

New models of poetry as reflected in the romantic works of blake, wordsworth, and...

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The Enlightenment was a period of individualism, science, rationalism, and of the human 'right' to govern nature. Poets and authors focused on creating perfect pieces of literature, and hoped that by some means their work would be considered 'sublime'. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution and the age of Romanticism, several poets such as Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge sought the 'sublime' within the realms of nature. The Romantics began to create a new model of poetry through focusing on the feelings or subjects of the poets mind instead of traditional methods. Alexander Pope would be considered one of the most important writers of the Enlightenment. In "An Essay of Criticism", Pope explains that it is important to know what you are talking about when doing a critique, and that it is wrong to pretend to be someone of vast knowledge. He writes; "So by false learning is good sense defaced: / ... And some made coxcombs Nature meant but fools" (25, 27). Pope makes it very clear throughout this piece that one needs to have an education in order to appreciate good works of writing. Pope felt that in order to write something of worth, it is best modeled after classic writing, such as in the Iliad. Pope's strict guidelines and rationality of the poetic process is an excellent example of why several poets began to stray from traditional writing and into the dramatic change found in the Romantic period. Writers such as Pope were not the only influence in the dramatic shift to the Romantic age. The Industrial Revolution created feelings of despair within William Blake, who is considered one of the first Romantics by many. "The Chimney Sweeper" in "Songs of Innocence" by Blake is a criticism of the treatment of child workers during the Industrial Revolution. It describes the life of a chimney sweeper who was sold into the trade by his parents. The

children are described as sleeping in the soot: " So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep" (4). One of the boys tells of a dream that he has about thousands of chimney sweepers who are " lock'd up in coffins of black" (12) and are then released by an Angel, so that they can " wash in a river and shine in the Sun" (16). The blackness of the coffins not only signifies the darkness of death, but also represents the blackness created by the soot. In addition, heaven for the chimney sweepers is depicted as a bath or " wash in the river" (16). Even though a bath may be something common or simple, to these children bathing would be something of luxury. Blake is creating the notion that they will be free from the evils of the world when they die. In the second version of the poem, which is in " Songs of Experience", a boy speaks resentfully against his parents for selling him into the chimney sweeping business. He has become aware of his fate: " They clothed me in clothes of death" (7). The child knows that his parents are the reason for his quick demise. Blake creates the two poems to contrast each other in terms of one who is innocent and of who is experienced. He further achieves effect through the rhythmic approach of his poetry by creating an almost childlike nursery rhyme. His child-like method of rhyming in " Songs of Innocence & Experience" creates irony due to their despondent nature. Blake is not the only poet to be considered from the Romantic era. There are numerous references to ' getting back to nature' in the poetry of Coleridge. One example would be " Frost at Midnight", which describes the " secret ministry" (1) of the frost as it creates a pattern on the window glass. He then compares the frost to various unexpected occurrences, such as the arrival of an unexpected guest. The frost is symbolic of the beauty of ' chaos'. He also

describes being "reared / In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim" (51, 52) which is a contrast to the liberation which he feels when in the country. The alienation from nature that is felt is made apparent in the line: "And saw nought lovely but the sky and the stars" (53). Another nature themed poem by Coleridge is called "Work without Hope", and opens by describing various different animals doing their natural duties. "All nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair - / The bees are stirring - birds are on the wing-" (1, 2). The final lines of the poem suggest that one should follow their natural path, just as the animals do. Bees do not consciously decide that they are going to gather honey, they simply do what comes by instinct: they have 'no hope' because they do not need to have hope. They simply live. Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, And hope without an object cannot live. (13, 14) Coleridge is expressing his enviousness of beings in nature. To have hope without anything to hope for is what he is warning against. He yearns for humanity to 'be like' the animals. William Wordsworth is another author who changed the model of poetry by his well-known "Lyrical Ballads". "We are Seven" tells the sad tale about a child who has lost two of their siblings. The "little maid" speaks of how she spends her time in the churchyard where her brother and sister are buried. She explains that she used to spend her time playing with her brother, in the churchyard where he sister is buried, but one winter he passes away as well. She is then left alone with her mother because her other siblings have "gone to sea" (20). The girl continually refers to herself and her siblings as "seven" even though two of them are obviously dead. The speaker of the poem says to the little girl, "But they are dead: those two are dead! / Their spirits are in heaven!" (65, 66) and she still

refers to them as " seven". This poem represents the innocence of childhood, and lack of experience also as depicted in Blake's works. " We are Seven" is not about denial of reality, it is simply a depiction of the relationship of nature between humanity. The girl remains close to her siblings even though they are dead. In a way, it is Wordsworth's way of say that everything in nature is unified and connected in some way, and this is demonstrated by " Their graves are green, they may be seen" (37). In reality, her brother and sister ' are now' the green grass. In Romantic poetry, we begin to see more references to nature and the connection humans have with it. This is demonstrated in Wordsworth's " I wandered lonely as a cloud" and excellently represents the desire to get away from the chaotic city. The poem begins with the personification of the cloud, of which the speaker adapts that view. Fields of daffodils are described as " Ten thousand saw I at a glance, / Tossing their heads in sprightly dance" (11, 12). The flowers are personified by their " dance", which can be compared to the cloud becoming the speaker. The speaker and the flowers are clearly different, but when they are described as dancing and the speaker as a cloud, they clearly have a connection. At the conclusion of the poem, the speaker's dissatisfaction with chaotic life is evident through the following line: " Which is the bliss of solitude; / And then my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the daffodils" (22-24). The new model of poetry created by the Romantics is symptomatic of their displeasure of the world they knew at the time. Society felt the need to control nature rather than appreciate it, which Coleridge and Wordsworth both felt the need to change. The Romantics felt that seeking fulfilment in nature instead of looking to the science and rationalism of the

Enlightenment, would in a sense, bring us back to our 'natural state'. In matters of poetry, Coleridge, Blake and Wordsworth strayed from the traditional, and opted for a fresh more 'naturally felt' poetic form. Poetry became something that expressed personal emotion through language and created focus on the imagination. The innocence of children is often compared to animals in many of the Romantic poems. Within the Romantic, there is a yearning to be innocent once more and be 'reunited with nature'.

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