

*Romanticist Imagination in Realism: The Echoes of Wordsworth  
and Coleridge in the Works of Charles Dickens*

*Summary*

This article aims to determine the status of Charles Dickens within the poetics of realism by examining his understanding of the concept of imagination. The central problem that occurs in the analysis of this subject is that Dickens's flights of imagination often destabilise the credibility and objectivity of his writing. The theoretical poetical fragments of his work which refer to this subject evoke similar theoretical positions that were taken up by Dickens's romanticist predecessors, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Although he took a stand against the romanticist tendencies that were present in the literature of his time, the echoes of his predecessors become significant in Dickens's later works. Due to the fragmented and often contradictory nature of Dickens's theoretical notions, we have tried to gain a better understanding of them by seeking their traces within the fiction, treating both theoretical and artistic writing as valuable sources for our examination.

We have based this comparative analysis on the statements Coleridge offers in chapter fourteen of *Biographia Literaria*, when explaining the poetical aims of *Lyrical Ballads*. Here he declares that his endeavours were focused on showing the supernatural as veritable, whereas Wordsworth attempted to give the charm of novelty to ordinary things. Finding in Dickens's own theoretical fragments a statement analogous to what Coleridge sees as Wordsworth's role in creating *Lyrical Ballads*, we have attempted to show how Dickens presents the romantic side of reality in his writing. The results of this attempt suggest that although they start from a similar theoretical standpoint, the two authors end up creating different literary constructs. In the case of comparing Dickens to Wordsworth, our key subject was the representation of children and their use of the imaginative ability. Through this parallel, it becomes noticeable that Dickens's artistically relevant children characters create a form of imagination that is essentially different than the one present in Wordsworth's poetry.

As for the relation between Dickens's and Coleridge's work, we have found few connections among their theoretical notions. However, Coleridge's concept of poetic belief sheds significant light on Dickens's fiction, namely in its reception. Dickens's extensive use of imagination, which often subverts the realist code of writing, at times demands the romanticist code of reception, meaning that the reader must engage in a willing suspension of disbelief, as Coleridge would put it. This method of reading is profoundly contradictory to the aims of realism, and in that sense, Dickens makes one of his greatest transgressions within the poetics of realism.

To conclude, we have pointed out that Dickens should not only be considered a realist writer because the realist code is dominant in his fiction, but also because he uses romanticist notions in a different manner. Dickens's imagination, unlike the romanticists', does not tend to create new entities and realities; it tends to transform the given reality of the world, and therefore could not exist without it. In this sense, Dickens's fiction presents us with a novel form of imagination – the realistic imagination.

*Keywords:* Charles Dickens, William Wordsworth, Samuel T. Coleridge, imagination, Romanticism, Realism