

Between Reality and Representation: The Crossing of Boundary in Wordsworth, Kant, and Coleridge

Chia-Jung Lee

Department of Foreign Languages and Literature
70 Lien-hai Road, Kaohsiung 80424, Taiwan
E-mail: chiajungl@mail.nsysu.edu.tw

Abstract

This paper will explore the impact of Immanuel Kant and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, two influential figures in Western philosophy, on William Wordsworth's writing to arrive at a finer understanding of this poet's use of language that includes the intellectual and artistic landscape of his poetry as a function of 18th-century aesthetics. A dominant train of thought extending from German Idealism to British Organicism is concerned with the aesthetic presentation of ideas, whose function is the creation of a world in which "the absolute" can be accessed directly. Kant's core epistemological concept is that the world's rational order is the product of the rule-based activity of "synthesis." While Kant believes that the world is comprehensible in light of our inner synthetic faculties, Coleridge supposes that there are "empirical laws" in

Received July 23, 2018; accepted January 25, 2019; last revised December 22, 2018

Proofreaders: Alex C. Chang, Li-Ting Chao, Tsai Min Fang

nature. However, the “empirical laws” of the *Dinge an Sich* challenge our mind’s desire to encompass them. Within Coleridge’s organic whole, there is a dynamic play of fragmentary forces, and this ironic pattern of the fragmentary and the whole strongly influenced Wordsworth’s writing. My study will thus attempt to clarify the more perplexing problem of the nature of Wordsworth’s interaction with nature. Here the fragment “replicates” the whole on the basis of its fragmentary totality. This problematic reflexive mode of “the literary absolute” invites further exploration. My study, then, aims to provide a fuller understanding of how, in the context of aesthetic idealism, Wordsworth engages with the problem of presenting new, exciting, challenging ideas and emotions in his poetry while at the same time expressing a profound sense of loss.

Key Words: Kant, Coleridge, Wordsworth, aesthetic idealism, the Literary Absolute