

THE POETIC SYNERGY: UNLEASHING EMOTION, IMAGINATION, AND THE PROFOUND INTERPLAY OF WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

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ABSTRACT

The creative partnership between William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge is pivotal to English Romanticism. Still, the current body of research has focused mainly on their poetry and theory, both of which are, in their own way, seen as individual accomplishments. Consequently, the dynamics of collaboration and subsequent estrangement have never been explored as a unified literary phenomenon. The current study fills this gap by discussing the role of the combination and contrast in developing central ideas of Romanticism. This paper aims to examine the Wordsworth-Coleridge collaboration as an intellectual relationship and to explore how their reimagined imagination, nature, human suffering, and supernaturalism are explored in Romantic poetry. The paper follows a qualitative comparative literary analysis methodology, using selected primary sources, including Lyrical Ballads, the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, and Biographia Literaria by Wordsworth and Coleridge, respectively. The results show that Wordsworth and Coleridge developed their own, yet interdependent, imaginative systems through long-term intellectual interaction. Wordsworth's ethical imagination anticipates experiential perception, moral sympathy, and nature as pedagogy. In contrast, Coleridge's supernatural imagination uses symbolic ambiguity and metaphysical questioning to explore the boundaries of ethics and knowledge. Their departure did not disintegrate cooperation but instead enhanced conceptual differentiation, turning intellectual polarization into a driving force. This research study makes contributions to the field of Romantic studies by developing a relational approach to literary formation that frames collaboration and estrangement as mutually constitutive. The study redefines poetic innovation as the product of dialogue, critique, and creative tension, and thus proposes a fresh perspective on the Romantic imagination as a field of negotiation and dynamic interaction.

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INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge play a pivotal role in the critical literature of English Romanticism, as their poetic and theoretical interventions changed established conceptions of imagination, nature, and subjective consciousness (Ozturk, 2024; Roy, 2024). Although the history of Romanticism is frequently told in terms of isolated genius, more recent criticism is increasingly emphasizing the role of collaboration as an element of intellectual and artistic formation, capable of creating a standard set of conceptual vocabularies and aesthetic priorities that transcend individual authorship. The collective work that is most closely linked to Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads, has therefore been interpreted not only as a shared publication, but also as an example of shared literary formation, which had a decisive influence on the reorientation of the goals of the poetic at the end of the eighteenth century (Burkett, 2016; Chadha & Mishra, 2024).

Though there has been sustained academic interest in Wordsworth and Coleridge, critical discourse has largely limited itself to treating the two poets as individual entities, studying their aesthetic beliefs, thematic concerns, and theoretical work in relative isolation. Romantic imagination, pantheistic interaction with nature, and supernatural studies have reinforced the poet-specific frames on poetic ethical and affective value of nature on the one hand, and metaphysical and supernatural interests on the other, largely as prefigured by Coleridge and Wordsworth (Chadha & Mishra, 2024; Sharma, 2022). Parallel critical paths, such as ecocritical readings of Romantic pastoral and philosophical descriptions of imaginative epistemology, have added still more layers, consolidating individual-centered paradigms by establishing separate conceptual genealogies for individual poets (Hutchings & Matthews, 2008; Kaya, 2020).

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Though this literature has illuminated some key divergences in focus and intellectual orientation, it has inclined towards treating collaboration and estrangement between Wordsworth and Coleridge as the biographical periphery rather than a primary category of analysis. The dialectical nature of creative collaboration, reciprocal criticism, and eventual separation has, therefore, not been theorized well as an integrated literary phenomenon. Recent research, and even works that consider thematic convergence, seldom examine the relationship between collaboration and estrangement as mutually productive forces that influence Romantic poetics (Hurtado, 1997; Roy, 2024). This division persists despite increased awareness that the intellectual interaction of the poets could have a formative impact on the Romantic notions of imaginative work, the moral hierarchy of nature, and the methods of narrating suffering and the uncanny (Burkett, 2016; Kaya, 2020).

This paper concentrates on four connected conceptual axes, imagination, nature, human suffering, and supernaturalism, as the basic categories of Romantic poetics that gain a new meaning when analyzed through the prism of collaborative dynamics, as opposed to individual authorial will (Kaya, 2020; Sharma, 2022). The issue of imagination has been treated as a disputed epistemic and ethical power, negotiated through mutual intellectual activity and philosophical opposition within the collective environment of the poets (Burkett, 2016; Chadha & Mishra, 2024). The nature is posed as a discursive domain in which pantheistic valuation, moral pedagogy, and ecological imaginations are refracted through processes of mutual influence and deviation (Hutchings & Matthews, 2008; Roy, 2024).

