



The Language of the Senses: Sensory-Perceptual Dynamics in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Thoreau, Whitman, and Dickinson

Kerry McSweeney

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McSweeney discusses the sensory acuity that informed Wordsworth's, Coleridge's, Thoreau's, Whitman's, and Dickinson's finest achievements and then, when blunted by illness or age, contributed to an attenuation of their creative power. He supplies a "sensory profile" or sensory history for each author and through close readings shows how this profile affected their relationship to the external world and their powers of symbolic perception. Using perspectives gleaned from the poets themselves and an understanding of the physiological ground of perception, McSweeney establishes a compelling theoretical basis for his approach. In clear and elegant prose, he studies the physical basis for aesthetic plenitude - such as the sensory manifold of synaesthesia - not only in the Romantic writers mentioned above but also in two Victorian poets, Hopkins and Tennyson.

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