his poem's ending based upon his experience and understanding of the world.

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