

The Making of Modern Criticism Is A Book That Comprises Four Sections: From Romantic Subjectivity to Modernist Impersonality: Re-Reading Wordsworth and Eliot

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Abstract:

A comparative essay of William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot, this essay explains the transfer of intellectual subjectivity of Romantics to Modernist impersonality. Though emotion is expected by Romanticism, imagination and individual consciousness, Modernism revisits these elements through applying discipline, tradition and depersonalization. This paper holds that the theory of impersonality as put forward by Eliot is not a denial but a modification of the Wordsworthian poetics. The paper shows that the current state of literary criticism develops in continuity and dialectics instead of discontinuity by applying a qualitative, textual and theoretical analysis. The findings indicate that the critical paradigm by Eliot reinstates the ideals of Romanticism in modernized epistemological paradigm thereby establishing the continuum within the literary criticism.

Key words: Romanticism, Modernism, Wordsworth, T.S. Eliot, Impersonality, Subjectivity, Literary Criticism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of development of literary criticism of the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century is one of the most exciting intellectual transformations in the history of the English literature. This move, commonly referred to as a Romanticism to Modernism one, is commonly seen as a shift between emotional subjectivity and the formal impersonality. However, this dichotomy interpretation is a simplification of a complex and continuous debate between these two literary paradigms. This shift is once again analysed in the current paper by contrasting William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot, and it is claimed that the modern literary criticism is not created by the break, but by the dynamics of transformation and continuity.

Romanticism is an unquestionable shift away, as described in the most sublime literary creations of Wordsworth in his *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and in the Preface to that creation. Wordsworth also reconstructs poetry into spontaneous overflow of strong emotions, which is grounded on the personal experience, emotional authenticity as well as the imaginative experience of nature and daily life. This reconceptualization makes the focus of literature to be centered on internal expression instead of a form of external imitation and therefore subjectivity becomes the centre of the creative process of poetry. Therefore, Wordsworth not merely changes the practice of poetry, but also lays the theoretical foundations

of a new style of literary criticism with its focus on the psychological richness, connection with the reader, and interpretive receptiveness.

The new critical sensibility introduced by the advent of Modernism at the dawn of the twentieth century, predetermined by the catastrophes of the past such as industrialization, World War I and the destruction of culture, is completely new. The chief one of the representatives of this movement is T. S. Eliot who is a critic of the Romantic emphasis on individual feeling and individual expression. In his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, Eliot is a proponent of theory of impersonality since he feels that poetry should not be a burst of emotions, it is a restraining method through which emotion is transformed into a system of continuity and tradition. The poet is not in their uncivilized, subjective forms that the poet is to Eliot an instrument by which the feelings are organized and perfected.

Although these are the obvious contrasts, the correlation between Wordsworth and Eliot is much more complex than a mere opposition between subjectivity and impersonality. This paper asserts that the critical model, with which Eliot has worked, is deeply integrated into, and indeed, founded on the Romantic redefinition of poetry, which Wordsworth has initiated. Eliot does not reject Romanticism, but dialectically- revisioning its main principles, refining them and recontextualizing them to the intellectual and cultural service of modernity. This Romantic expression of emotion, e.g., is not abandoned but is brought into a subjugation into an ordered and objective aesthetic experience. Likewise, the focus on lived experience, which Wordsworth puts in his work, has a parallel in the preoccupation of Eliot with historical consciousness and cultural memory.

This paper will situate Wordsworth and Eliot at one end or the other of the spectrum of literary thought, so as to argue against the concept of rigid periodization in literary history, and to pre-empt the fluid processes of influence, adaptation, and reworking that pervade the discourse of criticism. This argument is the thesis of this paper: literary criticism today can be seen as a dialectical process between the present and the past, as opposed to a sequence of hip-hop ideological discontinuities. The paper focuses on the restructuring of the theoretical grounds set down during the Romantic period in the Modernist criticism using qualitative and interpretive methodology eventually leading to the establishment of a more systematic, but conceptually unbroken, critical tradition.