Human suffering is not understood as a thematic content but as a way of expression and questioning of ethical assertions about sympathy, agency, and communal responsibility in a collective poetic dialogue (Hurtado, 1997; Kaya, 2020). Supernaturalism, lastly, is discussed as a theoretical tool for challenging the bounds of Romantic epistemology, in which Coleridge's metaphysical interests collide with, and elsewhere oppose, the moral-imaginative systems of Wordsworth, resulting in a dynamic area of congruence and contradiction (Burkett, 2016; Ozturk, 2024). Placing the themes into the framework of relations, the proposed study will show how collaboration and estrangement were co-constitutive forces that shaped the intellectual architecture of English Romanticism (Chadha & Mishra, 2024; Hutchings & Matthews, 2008; Roy, 2024).

This paper aims to investigate the interaction between collaboration and estrangement between Wordsworth and Coleridge as a single, relational literary phenomenon and to discuss how this interaction rethought the primary Romantic issues of imagination, nature, human suffering, and supernaturalism within a typical intellectual horizon. The study, by foregrounding relational exchange rather than individual authorial progress, aims to rebrand the Wordsworth-Coleridge collaboration as a constitutive influence on the construction of English Romantic poetics (Burkett, 2016; Hutchings & Matthews, 2008; Roy, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly Views on Wordsworth-Coleridge Collaboration

Critical debates about the Wordsworth-Coleridge relationship have swung back and forth between interpretive versions that dwell on an amicable collaboration between the intellects and those that anticipate philosophical antagonism and subsequent separation. They have an extensive literature theorizing that their early collaboration formed conceptual vocabularies, especially around imagination and nature, beyond the ability of individual writers, as they argue that common projects and continued theoretical exchange created these vocabularies (Trotter, 2023; Magee, 2021). In this view, collaboration is not confined to biographical proximity but to a practice of formation, indoctrination, and the dissemination of poetic objectives, critical language, and pedagogical desires.

Complementary research challenges this collaborative paradigm by focusing on asymmetry, contestation, and tension within the partnership. These narratives trace how incompatible metaphysical stakes, opposing opinions on the moral role of poetry, and critical contradictions created fruitful tension, redefining the aesthetic paths of both poets (Ulmer, 2009; Duff, 2020). The sensitivity to material and institutional conditions, such as print culture, patronage networks, and reception of criticism, further demonstrates that collaboration occurred within larger frameworks that led to both concord and conflict (Magee, 2021). The syntheses of recent times do not support reductive binaries, emphasizing the interdependence of cooperation and rivalry and revealing how collaborative theoretical models circulated in a vibrant realm of mutual formation despite an increase in critique and division over time (Trotter, 2023; Ulmer, 2009).

Even with this variety of methods, very little of the literature takes the relational dynamics per se as a primary category of analysis. The two dominant modes of collaboration and estrangement are favored in existing scholarship, as opposed to hypothetically theorizing the dialectic operation of these two modes as co-constitutive mechanisms. In light of this gap, a paradigm of the Wordsworth-Coleridge relationship as a site of interaction between concord and rupture should be formulated, in which conceptual innovation in Romantic poetics was generated in concert by both (Magee, 2021; Trotter, 2023).

Romantic Imagination: Philosophical and Poetic Debates

Debates about imagination play a leading role in Romantic studies, especially as they involve the distinction between imagination and fancy and their epistemological, ethical, and poetic consequences. Wordsworth and Coleridge are always at the centre of such debates, and their theories are seen as significant interventions to Romantic theories of thinking and creativity (Hurtado, 1997; Trotter, 2023). The works that highlight Coleridge's philosophical vocabulary situate his vision of imagination within a post-Kantian metaphysical tradition and understand it as a synthesizing, ontologically and epistemologically powerful, active force (Ulmer, 2009; Trotter, 2023). In this sense, imagination is like a mediator between mind and world, making it possible to engage in speculative transcendental matters.

In comparison, the scholarship that is sensitive to Wordsworth's formulations emphasizes the moral and communal aspects of imagination, focusing on how it can redefine perception, develop ethical sympathy, and found a poetics of everyday consciousness (Hurtado, 1997; Hutchings & Matthews, 2008). Convergence and divergence of the positions have long stressed in comparative studies: both poets from that period exalt imagination against Enlightenment reductionism, but Coleridge's theorization is, as noted, often perceived to be more systematic, more metaphysical, and Wordsworth to be more experiential and ethically-minded (Ulmer, 2009; Trotter, 2023).

