



# Ecological Concern in the Poetry of Wordsworth

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## ABSTRACT

Wordsworth, one of the representative poets of the English Romanticism, is regarded as the greatest Nature poet till date. Nature remained the everlasting theme in his poetry. He viewed Nature as superior to humans. He considered it as the guiding force. His views about Nature as reflected in his poems appear to heal the long-forgotten wounds of Nature by advocating the unification of man and Nature. Wordsworth repeatedly emphasizes the importance of nature to an individual's intellectual and spiritual development. He conveys his experiences with nature to readers through his poem using vibrant imagery, a narrative-like structure, and abstract metaphors.

Therefore, the present paper focuses on Wordsworth's cautious views about the interdependence of man and Nature in the light of his selected poems. An attempt has also been made in the paper to cater to the enormous need for literary-linguistic investigation of leitmotifs of nature in Wordsworth's poetry acting as a means of facilitating environmental sensitivity and sensibility among modern men.

**Key Words:** Ecology, nature, consciousness, interdependence, sensitivity.

William Wordsworth, one of the founders of English Romanticism and the leading voice of romantic poetry, is considered as one of the greatest poets of Nature in English literature. His fame primarily lies in the general notion that he has been considered as a poet who views Nature superior to man and even claims that the existence of Man depends upon Nature. His love for Nature is easily noticed in his poetry. His poems deeply explore the communion of Nature and man. The ideas of ecological harmony and holistic unity between human being and Nature are pervasive in his poetry.

As a child he saw the wondrous beauty of the Lake District and developed a special love for nature. In his spare time, he even visited places well-known for their scenic beauty. Later he was involved in the French Revolution and his heart was inspired by the movement. It seemed that he could see a new light of freedom in the world. However, the conflict between France and Britain in 1793 made him disheartened, also he was greatly disappointed by the unplanned industrialization which brought sufferings to people as well as to the environment. He condemns the Industrial Revolution and appreciates Nature, and by doing this, he apparently encourages ecological equality and environmental protection. In his influential book, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Imagination*, Bate (1991, p. 57) proclaims that Romantics were "the first ecologists" due to their challenging and countering "the ideology of capital" and originating a "holistic vision" of Nature. In his *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*, McKusick (2000, p. 19) contends that "English Romantics were the first full-fledged eco-critical writers in the Western literary tradition" in that they shared a holistic view of Nature and called the arrival of an amicable relationship between man and Nature.

Wordsworth's emphasis on man's dependence on Nature for existence is clearly shown in his poems. So, he composed a substantial number of poems to promote equality and harmony between Nature and human beings. His poems prove his ecological and environmental concerns and could be put into two groups: poems about nature and poems about human life. Nature was something that gave him zest and peace. In his whole life, Wordsworth put all his deep love into nature, and believed the beauty of nature could thrill people. Therefore,

nature was the everlasting theme in his poetry. In his opinion, nature could bring people peace, inspiration, and psychological solace so much so that, under his pen, all the aspects of nature appear alive. He believed that nature could enrich people's heart, brought pleasure to them. Wordsworth's emphasis on human being's dependence on Nature for survival is clearly shown in *The Ruined Cottage* (1797-ca. 1799), wherein he says:

At length [towards] the [Cottage I returned]

Fondly, and traced with milder interest

That secret spirit of humanity

Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies

Of nature, 'mid her plants, her weeds, and flowers,

And silent overgrowings, still survived. (Wordsworth, 2006, p. 1367, lines 501-506).