This way, besides re-defining the intellectual connection between Wordsworth and Eliot, this study provides a wider view of the development of literary criticism as an interdisciplinary and historically rooted arena. The transition to the Modernist impersonality of Romantic subjectivity is not then so much a break or a break-through, but an evolutionary relationship which is to be used to underline the stasis of Romantic thought in the formation of the modern critical paradigms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Criticism discourse that has emerged since the times of Romanticism to Modernism has led to realisation of much scholastic interests of literature particularly in the context of William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot. These two figures have always been traditionally confronted in terms of ideology; however, in our age, continuity, reinterpretation and intellectual dialogue between the theoretical frameworks of these two figures is more likely to be considered in the context of modern scholarship. This part is a synthesis of key critical views on prominent schools of thought to position the current study on the current academic discussions.

2.1 Subjectivity and Expressive Theory.

Romantic is an important epistemological turning point in the literary theory, as it was a transition between mimesis of the classical tradition and expressive individualism. This change is interpreted by earlier critics such as M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* as a change of literature as a commentary on reality into literature as an outpouring of the inner consciousness of the poet. In this context, the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth is commonly considered a classic work which prefigures the emotional, imaginative and lived experience as the essence of the poetic work.

The subjectivity of Wordsworth, in his bid to shape poetry as the unconscious effusion of highly charged emotions, according to scholars, is the origin and terminus of literature. Another manner of democratizing the poetic speech is his concern with the usage of ordinary words and countryside, which breaks the traditions of aristocracy of the neoclassical aesthetics. Moreover, Romanticism is further continued with the philosophical works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, particularly in his theory of primary and secondary imagination. These ideas combined give the intellectual basis of later theories of criticism.

2.2 New Criticism and Reconsideration of Organic Unity.

New Criticism was developed in the first half of the twentieth century and redirected the interest towards the internal structure of the text, rather than on authorial intention. Formalists such as Cleanth Brooks re-embarked the Romantic concepts, namely, organic unity, into a formalist realm. Although they rejected the explicit subjectivism of Romanticism, New Critics still held onto the notion of the work of literature as a whole, in which meaning is a result of the interaction of form, language, and structure. This phenomenon refers to the fact that Romantic aesthetics did not vanish but got re-conceived. The emphasis on close reading and integrity of the text might be considered a methodological evolution of the issue of unity of emotional and imaginative experience Wordsworth was interested in. The New Criticism is thus the period of transition between the Romantic expressivist and the Modernist formalism.

2.3 The Tradition and Impersonality Criticism of Modernism.

The modernist criticism and, in particular, T. S. Eliot has apparently introduced a challenge to Romantic subjectivity in their paradigm. In *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, Eliot criticizes the Romantic emphasis on the personal feeling, and in its place the impersonality and the historical consciousness. He claims that poetry is not to be a direct expression of personal feelings rather a metamorphosis of emotion in the context of the literary tradition. However, more and more scholars tend to think that the positions of Eliot are a dialectical response, yet not complete denial. His objectivity does not deprive him of emotion but transforms it into a kind of objectivity. In addition to this, his interest in tradition exhibits an even more interest in continuity and cultural memory that resembles the interest that Wordsworth had in the universal human experience. This suggests that Eliot has much to be indebted to the Romantic origins of his critical project, in its effort to revise them.

2.4 Reader-Response and Interpretation.

Other literary theoretical tendencies that followed behind, notably reader-response criticism, push Romantic knowledge of the subjectivity and experience even further. Opponents such as Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish are of the opinion that meaning is not inherent in the text, but is constructed during the interaction of the text and the reader. This perception is close to that of Wordsworth who accentuated the necessity to appeal to emotions and the transformative impact of poetry on the mind of a reader. Although the reader-response theory evolves in a different historical context, the concept of the interpretive plurality

and experience reading can be dated back to the elements of Romanticism. This coherency further supports the claim that to change the literary criticism, it is important to adapt it and not to discontinue it.

2.5 Structuralism and Post-Structural Extensions.

The structuralist and the post-structuralist theories have added new layers in the analysis of literature as they emphasize on the language, systems and meaning instability. Although these methods are not based on the Romantic focus on personal creativity, some conceptual similarities can be traced. Coleridge is interested in symbolism and imagination, e.g., foreshadows structuralist interests in signification, underlying structures of meaning. The idea of stable meaning is further complicated by post-structuralist critics, who accentuate ambiguity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy of the text. Reflectively, Romantic poetry offers rich arena to such analyses due to its linguistic experimentation and philosophical richness which proves the timelessness of the Romantic thought in modern thought.