The more recent interventions subvert these oppositions with the dialogic nature of the formulations of both poets. Wordsworth and Coleridge leave traces of metaphysical residue in their writings, and the ethical and affective registers continue to respond to each other in Coleridge's prose, suggesting a porous boundary between these stances (Magee, 2021; Duff, 2020). Still, a significant part of the literature reinvents imagination as a field of competing personal doctrines rather than a space of mutual theorization grounded in collaboration, critique, and revision. This incomplete tension leads to the need for a scholarship that frames imagination as a joint production of discursive space, unfolding over the duration of intellectual communication and through the measured contradiction between the two poets (Trotter, 2023; Ulmer, 2009).

Nature, Ethics, and Human Suffering in Romantic Criticism

According to recent ecocritical and ethical research, nature has been reaffirmed as central in Romantic poetics, where it is discussed as an epistemic and moral category that mediates perceptual, valuational, and social responsibility relationships (Hutchings, 2007; Nersessian, 2017). Interdisciplinary methods have also shown how Romantic interpretations of nature predict proto-ecological sensibilities by connecting aesthetic value to emergent environmental thinking, as well as to broader issues in the formation of morality and community (Nersessian, 2017; Wang, 2025). In this critical terrain, nature is often presented as a pedagogical force, teaching ethical responsibility and developing sensitivity to others.

The similar paths of enquiry have preempted human suffering and sympathy as the central issues of Romantic literature. Instead of understanding suffering as thematic decoration, researchers examine it as one of the ways Romantic poets challenge vulnerability, agency, and social responsibility (Jones, 2009; Kaya, 2020). The synthesis of ecocritical and ethical approaches has led to studies that argue that nature and suffering are co-moralizing: experience of nature could lead to a sense of ethical responsibility, and manifestations of suffering could challenge the boundaries and the limits of sympathy in social and political theory (Hutchings & Matthews, 2008; Nersessian, 2017).

Despite the abundance of such scholarship, little has been said about how collaborative intellectual exchange influenced these ethical-naturalist paradigms. Current scholarship tends to implicate ecological and ethical arguments in individual authorial programs, ignoring the dialogue between Wordsworthian ethical naturalism and Coleridgean metaphysical inquiry as the source of common, conflicting, or intermediate ways of thinking of the moral agency of nature and how suffering is represented. The mechanisms of convergence and divergence that have occurred in relation to one another are thus under-examined, which means that analyses that place ethical and ecological thinking in the context of collaboration are required (Hutchings, 2007; Nersessian, 2017).

Estrangement and Creative Tension in Romantic Partnerships

A critical analysis of estrangement and creative conflict progressively reconceptualizes the separation no longer as a biographical break but as a potential source of aesthetic novelty and theoretical clarification. Research that has stressed the importance of divergence holds that ideological difference, epistemological realignment, and incompatibility in poetic intentions may open new conceptual paths, with estrangement viewed as a valid state in literary networks (Ulmer, 2009; Magee, 2021). Studies of revisionary work, editing conflicts, and social criticisms of the work also exemplify how conflicts about poetic power, imagination, and moral intentionality are turning collaborative vocabularies into reconsiderations and reimaginings (Duff, 2020; Magee, 2021).

Concerns about institutional and cultural forces enhance this description by revealing the interactions among print markets, intellectual communities, and critical review with philosophical difference, thereby formulating both limiting and generative forms of estrangement (Magee, 2021). Even though specific scholarship focuses on the adverse effects of rupture: marginalization or critical misreading, an emerging critical tendency redefines estrangement as a dialectical state that leads to theoretical problematization and aesthetic reorientation, and not mere loss (Ulmer, 2009; Magee, 2021).

However, the majority of the literature still analyses collaboration and estrangement analytically as a distinct phenomenon with either solidarities of joint production or disruptions of separation. Few descriptions bring these poles together into a system that captures the interplay between a cycle of cooperation and disruption, thereby enabling specific conceptual innovations in Romanticism. It is this omission that underscores the necessity of relational analyses that trace the mutual influence of concord and conflict on poetic theory and practice across time (Trotter, 2023; Ulmer, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The research is informed by a conceptual framework of integration based on Romantic theories of imagination, reader-text interaction, and a critical model of literary collaboration as creative tension. As per the distinction between literature review and theory, the framework does not comprehensively review the body of prior scholarship but defines the conceptual prisms within which the relational processes between Wordsworth and Coleridge are viewed.