Ecocriticism is rather a new approach in which the relationship between literature and nature is demonstrated in the works of art. It showed the role and influence of nature in the literary works and vice versa. In general, it means the understanding of the law of the nature's variety. People's understanding to nature can broadly be divided into four stages. At first, because of their thinking limitation and low capability, Man treated nature as God. Therefore, they were afraid of the wild and changeable nature. In the second stage, people complied with nature and started extracting what they needed from it and even tried to change it slightly. Then in the third stage, they felt confident about nature and believed that they could conquer it with more efforts. Therefore, they assumed themselves as the ruler of nature, trying to change and control it. After the industrialization, people kept on extracting things from nature and their desire was beyond the sustainable range of nature, which consequently disturbed the balance between nature and man. However, in the last stage, people realized that their survival depends on their coexistence with nature. It is because of this realization; Wordsworth has been recognized as one of the most important ecological poets since the last few decades. His poems aptly reflect his deep love for the beautiful scenery, his experiences in nature and his concern for the pretty Lakes. He had made the Lake District his home for nearly his whole life. In his poetry, he appears to be deeply concerned with the good relationship between man and nature. He not only described about the beautiful nature, but also expressed the implied meaning of the relationship between man and nature. From ecological views, we see that the most obvious feature in Wordsworth's poetry lies in his keen perception of beauty of nature and the close relationship between man and nature. In "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," the poet mainly describes his discovering a large patch of country daffodils moving in the light wind and its lasting effect on his quiet moments of reverie after he left irksome city life. It seemed that the cloud, vales, hills, daffodils, and the poet himself formed an organic unity. Wordsworth put himself in nature and even he was immersed himself in nature. So, he related: "I wandered lonely as a cloud/ That floats on high o'er vales and hills," [3]. All his concerns represented in his poetry embodies his ecological consciousness.

Wordsworth introduces man as close friend of nature and in most of his poems he puts himself in the heart of nature. However, in his times, the Industrial Revolution created a great difference between the rich and the poor. Wordsworth experienced and observed the terrible conditions and showed pity for the poor. So, he held a critical attitude to the ruling class. He was pained by the burgeoning advent of technology which changed the landscape from that of the ages before industrial revolution. He strongly advocated that without the company of nature man can never survive which was also the chief concept of eco critics. Bate (1991, p. 40) as a true follower of Wordsworth, who in his *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Imagination* maintains, "The 'Romantic Ecology' reverences the green earth because it recognizes that neither physically nor psychologically can we live without green things". As an eco-critic, Bate does not intend to draw a line between the "material world" and natural one. The new mentality that Romantic poets spoke of is what Bate explains as, "a respect for the earth and scepticism as to the orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society" (9). Wordsworth's sonnet, "The World is Too Much with Us", written in 1802 and published

in 1807, can be a good justification for Bate's argument wherein the poet says:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:

Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! (Lines 1-4)

Wordsworth is disappointed with the modern man's passive treatment of Nature and shows that man is banished from the natural elements of Nature, e.g., the poet says:

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not... (Lines 5-9)

The ecocritical concerns regarding the changes and destruction of nature by human beings could be traced in Wordsworth's poems. As against the materialistic concept of nature, in most of his poems, Wordsworth picks nature and humble people as his topics. Not only for Wordsworth but also for other Romantic poets, nature is quite valuable. Besides, they also felt that talking about nature could help in its preservation. "Early Spring" is an obvious example of Wordsworth's preoccupation with nature and what happened to it. The poem starts with lines describing the persona in a relaxed condition, in a calm natural landscape. He is enjoying the tranquillity and peace he finds in the harmony of all elements of nature, where "thousand notes" are "blended" to make a harmonious one and interestingly this sound runs through the persona and fills him with joy and exuberance (Early Spring, lines 1-2).

In the contemporary world due to the rapid development of the society and industrialization, people's thoughts have been greatly changed, and they pay more attention to the material things and their life becomes money-centred. They are out to get what they can from nature, and even they disturb the balance of nature. Therefore, everywhere we can see the images of environmental destruction. The result is that people are badly hurt from these disasters. In order to meet with their own needs, they exploit nature madly and the interrelationship between man and nature is being destroyed. [9] Now people have realized that they rely on nature and they should respect and protect nature. Thus, Wordsworth's ecological concern becomes even more significant in the modern world. Wordsworth's poetry makes the modern people reconsider their attitude towards nature from the ecological perspective.

### Conclusion

To conclude, Wordsworth's "ecological" poems provide the contemporary materialistic man, a new lens through which he can see the inseparable relation and harmony between Nature and man in a vast ecosystem of the world. Wordsworth considered Nature as the supreme power which not only consoled him but also purified his soul. His poetry strongly reflects his belief that nature has a positive influence on man's growth, spirit, and health. So, the good relationship between nature and man is beneficial for man's existence. Therefore, it is true to say that Wordsworth's poetry can arouse man's ecological ideas and motivate him to protect nature.

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