



“Humanism in William Wordsworth’s Poetry”

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Abstract:

This research explores the pervasive theme of humanism in the poetry of William Wordsworth, a prominent figure in the Romantic literary movement of the 19th century. Wordsworth's works, particularly his famous collection "Lyrical Ballads," emphasize the significance of the individual's emotional and experiential connection with the natural world. This abstract delves into Wordsworth's emphasis on human emotions, the relationship between humanity and nature, and the celebration of the ordinary in his poetry. The study employs close reading and thematic analysis to uncover the humanistic elements in Wordsworth's poetry. It examines how Wordsworth portrays the sublime in everyday scenes, highlighting the dignity of common people and the beauty of the natural world. His concept of the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" underscores the centrality of human emotions in his work.

Keywords: William Wordsworth, poetry, humanism, emotions, Lyrical Ballads, etc.

Introduction:

William Wordsworth, one of the key figures of the Romantic literary movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, is renowned for his profound exploration of humanism in his poetry. His works have left an indelible mark on the world of literature, emphasizing the significance of human emotions, the profound connection between humanity and nature, and the celebration of the ordinary in life. This introduction provides an overview of the profound influence of humanism in Wordsworth's poetry, shedding light on its origins, its key themes, and its enduring relevance [1]. The late 18th century was a period of significant societal and intellectual change in Europe, marked by the Enlightenment and the rise of Romanticism. It was in this transformative landscape that William Wordsworth began to craft his poetic vision. Wordsworth's commitment to humanism, as articulated in his poetry, can be traced back to his experiences, including his upbringing in the Lake District of England, where he formed a deep connection with nature. His work reflects the idea that ordinary individuals and their emotions should be at the forefront of literary expression [2]. William Wordsworth, the renowned poet, came into the world

on the 7th of April, 1770, as the second offspring among a total of five siblings, in the town of Cockermouth situated in West Cumbria. The employment of John Wordsworth, the father of the subject, as a lawyer to Sir John Lowther, a wealthy landowner in England during that era, provided the family with a modest level of financial stability in a region that was not particularly renowned for its affluence [3].

During William Wordsworth's early years, his father's senior lawyer was frequently away on business related to Lowther. As a result, William Wordsworth became known as a solitary child, feeling disconnected from others save for his younger sister, Dorothy, with whom he had a strong and intimate relationship. The reason for his solitude might be attributed to behavioural issues, which significantly influenced his parents' choice to relocate him, at the age of six, to reside with his maternal grandparents in the town of Penrith in northern Cumbria [4]. During his time there, he enrolled in the nearby school. According to historical accounts, the grandparents of William Wordsworth were perceived as distant people of authority who had no active role in fostering his emotional growth. This circumstance was further exacerbated by the unfortunate event of his mother's demise in the year 1778 [5]. The occurrence resulted in a full fragmentation of the familial structure, leading William's father to make the decision of entrusting the care of his siblings to alternative guardians due to his inability to single-handedly provide for their upbringing. In the year 1779, William Wordsworth relocated once again, opting to attend a Grammar School situated in the bucolic village of Hawkshead, in close proximity to Windermere [11]. The individual resided in the residence of Anne Tyson and her spouse, a middle-aged couple in their sixties [6]. The school museum currently exhibits Anne's financial account records and a desk that bears the carved initials of the young William Wordsworth. Subsequently, his siblings subsequently accompanied him, whereas Dorothy was placed under the care of Elizabeth Threlkeld, a maternal relative, in the town of Halifax, located in the county of Yorkshire. The subsequent encounter between her and William was postponed for a considerable number of years. Additional disruption was introduced into his life when, in the year 1783, his father passed away, and Wordsworth remained indebted to the Lowther Estate for a substantial sum of money, a matter that remained unresolved until two decades later.

Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads," co-authored with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and published in 1798, stands as a seminal text in the history of Romantic literature [12]. This collection introduced a revolutionary approach to poetry, moving away from the artificial and ornate style of the preceding age. It placed a strong emphasis on the natural world and the emotional experiences of everyday people [7]. Central to this approach is Wordsworth's humanistic view that poetry should be accessible and relatable, aiming to evoke deep emotional responses from its readers. The humanistic elements in Wordsworth's poetry are multifaceted [7]. He believed that nature is not merely a backdrop for human experiences but an active and transformative force in the lives of individuals. Nature, in Wordsworth's works, is not just a picturesque landscape; it is a source of spiritual inspiration and a means of connecting with one's inner self. His famous poem "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" is a testament to this perspective, where he describes how nature can heal and soothe the human soul [8, 9]. Another fundamental aspect of Wordsworth's humanism is his celebration of the ordinary. He viewed the lives of

common people with a profound respect, elevating their everyday experiences to poetic significance. Wordsworth believed that the emotions and experiences of ordinary individuals were as worthy of poetic exploration as grand historical events or mythological tales [13, 14]. His poem "Michael" exemplifies this, narrating the life of a simple shepherd with deep empathy and dignity. His humanistic approach not only redefined the poetic landscape of his time but also continues to resonate with readers today, reminding us of the enduring power of human emotions and the beauty of the natural world [10].

In this study, we will delve into Wordsworth's poetry, employing close reading and thematic analysis to uncover the intricate layers of humanism present in his works. Through an exploration of his poems and prose, we will gain insights into how his deep appreciation for the human experience and the natural world has left an indelible mark on the field of literature and continues to inspire and captivate readers across the ages.

Effect of mother on Wordsworth poetry-

William Wordsworth, one of the most celebrated English Romantic poets, is renowned for his profound connection to nature and the emotions it evokes. While his natural surroundings played a pivotal role in shaping his poetic vision, it is crucial to recognize the significant influence of his relationship with his mother on his poetic oeuvre. Wordsworth's poetry, deeply rooted in his experiences, often reflects the nurturing and profound impact of motherhood on his life and creative expression. We will explore how the presence and absence of his mother influenced Wordsworth's poetry and provided a unique lens through which he examined the world [15, 16].

The Early Influence of Dorothy Wordsworth:

William Wordsworth's mother, Ann Wordsworth, died when he was just eight years old. However, the absence of his biological mother was somewhat compensated by his strong bond with his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth. She became a surrogate mother figure to William and was his constant companion. Dorothy's presence and their shared experiences in the idyllic Lake District profoundly influenced Wordsworth's poetic themes [17].

Dorothy's keen observation of nature and her ability to capture the essence of everyday life in her journals and letters inspired Wordsworth's fascination with the ordinary and the profound in nature. Her influence can be seen in his famous poem "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," where Wordsworth reflects on the restorative power of nature and the emotional connection he shares with Dorothy.

The Theme of Motherhood In Wordsworth's Poetry:

The theme of motherhood is recurrent in Wordsworth's poetry. He often portrays nature as a nurturing, maternal force that soothes, guides, and provides solace to humanity. For example, in his poem "To My Sister," Wordsworth expresses his deep love and affection for Dorothy, likening her to the moon, a celestial motherly presence in his life.

Additionally, Wordsworth's poetic works, such as "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (commonly known as "Daffodils"), demonstrate his deep appreciation for the beauty and serenity of the natural world, which he saw as a nurturing mother figure that could elevate one's spirits in times of solitude and melancholy [18].

The Absence of His Biological Mother:

The absence of Wordsworth's biological mother also had a profound impact on his poetry. It instilled in him a sense of loss and longing that permeates many of his works. In poems like "Lucy Gray" and "We Are Seven," Wordsworth explores themes of childhood innocence, mortality, and the emotional void left by his mother's death [19].

Effect of Society on Wordsworth's Poetry –

Wordsworth's poetry is not isolated from the society he lived in; it was significantly influenced by the societal changes and developments of his time. This article explores the profound impact of society on Wordsworth's poetry, shedding light on how the changing socio-political landscape influenced his works. Wordsworth was a product of his time, living during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a period marked by the aftermath of the French Revolution, industrialization, and radical political changes. These societal transformations had a direct influence on Wordsworth's poetry.

