

Wordsworth and Keats: the nature- image

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



The names Keats and Wordsworth are to a certain extent tantamount to Romanticism, especially from the perspective of modern academics. To many, Wordsworth and Coleridge are seen as the fathers of English Romanticism as they were the first to publish literary works that were seen as romantic with *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Yet although John Keats was only born in 1795, he still contributed much to the Romantic Movement and is in essence regarded just as highly as William Wordsworth. One can argue that to a certain extent the Romantic Movement came into existence due to the French and American revolutions. This period in history exemplifies a time when people broke through the constraints of old social and political conventions. People were starting to see life and the world in a different way. For the first time after the age of reason took the stage, the Romantics placed an emphasis on the imagination of man. To them the imagination was more important than reason alone. The imagination could create a whole new and different dimension to normal reason, and as such reason should be seen as subordinate to imagination. Charles Darwin is a great example of a Romantic that used his imagination to explore new ideas. To Darwin reason was only employed as the backbone to substantiate his arguments. His imagination separated him from the accepted scientific knowledge about nature and the earth and in effect allowed him to think laterally. The product was works that challenged science and religion with such a degree of persuasion that they changed the perception of most of the western world. Darwin's writings even influence our modern-day scientific theories, proving that the Romantics were not just part of a popular phase that dissolved into history, but that they were integral to the development of the human way of

thinking. However, this train of thought seems to give the Romantics a great deal of credit. From another perspective, Wordsworth and Keats can be argued to be two poets dazed through an infatuation with nature, or as two writers influenced by paganism who mastered the art of poetry in a time when the west was ready to embrace or at least consider a new worldview. But for the purpose of this essay, Wordsworth and Keats will keep their credibility as revolutionary poets (who did not indulge in any hallucinogenic substances). After inspecting Romantic poetry it is fairly obvious that nature played an essential role not only as a muse, but as a subject in many of the poems. Nature was even at the core of Darwin's Origin of Species. It is with a certain conviction that one can state that nature ruled in the Romantic's thoughts. William Wordsworth reinforces this statement in The World is Too Much with Us, when he writes: " Little we see in Nature that is ours." In this poem, Wordsworth is making a plea to the audience and the world to start noticing nature for her beauty and grace and to rekindle our admiration for her divinity before we are overcome with the growing materialism. He states that " we are out of tune" because we're so caught up with our worldly lives. Throughout this poem Wordsworth is showing a passion for nature that is so deep-rooted that he personifies the ocean as a woman who " bares her bosom to the moon." This in itself conveys a feeling of affection that is usually only found between two people. However, if one looks at the poem as a whole, it seems almost strange that one person can have such an enthrallment with nature alone that he will spend the time to write something so beautiful about it. It is, of course, not the only example of the Romantics using nature in their poems. Conversely, it is a romantic poem that does not

employ nature as an expressive tool to bring forth a different message. Nature is used here rather to represent itself, and nothing more. John Keats, like William Wordsworth and the other Romantics, also enjoyed using the nature-image in his works. In *Bright Star*, Keats uses the image of a star to express his discernment of steadfastness. The beauty of the ocean and the fresh snow ("new soft fallen mask / Of snow (...)") is also exploited in this poem to emphasise his adoration for the loved one he speaks of. It is interesting to note that although Keats states that he would only want to be as "steadfast" and "unchangeable" as the star, he is still tremendously sensitive and gives the reader an unambiguous feeling of how he perceives life for him would be as a star. His love for nature is explicated in so few lines with such intensity that it becomes clear how profound his adoration is for nature. His use of the word "Eremitic" also comes as an indication of how he sees himself - a devotee or even disciple of nature. This is the very essence of the Romantics. Apart from the adulation for nature that Wordsworth and Keats show through their descriptions and focus on nature images, it is important to note that nature to the Romantics was seen as a living entity. This was in steep contrast with the empirical and pragmatic ways of thinking that was characteristic of the neoclassic age before Romanticism. Prior to the Romantics, nature was observed as separate individual mechanisms that just happen to be in mutualism or equilibrium with each other. It was a raw and scientific view that evolved through the empirical reasoning that the Ancient Greeks created. This system of thinking about the world and nature, combined with the start of the industrial age and the growing materialism set the stage for radical thinking. The French and American revolutions

provided the spark the artists and poets searched for in order to create a new approach to understanding and accepting the world around them. It was in effect a rebellious movement in that the Romantics took a standpoint that opposed normal society's worldview. Apart from this, the Romantic poets broke free from the conventional poetry at the time. They moved away from the formal austere language used by the Neoclassicists and started using a more simple form of speech. It was a celebration of freedom of the individual - a blatant disregard for the accepted rules and norms of not only poetry, but of science, society and politics too. But to the Romantics, nature was at the centre of this new revolutionary approach. Nature was the essence and the backbone of their artwork and poetry due to two reasons. It was believed that man's imagination drew inspiration from nature and, from a psychological viewpoint, nature stood in contrast to the things that the Romantics were trying to escape from. Nature became the axis of the movement. Nature was alive. Keats writes of the seasons in *Autumn* as if they are people who are conscious of the world that they have an effect on, whilst Wordsworth even makes nature speak in *Three Years She Grew*. Any student of Romanticism can say with great certainty that nature was at the heart of the movement. It was the portal the Romantics used to express themselves and it was the facet they drew their inspiration from.

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