2.6 Comparative Critiques of Christianity and Islam.

Critical School	Key Focus	Relation to Wordsworth and Eliot
Romanticism	Emotion, imagination, subjectivity	Foundational framework (Wordsworth)
New Criticism	Textual unity, close reading	Reformulation of Romantic organic unity
Modernism	Impersonality, tradition	Transformation of Romantic principles (Eliot)
Reader-Response	Reader interpretation	Extension of Romantic subjectivity
Structuralism	Language systems, symbols	Theoretical expansion of Romantic imagination

2.7 Research Gap

- The body of scholarship has a number of critical gaps:
- Little learning in a definite parallel of the poetry of Wordsworth and the critical theory of Eliot in an ongoing study.
- Too much emphasis on resistance, compared to change between Romanticism and Modernism.
- Poorness of dialectical models of development of literary criticism.
- Absence of interdisciplinary implications of such transition that is being investigated.

2.8 The current research.

In order to fill in these gaps, the specified study adopts a comparative and integrative position and positions Wordsworth and Eliot in a continuum of the literary thinking. Passionate about change, redefinition and intellectual tradition, the paper attempts to make its own contribution to the more progressive knowledge of the development of modern literary criticism.

3. OBJECTIVES

This paper seeks to discuss the intellectual shift in subjectivity of the Romantic to the Modernist impersonality by comparing William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot.

Specific Objectives:

1. To examine the theory of subjectivity and poetic expression of Wordsworth.
2. To discuss the theory of impersonality and tradition of Eliot.
3. To discuss the continuity of Romanticism and Modernism.
4. To determine the contribution that the two thinkers make to the current literary criticism.

4. METHODOLOGY

The current research uses a comparative, interpretive, and qualitative approach to research to understand the intellectual change in subjectivity (Romantic) to impersonality (Modernist) by critically analysing William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot. As the research problem is theoretical and conceptual, the methodology is aimed to support the process of in-depth textual interpretation and interdisciplinary synthesis instead of the process of empirical generalization.

4.1 Research Design

The study research design will be that of comparative analysis research design, which will be conducted to investigate how the literature criticism has evolved during the two major literary movements: Romanticism and Modernism. With this design, one can systematically explore the similarities, differences and changes in the critical philosophies of Wordsworth and Eliot.

The research is:

- Presentation, in outlining key theoretical ideas of the two philosophers.
- Critical, in evaluating critically their conceptual frameworks.
- Comparative, in discovering continuities and divergences.
- Design goes beyond the linear history to create an active dialectic image of the evolution of literary criticism which is constituted in interaction, reinterpretation and transformation.

4.2 Research Approach

The study relies on an interpretive and inductive approach which is particularly suitable to studies in the humanities. The study compiles conclusions made on the basis of intimate text analysis and theoretical speculation rather than the pre-determined hypotheses.

Key approaches include:

- **Hermeneutic Analysis:** Analysis of texts as a historical context and philosophical background to derive the meanings.
- **Historical-Critical Method:** Continues the history of the development of literary thinking between Modernism and Romantic period.
- **Comparative Method:** Comparing the theories of Wordsworth and Eliot to find patterns of influence, continuity and change.
- **Intertextual Analysis:** Discussion of the reaction of the main concepts of Eliot to, revise or redefine Romantic ideals.

This multifaceted approach will give richness and conceptual soundness to analysis.

4.3 Data Sources

The study is based on the purely secondary data with primary writing sources and criticism.

4.3.1 Primary Sources

Lyrical Ballads (1798) and later Preface (1800, 1802) William Wordsworth.

Chosen critical essays of T. S. Eliot, such as:

- Tradition and the Individual Talent.
- The Metaphysical Poets

4.3.2 Secondary Sources

- Introduction to critical writing (e.g., M. H. Abrams, Cleanth Brooks)
- Recent academic articles (2019-2025) about Romanticism, Modernism, and literary theory.

Publications in books and journals on the reader-response theory, structuralism and modern criticism. The sources will be selected based on the purposive sampling strategy that places a focus on the texts that are theoretically rich, and have a direct relationship to the research objectives.

4.4 Analytical Framework

The paper employs thematic and conceptual analysis to examine valuable categories that dwell on literary criticism, including:

- Subjectivity vs. Impersonality
- Feeling vs. Beauty Control.
- Imagination vs. Structure
- Personal Experience or Tradition.