At the heart of this paradigm is the theory of Romantic imagination, which conceives of imagination as a creative, generative power rather than a representational mechanism. Most appropriately, Romantic theorists (primarily Coleridge) place imagination as a unifying force between perception and cognition and between moral intuition, and oppose

Enlightenment paradigms that undermine poetic creation by reducing it to associative fancy (Abrams, 1993). In this sense, imagination is an active epistemic process that mediates the mind-world relation. Thus, it is especially valuable in the study of intellectual exchange and the co-formation of concepts in collaborative literary activities.

A reader-text interaction model, linked to Romantic and post-Romantic criticism, has been used to supplement this account, as described by Abrams (1993), and to advance introductory theoretical mappings. In this sense, the meaning of literature is not determined by the author's intent but emerges through the reader's imagination and feeling towards the text (Abrams, 1993). Romantic poetry, in turn, preempts the reader as being an active contributor to the meaning-making process, prioritizing change, moral introspection, and lived experience. The model helps understand poetic discourse in a relational and processual way, rather than in a doctrinal or closed way.

The paradigm also includes a vision of partnership as creative tension, seeing literary partnership not as a state of peaceful coexistence but as a dynamic space organized around dialogue, conflict, and positive friction. Instead of seeing collaboration and estrangement as sequential, opposing stages, this theory views them as processes that mutually depend on each other, in which theoretical refinement and aesthetic innovation occur. Critical disagreement, revision, and divergence do not constitute failures of collaboration but instead serve as means of stressing concepts and retuning poetic thinking (Duff, 2020; Magee, 2021).

Combined, these theoretical viewpoints preempt relationality, negotiation, and co-production as key processes of Romantic literary formation. The framework analyzes the influence of intellectual agency in Wordsworth and Coleridge on the construction of Romantic poetry as a dynamic, contested, and generative space, drawing on imagination theory, reader-text interaction, and collaboration-as-tension.

DISCUSSIONS

Wordsworth: Ethical Imagination and Nature

The poetry of Wordsworth always represents imagination as a moral and emotional power, in which nature mediates moral consciousness and social duty. Instead of being an abstract metaphysical concept, imagination in Wordsworth's works is anchored in perceived life and experience, making it possible to convert even mundane experiences into the ground of moral understanding. Critical scholarship has highlighted that such an ethical imagination opposes the practices of sensationalism and is instead a disciplined approach attentive to human vulnerability, social marginality, and the healing powers of nature (Abrams, 1993; Hutchings & Matthews, 2008).

In some of the poems of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth presents nature as a way of teaching or instilling morality through the senses, not as a passive landscape to be viewed. Nature results in a channel in which moral sympathy is triggered, comprising the awareness of shared suffering and a duty towards the collective. This ethical naturalism theory shares similarities with its critique of Enlightenment rationalism, focusing more on affective responsiveness and moral imagination rather than abstract cognition (Hurtado, 1997; Kaya, 2020). The role of imagination in Wordsworth's poetry is, therefore, twofold: it perfects perception but at the same time brings a poetic meaning to bear upon morality.

Notably, the intellectual exchange does not focus on Wordsworth's ethical imagination. As the literature review indicates, his interest in moral sympathy and experiential immediacy is formed in a dialogic context through his long-term engagement with Coleridge's philosophical imagination. This opposition of Wordsworth to speculative abstraction might not be interpreted as such to the point of theoretical seclusion, but as a measured reaction to an experimental field of thought, where ethical naturalism arises in a dialectical opposition to metaphysical ambition (Burkett, 2016; Magee, 2021).

Coleridge: Supernatural Imagination and Moral Symbolism

Coleridge's poetic imagination is often expressed through supernatural symbolism and metaphysical questioning, in contrast to Wordsworth's ethical-naturalist orientation. In other stories, such as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, imagination acts as a mediating force that disrupts empirical perception and opens the poetic discourse to ontological and moral ambiguity. In literature, it has always been observed that Coleridge uses the supernatural not to indulge in escapism but to explore, symbolically, the boundaries of moral knowledge and epistemic confidence (Abrams, 1993; Ulmer, 2009).

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the moral meaning is created not by explicit moral teaching but by symbolic exuberance, narrative obsession, and the uncanny violation of natural law. The supernatural aspects play on the effects of moral failure, yet they also oppose the reductive moral closure that requires interpretive involvement rather than passive consumption. It aligns with Coleridge's philosophical view of imagination as an active, synthesizing faculty that creates meaning through the mediation of symbols, rather than an imitative one (Trotter, 2023).

