

A Comparative Analysis of Representation of Nature in English and Romantic Literature

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Abstract: *This research investigates the diverse portrayals of nature in the writings of prominent English Romantic poets. The paper emphasizes the developing philosophical and emotional connection with nature through an examination of key poems. While Blake sets the untainted essence of nature against the corrupting powers of experience, Wordsworth extols its uplifting spiritual and moral effects. Whereas Coleridge depicts nature as simultaneously sublime and enigmatic, Byron's portrayal of nature embodies the wandering self's melancholy. Nature is elevated by Shelley and Keats as a symbol of transcendence and impermanence. The paper shows, by scrutinizing these authoritative texts, that Romantic poetry reconceived nature as a profound space for imagination, emotion, and existential reflection, rather than merely as landscape.*

Keywords: Romanticism, Nature, English Poetry, Sublime and Imagination.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the very beginning of existence, humans have been captivated by nature. As early humans were profoundly reliant on their surroundings for survival, they slowly started to mold and make use of the natural world. Even with this increasing dominance, the profound enigmas of nature continued to evade capture, motivating innumerable efforts to portray and comprehend it through every form of art—be it literature, music, painting, or sculpture. Neither the first nor the last philosopher to ponder the marvels of nature was Aristotle. For centuries, poets, philosophers, and artists have wrestled with the mystery of nature, trying to express its evident beauty and hidden intricacy. The outcome is a lasting literary tradition in which nature plays a leading role rather than serving only as a backdrop.

During the 19th century, literature's relationship with nature changed considerably. Romantic writers moved beyond classical and Enlightenment portrayals that emphasized harmony, rationality, and order, embracing the sublime, chaotic, and transformative power of nature. Galitz (2004) states that “nature with its uncontrollable power, unpredictability, and potential for cataclysmic extremes offered an alternative to the ordered world of Enlightenment thought” (para. 6). Romanticism arose partly as a reaction to the disillusionment of the Enlightenment, framing nature as an organic counterforce to reason and industrial advancement.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The imagination and subjectivity of the individual were championed by Romanticism. Romantic literature, as noted by González de la Llana Fernández (2013), is characterized by a profound examination of the inner world, frequently influenced by exotic landscapes and imagined geographies. Although these distant locales were not always tangible, they frequently resided solely in the imaginations of authors such as Coleridge. He crafted dreamlike realms such as Xanadu in “Kubla Khan” (Coleridge, 2009a) and metaphysical journeys in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (Coleridge, 2009b).

Romantic writers also displayed recurring themes: the innocence of children in Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, the moral purity found in rural life within Wordsworth's poetry, and the supernatural elements present in Coleridge's verse. However, as noted by Sánchez Calvo (1989), nature persists as the most unifying and omnipresent theme, serving as “the muse of their creations” (p. 144). No matter if it manifested as a wild landscape, a mysterious woman, or a

symbolic animal, nature was raised to the level of the divine and sublime. The Romantic ideal supplanted the Renaissance concept of Uomo Universale, where man was seen as the measure of all things; instead, man was viewed as just a small component of a larger, potent, and capricious natural order (González de la Llana Fernández, 2013).

Objectives:

To explore the multifaceted representation of nature in the works of major English Romantic poets.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study examines the representation of nature in the key works of prominent Romantic poets Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. It examined chosen texts to investigate the dual role of nature as a potent force in its own right and as a source of inspiration that influenced the imagination of Romantic literature. In Romantic literature, nature is no longer a passive element; it is imbued with activity, emotion, spirituality, and a sense of transcendence.

This study employs a qualitative research approach and utilizes descriptive qualitative methods to analyze how nature is represented in English and Romantic literature. The secondary data sources include pertinent books, encyclopedias, articles, journals, and online references. To identify and examine the research questions, the researcher employs 'purposive sampling.' The data is gathered using observation, documentation, and note-taking techniques. It may also be classified as library research. The researcher employs references from the earlier study to illustrate similarities, comparisons, and differences. This study is supported by a review of some previous studies as a reference. The conclusions are drawn by the researcher based on the findings, discussions, and interpretations.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

William Blake: Excerpts from *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*