The two authors compare these themes so that they can come up with a critical framework comparing the two themes.

As well, the study incorporates:

- **Dialectical Analysis:** To get to know how conflicting concepts (emotion vs. impersonality) work together and develop.
- **Conceptual Mapping:** To trace the development of the Romantic ideas up to the Modernist theory. It is a framework that enables the study to go beyond comparison in a descriptive manner to theoretical synthesis.

The extent of the research is detailed below.

The study is confined to:

Critical and theoretical works by Wordsworth and Eliot.

4.5 Romanticism to Modernism of the literary criticism.

- Not empirical but theoretical study.
- Detailed biographical analysis
- Literary studies that are quantitative or empirical.

4.6 Study Limitation.

Although the study contains a thorough theoretical analysis, there are still some limitations:

- Use of interpretive analysis which may involve subjective interpretation.
- Focus: The selected texts might not reflect the whole body of work.
- Absence of empirical support or confirmation by readers.
- In spite of these limitations, the methodology is analytically enriched, theoretically clear, and academically sound and it can be used in advanced literary research.

4.7 Justification of Methodology

The nature of the research problem that is inherently conceptual, philosophical and interdisciplinary explains the chosen methodology. It can be used with a qualitative and interpretive approach to:

- A lot of reading of literature.
- The abstract theoretical constructs are discussed.
- Making various critical views integrate.
- By so doing the methodology is in line with the objective of the study to redefine the development of literary criticism as a process of conversation and constant, rather than as a disjuncture in history.

5. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

The shift of Romantic subjectivity to Modernist impersonality is more of an intellectual development than a definite ideological break. This section discusses how different concepts like emotion, imagination, subjectivity and tradition are redefined and reworked in modern literary criticism through a comparative analysis of William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot.

5.1 Wordsworth and the Primacy of Subjectivity.

The poetic theory of Wordsworth, which is presented in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, makes subjectivity the cornerstone of the literary production. The fact that he has defined poetry as the spontaneous outburst of strong feelings places emotion as not only content but as the source of poetic expression.

This accent underlines a number of dimensions that are of critical nature:

- **Rhetorical:** Poetry is authentic; it is not a man-made creation.
- **Imagination as Power of Creation:** The poet moves the banal reality to the artistic expression.
- **Democratization of Language:** The common speech is used to undermine literary traditions of the elites.

The framework by Wordsworth changes the literary criticism into:

- Psychological depth
- Reader engagement
- Interpretive openness

In this way, Romantic subjectivity is established as a paradigm which reinvents poetry and criticism.

5.2 Eliot and the Theory of Impersonality.

On the contrary, Modernist criticism by Eliot brings in an organized and disciplined method to literature creation. In Tradition and the Individual Talent, Eliot is convinced that poetry cannot be a direct manifestation of individual feeling but a conversion of this feeling into an impersonal work of art.

The major aspects of the theory of Eliot are:

- **Anonymity of the Poet:** The poet is merely a conduit and not an origin of emotion.
- **Objective Correlative:** The expression of emotions needs to be done in form of structured external equivalents.
- **Historical Consciousness:** Poetry is placed in the context of an ongoing literary tradition.

The framework of Eliot depicts a change to:

- Formal discipline
- Intellectual control
- Aesthetic objectivity

But this does not annihilate emotion, but reorganizes emotion into a regulated and universalized emotion.

5.3 Continuity Romanticism and Modernism.

Although there is a seeming distinction, a closer examination shows that there is much continuity between Wordsworth and Eliot. The subjectivity to impersonality is not the rejection but rather transformation.

Wordsworth (Romanticism)	Eliot (Modernism)
Emotion as origin	Emotion as structured experience
Subjective expression	Impersonal transformation
Individual experience	Historical tradition
Imagination	Formal structure

It is an analogy meaning that:

In a perfect sense, not denied, Romantic principles.

The subjectivity is made a more disciplined one.

The development of literary analysis is through reformulations.

5.4 Dialectical: Relationship Change, Not Struggle.

- Wordsworth may be considered to be dialectically related to Eliot:
- Emotion and subjectivity are established by Wordsworth.
- Eliot criticizes and re-arrange these elements.

The resultant effect is a critical framework which is synthesized.

The disapproval of Eliot is:

- Something in reaction to Romanticism.
- A smooth over flaming its flamboyances.
- A continuance of its initial problems.

