

# Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric

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## Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric

In his article "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," M. H. Abrams works to define what constitutes the greater Romantic lyric by turning to the philosophic undertones pervading the lyrical writings of William Wordsworth and more so of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Abrams's first task is to define what is meant by the term "[greater](#) Romantic lyric," a form which the critic states in no unbiased way "includes some of the greatest Romantic achievements in any form" (201). This longer Romantic poetic form is typified by "a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting" who carries on "a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene" (201). The structure of the greater Romantic lyric is as follows: the poem begins with the poet describing the immediate natural surroundings, which aspect triggers "memory, thought, [anticipation](#), and feeling" and leads to a meditation whereby the observer "achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem" (201). This cycle of completion is often marked by the poem returning back upon itself, a culmination back to the beginning.

The key ingredient in this structure is that it is centered on the role of the human, for even

though Romantic poetry is abundantly rich with descriptions of the natural world, Romantics are "humanists above all," describing the outer physical world only as it relates to man's self-reflective condition (202). This accounts for Wordsworth's fear that an all-consuming observation of the material world would "tyrannize over the mind and imagination" (202). But to fully explicate his definition of the greater Romantic lyric, Abrams turns not to Wordsworth but to Coleridge as the main focal point, for Coleridge is its chief author and [innovator](#), having brought forth the Romantic lyric in "The Eolian Harp" in 1796, a full two years before Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (204).

That Coleridge gives the appellation "conversation poems" to his own lyric poems (which also include "The Nightingale" and "This Lime-tree Bower") reflects for us the Romantics' focus on the primacy of the human dimension in the natural world. They are "conversational" in the sense that the poems involve a "dramatic mode of address to an unanswering listener" (206). These poems, then, follow the aforementioned formula of the speaker viewing a natural scene, reflecting meditatively on the scene and how it relates to the self, and reaching "the free movement of thought from the present scene to recollection in tranquility, to prayer-like prediction, and back to the scene" (206).

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