I. Nature as a Source of Solace: In Wordsworth's early poetry, nature was portrayed as a source of solace and spiritual renewal in a society disrupted by industrialization and political turmoil. His famous poem "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" demonstrates how the tranquility of the natural world offered a respite from the chaos of society. Wordsworth's focus on the restorative power of nature reflected the societal need for escape and inner peace.

II. The Lyrical Ballads: "The Lyrical Ballads," published in 1798 by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, stands as a seminal work in the history of English literature. This collection of poems is often considered the inception of the Romantic movement, characterized by a shift away from the traditional, formal poetry of the 18th century and a renewed focus on emotions, nature, and the everyday experiences of common people. In this scholarly article, we delve into "The Lyrical Ballads," emphasizing William Wordsworth's role and contributions, and explore its profound influence on the trajectory of poetry [20].

1. The Collaborative Genesis

"The Lyrical Ballads" was the result of a creative collaboration between Wordsworth and Coleridge. It comprised 23 poems, with Coleridge contributing four, including his famous "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." However, Wordsworth's contributions, particularly those in the first edition, are of central importance. His poems, such as "Lines Written in Early Spring" and "Tintern Abbey," set the tone for the collection by emphasizing simplicity, everyday language, and a deep connection to nature.

2. Nature as a Source of Inspiration

One of the hallmark features of Wordsworth's poetry in "The Lyrical Ballads" is the celebration of nature. He regarded nature as a living, breathing entity and believed that it held the key to the deepest emotions of the human soul. In poems like "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth reflects on the restorative power of nature and how it can offer solace in a rapidly changing and industrialized world [12].

3. Ordinary Lives and Emotions

Wordsworth's poetry in "The Lyrical Ballads" places a spotlight on the lives of common people and their everyday experiences. He believed that these ordinary experiences contained profound and universal emotions. In poems like "Michael" and "The Brothers," Wordsworth explores the trials and tribulations of rural life and the deep emotions that are part of the human condition.

4. Simplicity and Lyrical Style

"The Lyrical Ballads" were characterized by a departure from the ornate, artificial language of the 18th century. Wordsworth, in particular, championed a return to simplicity and the use of everyday language. This shift in style was a conscious reaction against the artificiality of the previous era, emphasizing the power of common speech to convey deep emotions and ideas.

5. Influence and Legacy

"The Lyrical Ballads" marked a turning point in English literature. It gave birth to the Romantic movement, which would have a lasting impact on poetry and art. Wordsworth's emphasis on the inner world of the individual, the beauty of nature, and the use of everyday language influenced a generation of poets and writers. His ideas on the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and the importance of the poet as a "man speaking to men" left an indelible mark on literary theory.

III. Radical Politics and Social Issues: Wordsworth was deeply affected by the radical political movements of his era. The French Revolution and its potential for societal upheaval influenced his political beliefs. Wordsworth's poem "The Prelude" reflects his fascination with political change and his belief in the power of the individual to effect social transformation [23].

1. **The French Revolution and Political Idealism:** Wordsworth's early years were marked by a fervent enthusiasm for the ideals of the French Revolution. He believed in the potential for political change and freedom. His poem "The Prelude" reflects his personal experiences in France during this period and his initial hope for a brighter political future. However, the disillusionment that followed, particularly with the Reign of Terror, led to a shift in his views.
2. **Disillusionment and Critique of Radicalism:** As the French Revolution took a violent turn, Wordsworth's optimism waned. This disillusionment is palpable in poems such as "The Prelude," where he begins to

question the efficacy of radical politics and the consequences of revolutionary fervor. He expressed concerns about the loss of individual freedoms in the face of collective ideologies.