William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794) offer a dialectical perspective on human existence by juxtaposing the lenses of childhood innocence and worldly experience. In Blake's poetry, nature serves dual purposes: it symbolizes divine harmony and reflects the corruption found in human society. Nature is portrayed in *Songs of Innocence* as a pure and pastoral realm, akin to Eden, where the divine and innocence exist together in harmony. As an example, in "The Lamb," the child-speaker poses the question, "Little Lamb, who made thee?" (Blake, 1789/2009), connecting the divine creator with the natural world. The lamb is more than just an animal; it represents innocence, gentleness, and Christ-like purity. In this collection, nature embodies spiritual and moral clarity, representing the goodness of God's design. Nonetheless, *Songs of Experience* shows a drastically different representation. The natural world grows more severe and ambiguous, mirroring the condition of humanity in its fallen state. Blake poses the question in "The Tyger": "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" (Blake, 1794/2009), depicting the tiger as a being of fearful symmetry that calls into question the idea of a completely benevolent creator. Nature represents beauty and terror, creation and destruction, as well as innocence and experience. The tiger's "burning bright" image presents a sublime vision of nature, echoing the Romantic fascination with power and the unknown. Blake's dualistic perspective on nature mirrors his wider criticism of Enlightenment rationalism and organized religion. While *Songs of Innocence* exalts the pristine beauty and divine quality of nature, *Songs of Experience* presents readers with a grimmer truth in which industrialization, power structures, and humanity's flaws cloud nature's equilibrium. This dualism foreshadows the Romantic era's view of nature as both a redemptive and fearsome force. According to Sanchez Calvo (1989), Blake's perception of nature is dynamic, mirroring the development of the individual's consciousness in relation to society. The transition from innocence to experience represents not just individual development but also the changing nature of humanity's relationship with the natural environment. Blake employs nature not just as a setting, but as a dynamic symbol for spiritual and psychological exploration.

Nature in the Poems of William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth is a leading figure in English Romantic poetry, renowned for his deep and personal bond with nature. To Wordsworth, nature was more than just a setting for human action; it served as a moral and spiritual guide, a living force that could instruct, heal, and change the human spirit. His creations depict nature as a wellspring of emotional profundity, ethical contemplation, and metaphysical understanding. In the poem *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth contemplates how his relationship with nature has developed as he has grown older. In his youth, nature offered him “aching joys” and “dizzy raptures.” As he matures, though, his understanding develops: nature transforms into a “motion and a spirit” that drives “all thinking things” (Wordsworth, 2003a). This transition exemplifies Wordsworth’s process of internalizing the natural world and converting it into a wellspring of philosophical reflection and spiritual nourishment. Nature has become an integral part of his moral and emotional being, rather than just an external pleasure. In a similar vein, Wordsworth critiques the excessive focus on rationalism and bookish learning in *The Tables Turned*, urging readers to “Come forth into the light of things, Let Nature be your teacher” (Wordsworth, 2003b). Here, he contests the Enlightenment’s preference for intellect over intuition. For Wordsworth, Nature provides truths that analytical reasoning cannot reach—truths experienced directly, felt through emotion, and revealed in reflection. His conviction regarding the spiritual strength of nature is also illustrated in his poem *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*. He mourns the disappearance of childhood’s “visionary gleam,” when the world felt suffused with divine presence. Nonetheless, he derives comfort from nature’s lasting beauty and permanence, implying that it can still link the human soul to eternity (Wordsworth, 2001a). In *Lines Upon Westminster Bridge*, he depicts the calm of a city morning from a Romantic perspective, ascribing a magnificent tranquility to the urban scene as viewed through nature’s lens (Wordsworth, 2001b). Wordsworth’s perspective on nature is in harmony with Sánchez Calvo’s (1989) concept of “spiritual organicism,” which regards the natural world as a moral force that molds the human spirit and provides insight into the deeper meanings of life (p. 148). His poems advocate for reconnecting with nature as a cure for the estrangement caused by rationalism and industrialization. In the end, Wordsworth’s nature is not chaotic or indifferent; rather, it is nurturing and revelatory. His work embodies a Romantic ideal in which nature is seen as an active and kind force that counters the artificial aspects of contemporary life and serves as a link to spiritual enlightenment.

Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the foundational figures of English Romanticism, introduced a uniquely imaginative and supernatural dimension to the representation of nature. Unlike Wordsworth’s spiritual tranquility or Blake’s moral dualism, Coleridge presents nature as a mystical, awe-inspiring, and often terrifying force. His poems *Kubla Khan* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* exemplify the Romantic fascination with the sublime where beauty and terror coexist and where nature is not only a backdrop, but an autonomous, moral, and metaphysical presence. In *Kubla Khan*, nature is imagined as exotic, sublime, and dreamlike. The poem opens with the vision of Xanadu, a “stately pleasure dome” where the sacred river Alph “ran through caverns measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea” (Coleridge, 2009a, lines 3– 5). Nature here is both magnificent and enigmatic, evoking the sublime through its vastness, darkness, and ungraspable power. The juxtaposition of the ordered dome and chaotic natural surroundings symbolizes the tension between human imagination and the untamable forces of nature. Coleridge crafts a landscape that is surreal, fertile, and haunted a metaphor for the unconscious mind and poetic creativity, where nature serves as both inspiration and mystery. In contrast, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* explores nature as a moral and spiritual force capable of punishing and redeeming. The mariner’s killing of the albatross a bird traditionally seen as a symbol of nature’s benevolence triggers a supernatural punishment: “Water, water, everywhere, / Nor any drop to drink” (Coleridge, 2009b, lines 119–120). Nature, once violated, becomes hostile. The sea, sky, and creatures respond in eerie unison, suggesting that all elements of the natural world are interconnected and governed by a moral order. However, redemption comes when the mariner blesses the “happy living things” in the water, recognizing their beauty and value: “A spring of love gushed from my heart, / And I blessed them unaware” (Coleridge, 2009b, lines 284–285). This moment of spiritual awakening illustrates that

harmony with nature requires humility, reverence, and empathy. As Galitz (2004) notes, Romantic artists often portrayed nature as an uncontrollable and morally charged force, standing in contrast to Enlightenment rationalism. Coleridge's mariner learns that human transgressions against nature have profound ethical consequences, reinforcing nature's sacred status. Both poems demonstrate Coleridge's philosophical and imaginative engagement with the natural world. His depiction of nature blends the mystical, moral, and metaphysical, aligning with the Romantic tradition while also extending it into the realms of psychological and spiritual complexity. Nature, in Coleridge's vision, is neither wholly nurturing nor entirely destructive it is a sublime force demanding both awe and ethical responsibility.

Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage by Lord Byron exemplifies a unique Romantic connection with nature, intertwining external landscapes with the poet's internal emotions. Byron's portrayal of nature stands in contrast to Wordsworth's nurturing perspective and Coleridge's moral metaphysics; he depicts it as a magnificent yet frequently mournful reflection of the self. His perspective is profoundly subjective, mirroring the Byronic hero's feelings of alienation, nostalgia, and existential longing. Nature serves as both a sanctuary and a mirror, a grand canvas for the projection of emotional and philosophical struggles. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the protagonist created by Byron sets off on a voyage through Europe's grand landscapes and ancient relics, searching for comfort from his disenchantment with civilization. While the natural world offers an escape from societal corruption, it is never completely restorative. Byron writes, "There is a pleasure in the pathless woods, There is a rapture on the lonely shore" (Byron, as cited in Sánchez Calvo, 1989, p. 150), conjuring the sublime through isolation and remoteness. The "pathless woods" symbolize liberation from societal frameworks, whereas the "rapture" by the shore embodies the profound emotions evoked by nature's wild areas. Byron's connection to nature is characterized by greater ambivalence than the moral resolution found in Coleridge or the spiritual comfort present in Wordsworth. He respects the strength and beauty of nature, but he frequently employs it to highlight human triviality and loss. For example, the Alpine scenes in Canto III are depicted with both wonder and a feeling of seclusion. Rather than serving as a setting for communion, the natural world transforms into a stage for introspection, highlighting the Byronic motif of the isolated, tormented person. Ruins, storms, and immense desolation characterize Byron's landscapes. This preference corresponds with the Romantic aesthetic of the sublime, in which nature's magnificence and peril inspire fear and awe. Sánchez Calvo (1989) observes that Byron's nature is characterized as "melancholic and majestic," reflecting the poet's internal chaos and emotional intensity (p. 152). His is not the gentle nature found in pastoral scenes, but rather a powerful and often overwhelming force that mirrors the modern soul's turmoil. Significantly, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* redefined the travel narrative as a Romantic form of inner exploration. Byron uses nature not only to create distance between himself and the artifice of society, but also to present the emotional and philosophical dilemmas faced by modern man. In his poetry, nature serves less as a moral compass and more as a magnificent companion in solitude—a landscape that reflects the Byronic hero's tumultuous inner life.

Shelley's *Ozymandias* and Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*

Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats, though contemporaries within the Romantic movement, offer contrasting yet complementary visions of nature and its relationship to art, time, and human experience.

