**Definition of poetry according to Wordsworth**

Wordsworth defines poetry as ‘**the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity’**

**Wordsworth’s ‘Preface to *Lyrical Ballads’***

The second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* - that of 1800 - included an extended preface by Wordsworth. For Wordsworth, poetry should be written in **‘the real language of men’**.

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**Samuel Taylor Coleridge** (1772-1834)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a friend to poet William Wordsworth. He and Wordsworth were the founder of the English Romantic Movement.

***Biographia Literaria***

In 1817, Coleridge wrote *Biographia Literaria*, in which he outlined the evolution of his thought and developed an extended critique of Wordsworth’s poems.

**Definitions of poetry according to Coleridge**

Coleridge defines poetry as ‘the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of **imagination**’

**Coleridge's Major Contentions with Wordsworth in *Biographia Literaria***

Coleridge **disagreed** with Wordsworth’s theories presented in ‘*Preface to the Lyrical Ballads’* (1800) and so criticized them in *Biographia Literaria*.

Coleridge wanted to correct Wordsworth's views about the language of poetry being **‘the real language of men**’ and also about the suitability of ‘the incidents of common life’. According to Coleridge, such a generalization cannot exist, for men are individuals by nature. Coleridge objects to **Wordsworth’s use of the word ‘*real’* and suggests that *‘ordinary’* or *‘generally’* should have been used instead**.

**Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)**

Born in 1792, Percy Bysshe Shelley is one of the epic poets of the 19th century. Shelley married twice before he drowned in a sailing accident in Italy at the age of 29. His first wife committed suicide and shortly thereafter he married his second wife, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, who was the author of *Frankenstein*(1818) and the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*

**Shelley’s ‘A Defence of Poetry’**

‘A Defence of Poetry’ is an essay written in 1821 – a year before Shelley’s death - and first published by his widow, Mary Shelley, in 1840. Shelley addresses **an article** entitled, ‘**The Four Ages of Poetry’**, written by his friend, **Thomas Love Peacock**. Peacock’s article teases and jokes that poetry has become valueless and redundant in an age of science and technology and that intelligent people should give up their literary pursuits and put their intelligence to good use. Shelley takes this treatise and extends it, turning his essay into more of a rebuttal (denunciation) than a reply.

**Definition of poetry according to Shelley**

Shelley defines poetry as ‘the **expression of the imagination**’: and poetry is connate with the origin of man, blending the definitions of poetry of both Wordsworth and Coleridge.

**Poets according to Shelley**

Shelley states that poets **are the revolutionaries, teachers, prophets, the innovators and lawmakers** or ‘**legislators of the world’**.

**John Keats (1795–1821)**

He was an English Romantic lyric poet, who died at the age of 25. He devoted his short life to the perfection of poetry. In 1818 he went on a walking tour in the Lake District. That trip brought on the first symptoms of the tuberculosis, which ended his life.

**The Poetic Character to Keats or The Chameleon poet**

In a letter to Richard Woodhouse in 1818, Keats defines **'the poetic Character' as** having ‘no self—It is everything and nothing—It has no character**’ and ‘the chameleon poet'**:

**Chameleon poet** means that **y**ou can change your surroundings temporarily and you can move to different identities to hide from the world. Let your imagination take you away. It is the way Keats escapes - possibly allowed him to cope with the knowledge that he did not have long to live. But you are still a chameleon even when you have changed your colour. Underneath, Keats is still Keats, no matter what he does to escape the harsh reality.

**The Victorian Age**

Victorian age is named after Victoria, who became a queen in 1837 at age of 18 and ruled for 68 years until her death in 1901. So, the period from 1837 to 1901 is called Victorian era.

**Matthew Arnold (1822 -1888)**

A Victorian poet and cultural critic, who worked as an inspector of schools. Matthew Arnold has been characterised as a sage writer, a type of writer who chastises and instructs the reader on contemporary social issues.

**Matthew Arnold’s Touchstone Theory**

In his essay ‘The Study of Poetry’, the Victorian poet and critic Matthew Arnold states that **touchstone method is a comparative method of criticism**. According to this method, in order to judge a poet's work properly, a critic **should compare it to passages taken from works of great masters of poetry**, and that these passages should be applied as touchstones to other poetry. Even a single line or selected quotation will serve the purpose. If the other work moves us in the same way as these lines and expressions do, then it is really a great work, otherwise not. The **touchstone classic writers**, according to Arnold, are **Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and John Milton**.

**The Modern Age**

**T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)**

T.S. Eliot was born in Missouri in America, in 1888. For his lifetime of poetic innovation, Eliot won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948.

**Tradition according to T.S. Eliot**

In his essay, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919), T.S. Eliot spreads his concept of tradition, which reflects his reaction against romantic subjectivism and emotionalism. He also signifies the importance of the tradition. According to Eliot tradition is a living culture which is inherited from the past and also has an important function in forming (shaping) the present. To Eliot tradition is bound up with historical sense of a poet or writer. Historical sense is a perception that past is not something that is lost or invalid. Rather it has a function in the present.

[**T.S. Eliot's Theory of Depersonalisation**](http://www.literary-articles.com/2010/02/t-s-eliots-theory-of-depersonalization.html)

In ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’ (1919), Eliot propounded the doctrine that poetry should be impersonal and free itself from Romantic practices, ‘the progress of an author is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality’. He sees that in this depersonalisation, the art approaches science. For Eliot, emotions in poetry must be depersonalised. Artistic self-effacement is essential for great artistic work.

**T.S. Eliot’s Theory of Depersonalisation and John Keats’ The Chameleon Poet**

T.S. Eliot’s ‘impersonal poet’ has links with John Keats, who proposed a similar figure in ‘the chameleon poet’. Both emphasise that true art has nothing to do with the personal life of the artist. Eliot’s belief that ‘poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but **an escape from personality**’ sprang from what he viewed as the excesses of Romanticism. This idea of escapism is also evident in Keats’ poetry. There are many causes for his escape from actual life to the world of imaginary, such as his family loses, his physical ailment and poverty which prevented him from marrying his beloved, Fanny.