In these aspects, Modernism could be viewed as its continuation which, however, corrects, but is not contradictory.

5.5 Rereading Major Ideas.

- **Emotion Wordsworth:** Uncircumspect and squat.
- **Elizabeth:** Put together and arranged.
- **Imagination Wordsworth:** Creative and innovative.
- **Eliot:** Figured and formalized.
- **Language Wordsworth:** Simple, and natural.
- **Eliot:** Old fusty and coy.
- **Criticism Wordsworth:** Enjoying and explaining.
- **Eliot:** Critical, and historical.

These changes illustrate how literary ideas change over time yet to some extent continue to exist.

6. KEY FINDINGS

The analysis comes to certain useful conclusions about the intellectual shift in the sphere of Romanticism to Modernism with references to the works by William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot:

- 1. Continuity over Rupture:** Literary criticism during Romanticism and its shift towards the Modernism era is characterized by continuity and transformation, rather than an ideological one.
- 2. Objectivity to be transformed into Subjectivity:** The emotional subjectivity which Wordsworth advocates has by no means been disclaimed by Eliot but transformed into a model of an aesthetic, learned and impersonal form.
- 3. Dialectics relationship of the two philosophers:** Wordsworth and Eliot go in opposite dialectic of being created as a consequence of criticism, as a modification and improvement of the values of Romanticism.
- 4. Re-setting the Emotion and Imagination:** The expression of emotions in Romanticism evolves to a more restrained and formal expression of the same in Modernism and imagination ceases to be spontaneous and innovative but turns more formal.
- 5. In Tradition Modern Criticism:** Eliot introduces the historical awareness and tradition as a valuable tool and transports the idea of universal human experience, that Wordsworth cantered on, even deeper into the realm of culture.
- 6. The basis of Modern Literary Criticism:** Modernism elaborates and perfects the theoretical foundations of Romanticism and a modern literary criticism as a systematic object became a reality.
- 7. Cross-disciplinary and changing nature of Criticism:** Such dynamic and interdisciplinary field literary criticism is created with the help of the continuous redefinition of the past theories.

7. CONCLUSION

We have vividly explained in this paper the intellectual transformation that has taken place in the poems of William Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot and their style of poetry because of this shift of subjectivity (Romantic) to impersonality (Modernist). Abandoning the conventional dichotomy of the opposing Romanticism and Modernism, as two literary paradigms, the analysis demonstrates overall continuity, dialogic and transformative nature of the idea of the relationship between the two.

The reorientation of poetry as a process of emotion, imagination and experience of life the way Wordsworth defines it is a breakthrough in the thought process of literature where subjectivity has been formed as the main focus of poetic creation. This Romantic form not only revolutionised the practices of the poets but also this was the intellectual base of the modern literary criticism. Quite the opposite, Eliot theory of impersonality is an organized and disciplined theory which emphasizes on tradition, historical consciousness and aesthetic discipline. But instead of condemning Romanticism, Eliot does not avert his eyes to it, but makes it a part of the discussion of the critique of the cultural and intellectual demands of modernity, modifying its main ideas. It has been demonstrated that the Modernist criticism was a continuation of the Romantic notion where emotion is not destroyed but restructured, the subjectivity is not abdicated but is intermediated by the form and tradition. The dialectical relationship brings out the idea that the evolution of the literary criticism is rather a reinterpretation and adaptation process, rather than transformation. What Eliot has done is to systematize and expand the Romantic knowledge and bring it to a more rigorous, historically-grounded system which in its turn led to the formation of the principles of the modern critical discourse.

Besides, the findings challenge the chronological approach to the history of literature and also assert the importance of the intellectual continuity between the literary movements. By putting Wordsworth and Eliot in the same continuum, the work will assist in viewing the process of development of literary criticism as an interdisciplinary and dynamic process in a more nuanced manner. In conclusion, the era of the Romanticism and the Modernism cannot be regarded as a break, it is a change in terms of theory. The years of discussion between Wordsworth and Eliot illustrates that contemporary literary criticism has strong Romantic roots and developed via the critical interactions, redefinition and addition of concepts. This perspective once again endorses the relevance of the concept of historical continuity in the development of the modern critical thinking as well as gives fresh guidelines to future researches on the subject of literary theory and criticism.

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