In *Ozymandias*, Shelley employs a natural setting to reflect on the impermanence of human power and pride, while Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* reveals nature as a medium of transcendence and poetic immortality. Both poets present nature not simply as a setting, but as a force that frames human mortality and artistic aspiration. Shelley's *Ozymandias* explores the decay of empire and the limits of human authority through a powerful natural metaphor. The shattered statue of the once-mighty king lies in a "boundless and bare" desert, where "the lone and level sands stretch far away" (Shelley, 1993). The desert, a timeless and indifferent force, has outlasted Ozymandias's vainglorious monument. Nature is silent but victorious, rendering human ambition futile. As Sánchez Calvo (1989) observes, Shelley's nature is not benign but "subversive, eroding the human constructs that defy time and truth" (p. 153). The poem becomes a

meditation on transience, where nature functions as both a witness to and a destroyer of human arrogance. In contrast, Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* immerses the reader in the sensory beauty of nature, using the nightingale as a symbol of poetic and emotional transcendence. The bird's song offers escape from "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" of human life (Keats, 1998, line 23). Nature here is idealized, a refuge from suffering and decay. Yet the poet remains painfully aware of his mortal limitations: "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!" (line 61). While the nightingale sings eternally in a realm untouched by time, the speaker is drawn back to his human condition, grounded in physical and existential fragility. Keats, unlike Shelley, does not evoke nature's vast indifference but instead its enchanting power to elevate the soul. Still, both poets converge on the Romantic theme of ephemerality Shelley through the ironic erosion of legacy, and Keats through the contrast between eternal nature and transient life. Fogle (1953) argues that Keats's bird represents "the art that survives man," an embodiment of nature's ability to inspire and preserve human emotion across generations (p. 213). Together, *Ozymandias* and *Ode to a Nightingale* illustrate the dual Romantic conception of nature as both a force of destruction and a medium of transcendence. For Shelley, nature reduces human legacy to dust; for Keats, it offers a timeless sanctuary through artistic expression. In both, nature becomes the ultimate measure of human significance and aspiration either as a dissolving force or as an eternal muse.

IV. DISCUSSION

The Romantic poets Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats shared a deep fascination with nature, yet each approached it through a distinct philosophical, emotional, and stylistic lens. Nature, for these poets, was not merely a passive backdrop but a powerful, dynamic force, often serving as muse, mirror, moral guide, or sublime enigma. Despite common Romantic themes, their treatment of nature reflects diverse responses to imagination, emotion, morality, and mortality.

William Blake, in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, presents a dualistic vision of nature. In the innocent world, nature symbolizes purity and divine creation epitomized in "The Lamb." However, in the experienced world, it becomes a site of fear and spiritual tension, as in "The Tyger." Blake uses nature symbolically to critique society and explore spiritual dualism. His nature is heavily allegorical, shaped by his visionary theology and moral concerns.

William Wordsworth takes a more personal and spiritual approach. Nature, in his poetry, is a living moral force capable of healing, guiding, and spiritually uplifting the individual. In *Tintern Abbey* and *The Tables Turned*, he portrays nature as a teacher and sanctuary, emphasizing emotional introspection and the restoration of inner peace. Unlike Blake's symbolic dichotomy, Wordsworth offers a more harmonious and reverential engagement with the natural world.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge explores nature's mystical and supernatural qualities. In *Kubla Khan*, nature is imagined as surreal and dreamlike an exotic vision of the sublime and the unconscious. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, nature acts as a moral agent, punishing and ultimately redeeming the mariner for his transgression against it. Coleridge's nature is charged with spiritual mystery and governed by moral order, blending psychological depth with theological speculation.

Lord Byron, by contrast, presents a more introspective and melancholic relationship with nature. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, nature reflects the emotional turmoil of the wandering self. Byron's landscapes are vast, sublime, and solitary, offering both awe and existential alienation. Unlike Wordsworth's consolatory nature, Byron's natural world is majestic but indifferent a projection of the Byronic hero's internal discontent and philosophical skepticism.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, in *Ozymandias*, uses nature to critique human hubris and emphasize transience. The relentless sands of the desert consume the remnants of empire, illustrating nature's ultimate supremacy over human constructs. Nature here is not nurturing, but indifferent and destructive outlasting monuments and legacies. Shelley's nature symbolizes time and decay, reinforcing the futility of earthly power.