3. Reflections on Nature and Politics: Wordsworth's poetry often intertwines his reflections on nature with his evolving political beliefs. His focus on the tranquil and redemptive power of nature, seen in poems like "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," can be interpreted as a response to the turmoil and radicalism of his time. Nature becomes a refuge and a source of stability amid the political upheaval.
4. Celebration of the Common People: Wordsworth's commitment to common humanity and the lives of ordinary people is a significant aspect of his poetry. He advocated for social equality and gave voice to the marginalized. His poem "Michael" tells the story of a humble shepherd, highlighting the dignity and worth of everyday individuals, aligning with the egalitarian ideals of the Romantic era.
5. Resistance to Industrialization: Wordsworth's work is also marked by his resistance to the negative impacts of industrialization and urbanization. As the Industrial Revolution transformed rural landscapes and traditional ways of life, Wordsworth mourned the loss of natural beauty and the connection to the land. In "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," he contrasts the beauty of nature with the mechanization of society.
6. The Role of the Poet as a Moral Guide: Wordsworth believed that poets had a moral duty to guide society towards a more enlightened and humane path. His poetry emphasizes the poet's role as a moral teacher and a defender of individual and societal values. In "Lines Written in Early Spring," he reflects on the cyclical nature of life and encourages contemplation of one's place in the world.

IV. The Impact of Industrialization: The industrial revolution was in full swing during Wordsworth's lifetime, leading to the rapid urbanization and degradation of the natural environment. Wordsworth's poetry often mourns the loss of rural landscapes and the alienation of people from nature. In "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," he laments the loss of a once idyllic natural setting to industrialization [24, 22].

V. The Role of Childhood and Imagination: Wordsworth's belief in the purity and wisdom of childhood is evident in his poetry. He recognized that society's corruption could be ameliorated by returning to the innocence and creativity of youth. In "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Early Childhood," Wordsworth contemplates the loss of childhood wonder in a society driven by materialism [21].

Conclusion

William Wordsworth's poetry is a testament to the profound influence of motherhood on his life and creative expression. From the nurturing bond with his sister Dorothy, which shaped his poetic vision, to his exploration of the absence of his biological mother, Wordsworth's work reflects the multifaceted role of mothers in our lives. His poems celebrate the maternal aspects of nature, explore themes of love, loss, and longing, and provide a unique perspective on the enduring impact of motherhood. The mother figures in Wordsworth's life were not only

his muses but also the embodiment of the emotional depth and connection that defines his poetry. Through his words, we see a poet who was deeply influenced by the maternal forces that surrounded him, leaving an indelible mark on the landscape of English Romantic poetry. “The Lyrical Ballads” by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge is a landmark in the history of English literature. Wordsworth’s contributions to this collection, marked by his celebration of nature, the ordinary lives of people, and the use of everyday language, transformed the poetic landscape of his time. “The Lyrical Ballads” initiated a poetic revolution that emphasized the importance of emotions, simplicity, and the profound impact of nature. Wordsworth’s ideas continue to resonate with poets and readers today, making “The Lyrical Ballads” an enduring and influential work in the canon of English literature. William Wordsworth’s poetry is a testament to the profound influence of society on artistic expression. The changing socio-political landscape of the late 18th and early 19th centuries in England had a profound impact on his works. Wordsworth’s engagement with nature, his rejection of artificial language, his fascination with radical politics, and his reaction to industrialization all stemmed from the societal shifts of his time. His poetry not only reflects these influences but also offers insights into how the individual can navigate and respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Thus, Wordsworth’s poetic legacy endures as a unique and invaluable exploration of the interaction between the individual and society. The effect of radical politics and social issues on Wordsworth’s poetry is undeniable. His early political idealism, disillusionment, and evolving views on radicalism are evident in his work. Wordsworth’s commitment to the common people, his critique of industrialization, and his belief in the redemptive power of nature reflect the societal changes and challenges of his time. His poetry continues to be a rich source for understanding the intersection of individual experiences, political beliefs, and societal transformations in the tumultuous period of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Wordsworth’s engagement with these issues makes his poetry a timeless exploration of the interplay between the individual and society.

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