Likewise, *Christabel* encourages supernatural ambiguity to disturb fixed lines of goodness and evil, uprightness and sceptical inquiry. The application of indeterminacy predicts imagination as a speculative and ethical power, which reveals not only the weakness of moral judgment but also heightened emotion. These tactics place Coleridge's imagination in a metaphysical register that not only supplements but also challenges the ethical naturalism of Wordsworth, thereby supporting the relational nature of the Romantic theory of imagination (Duff, 2020; Magee, 2021).

Comparative Discussion: Synergy, Divergence, and Productive Conflict

A comparative study of Wordsworth's ethical imagination and Coleridge's supernatural symbolism reveals a dynamic interaction shaped by both cooperation and opposition. Their intellectual synergy had been established at an early age, allowing them to express a unified Romantic criticism of rationalist poetics by presupposing imagination as a key epistemic and moral instrument. However, this mutual adherence did not form the basis for theoretical uniformity. Instead, it generated

specialized paths in which ethical naturalism and metaphysical conjecture were not only complementary but also conflictual forms of Romantic ideas (Trotter, 2023; Roy, 2024). This break cannot be interpreted as the end of the cooperation, but rather as its reorganization. According to the literature, critical disagreement and philosophical recalibration enhanced conceptual clarity, enabling each poet to polish his imaginative system in response to the other in their respective positions (Magee, 2021; Ulmer, 2009). It is the growing focus upon Wordsworth's moral restraint and experiential base that we read with renewed clarity in opposition to the speculative ambition of Coleridge, just as the extravagance of the symbolic is given moral soundness through the indirect conversation with Wordsworthian sympathy and social anxiety. When interpreted as constructive struggle, the Wordsworth-Coleridge relationship is a creative engine of Romantic poetics rather than a partnership of ascent and decline. The shared innovation of synergy, the conceptual pressure of divergence, restructured Romantic imagination into a field of contention and interaction. This mutual interaction not only determined the personal poetic paths of each of them but also influenced the overall intellectual infrastructure of English Romanticism, where imagination, nature, suffering, and the supernatural are inseparably linked (Burkett, 2016; Chadha & Mishra, 2024).

CONCLUSIONS

This research was intended to study the relationship between collaboration and alienation between William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge as a single literary entity, and to evaluate how this interplay redefined key Romantic issues of imagination, nature, human suffering, and supernaturalism. Placing their intellectual partnership in a relational and dialogic context, the study transcends the poet-centered analysis and prefigures collaboration and divergence as such forces of Romantic poetics.

The results show that Wordsworth and Coleridge developed distinct yet interconnected imaginative structures through sustained intellectual interaction. The ethical imagination that Wordsworth is interested in is grounded in experience, moral sympathy, and nature as a pedagogue. In contrast, the supernatural imagination that Coleridge uses relies on symbolic ambiguity and metaphysical questioning to explore ethical and epistemological boundaries. These approaches did not proceed independently but instead developed through mutual influence, critical analysis, and correction, forming an active discipline of conceptual negotiation. The fact of their subsequent separation did not reject previous cooperation but merely increased theoretical polarization, drawing the lines of Romantic imagination still more clearly as ethical and speculative.

The main limitation of the study is that it provides an integrated analysis of collaboration and estrangement as processes co-constituted. The study generalizes concord and conflict by conceptualizing them as relational rather than sequential or oppositional, and thus provides a relational model of the formation of the Romantic literary. This is a way of reconsidering the Wordsworth-Coleridge collaboration not as a story of harmony and then degradation, but as a process in which intellectual conflict gave rise to aesthetic creativity and conceptual precision.

This approach has broader theoretical implications for Romantic studies. Forcing the relations dynamics forward, the research questions the theories of solitary geniuses and the importance of intellectual exchange, disagreement, and creative tension as means of forming literary theory and practice. Imagination is neither a dogma nor a settled category of epistemic and ethical value, but a negotiated category generated through dialogue and difference in the discursive spaces shared by everyone.

This paper is constrained to examining selected poems and primary theoretical texts, which, by definition, limits the study's research scope. It does not provide a comprehensive description of the entire poetic works, letters, and general histories of reception. Also, the relational framework, though focusing on intellectual processes, does not address the entirely material or socio-economic aspects that fostered the further development of collaborative production and estrangement.

The scope of this relational model could be expanded in future studies by using less-studied texts, letters, and contemporary criticism of the works to understand the mechanics of Romantic collaboration better. The relevance of collaboration-as-creative-tension as a more general theoretical paradigm could also be challenged through comparative studies of other Romantic partnerships. These questions would enrich knowledge of the formation of literary movements not only through the power of individual perception but also through the process of thinking and creating contradiction.

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