John Keats, in *Ode to a Nightingale*, finds in nature a means of poetic and emotional transcendence. The nightingale's song becomes a vehicle for escaping human suffering and approaching the eternal. While Shelley's nature erodes and dismantles, Keats's nature seduces and elevates. However, both poets express a longing for permanence in the face of mortality, highlighting nature as both a source of beauty and a reminder of human impermanence.

Hence while all six poets center nature in their Romantic imagination, their portrayals diverge significantly:

Poet	Nature as...	Key Characteristics
Blake	Moral allegory	Dualistic (innocence vs. experience), symbolic, spiritual
Wordsworth	Spiritual guide	Healing, nurturing, tranquil, morally instructive
Coleridge	Mystical power & moral force	Supernatural, sublime, psychologically complex
Byron	Mirror of inner melancholy	Sublime, solitary, majestic, emotionally reflective
Shelley	Force of transience and critique	Indifferent, destructive, symbolic of decay and time
Keats	Source of aesthetic and poetic transcendence	Sensuous, eternal, escape from mortality

These contrasting visions reveal that while nature served as a central motif of Romanticism, it was not a monolithic idea. Rather, it was a versatile symbol that accommodated a range of ideological, emotional, and philosophical expressions from innocence to terror, from consolation to critique. Together, these poets illustrate the richness and complexity of nature's role in Romantic literature.

V. CONCLUSION

Nature as depicted by the Romantic poets exemplifies a deep change in literary sensibility: a departure from the Enlightenment's rational, mechanistic worldview and toward a more emotional, spiritual, and imaginative relationship with nature. Although they were connected by a common respect for nature, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats each crafted a unique poetic vision that mirrored their personal philosophical beliefs, emotional concerns, and artistic goals. In Blake's view, nature operates within a moral and theological context, representing innocence and experience in sharp contrast. Wordsworth exalts nature as a source of spiritual wisdom and moral direction, providing comfort and understanding through individual connection. Coleridge delves into the sublime and supernatural aspects of nature, depicting it as a mystical force that can bring both punishment and redemption. Byron's landscapes reflect his inner sadness, making nature a sublime yet emotionally fraught setting. While Keats seeks aesthetic pleasure and transcendental escape in nature, lamenting the constraints of human mortality, Shelley highlights the fleeting quality of human creations compared to nature's lasting powers. These poets together create a portrayal of nature that is rich and complex, challenging, inspiring, and transcending the human condition. In Romantic literature, nature is portrayed as dynamic and multifaceted, intricately linked to concepts of imagination, memory, mortality, and morality. A comparative examination of their works provides us with a deeper understanding of how nature functioned not just as a physical reality but also as a potent metaphor for the inner landscapes of Romantic imagination.

Future Directions

This study has offered a comparative analysis of how nature is depicted in the works of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Nevertheless, there are still several paths available for further academic investigation. Future studies could broaden this analysis in the following ways. Nature depictions from the Romantic era can be reevaluated through the lens of modern ecocriticism. Researching how these poets anticipate contemporary environmental issues like sustainability, climate anxiety, and ecological interconnectedness may provide valuable insights into the lasting significance of Romanticism in the Anthropocene.

Additional research could examine how nature is depicted in English Romantic literature compared to other European or non-Western Romantic traditions (e.g., German, French, or Persian Romanticism). This would enable a wider comprehension of the ways in which cultural, historical, and philosophical differences influence literary portrayals of the natural world. Romantic poetry could be examined from a feminist ecocritical perspective to investigate the gendering of nature. Numerous poets of the Romantic era depicted nature as a woman, prompting inquiries into how gender, power, and representation intersect in their writings. An interdisciplinary approach could investigate the parallels or divergences between visual art, music, and landscape painting of the Romantic era and the literary

imagination of nature. This may aid in shedding light on the cross-media aesthetic of Romanticism and enhancing our comprehension of nature's symbolic and affective functions. As the field of digital humanities progresses, future studies might include computational analysis and geo-mapping of natural imagery found in Romantic poetry. Techniques like these could uncover trends in the use of metaphors, geographical references, or environmental motifs within extensive textual corpora. With the ongoing development of posthumanist theory, scholars may investigate Romantic nature from the perspectives of non-human agency and material ecocriticism, particularly in texts such as Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and Shelley's *Ozymandias*, which allude to decentered human subjectivity. Thus, the relationship of Romanticism with nature constitutes a rich area for investigation, one that is still relevant to current theoretical controversies and worldwide environmental issues. Incorporating new critical methodologies and comparative frameworks into the discourse will help maintain the vitality and relevance of Romantic nature studies in the 21st century.

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