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## Man And Nature: An Ecocritical Study Of Selected Poems Of William Wordsworth

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### Abstract

Concern for environmental degradation has been a key focus in literary works from Romanticism to Ecocriticism. Strengthening the human-nature relationship is an absolute priority. This research explores the study of selected poems of William Wordsworth through ecocritical lens. Ecocriticism studies the literary texts from an environmental perspective. Wordsworth, the greatest devotee of nature, invites readers to reconnect with the primal forces of nature and to recognize their intrinsic connection to earth. Wordsworth's poetry offers a profound meditation on the human-nature relationship, as most of the ecocritics do. Let us endeavour to achieve a future where we co-exist with nature in harmony. This paper will keenly examine the ecocritical aspects in the selected poems of William Wordsworth.

**Keywords:** environmental degradation, Romanticism, Ecocriticism, nature, human-nature relationship, William Wordsworth

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### Introduction

*“Come forth into the light of things,*

*Let Nature be your teacher.”*

— William Wordsworth

We share a deep and undeniable connection with nature that we all must recognize. Our very existence relies on the precious resources that nature provides, like the air we breathe and the food that nourishes us. It's important to understand that our actions can greatly affect the delicate balance of ecosystems and climate patterns. By being mindful of this, we can work together to protect and cherish the environment that sustains us all.

Nature is the life source of mother earth. Humans have a great responsibility to preserve and conserve natural resources for their survival on this planet. To strengthen the bond between nature and human beings is the dire need of the hour. This paper focuses to bridge the gap between human-nature relationship as the pressing priority.

The human race has reached a critical point of environmental limits, where our actions are harming the planet's life support systems. Anthropogenic impacts include changes to ecosystems, loss of biodiversity, global warming, and environmental degradation like ocean acidification. Activities such as population growth, over consumption, pollution, and deforestation are causing significant damage. Problems like global warming and biodiversity loss pose catastrophic risks to human survival, highlighting the need for greater environmental awareness.

From Romanticism to Ecocriticism, nature only has been a topic of major concern. William Wordsworth, a leading figure in the Romantic movement, was profoundly shaped by the Industrial Revolution, yet he staunchly opposed its effects. His poetry powerfully expresses his resistance to industrialization, championing nature, rural life, and emotional depth over the harsh realities of mechanization and urbanization.

Wordsworth poignantly contrasts the beauty of nature with the devastation caused by humanity, a reflection of the significant social and environmental changes during the Industrial Revolution. His heartfelt line, "Have I not reason to lament what man has made of man?" expresses a deep sorrow for the moral and social consequences that industrialization has wrought, inviting us to share in his empathy for those affected by these overwhelming changes.

## Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is the study of human nature relationship. It examines the intricate relationship between literature and the environment.

Ecocriticism as a concept first arose in the late 1970s, at meetings of the WLA (the Western Literature Association, a body whose field of interest is the literature of the American West). In his introduction to a series of brief position papers (all entitled 'What is ecocriticism?') Michael P. Branch 'traces the word "ecocriticism" back to William Rueckert's 1978 essay 'Literature and ecology: an experiment in ecocriticism'.<sup>1</sup> A claim for first usage in literary criticism of the related term 'ecological' is made by prominent US ecocritic Karl Kroeber, whose article "'Home at Grasmere": ecological holiness', appeared in the journal *PMLA*, 89, 1974, pp. 132-41. Both terms ('ecocriticism' and 'ecological') apparently lay dormant in the critical vocabulary (says Branch) until the 1989 WLA conference (in Coeur d'Alene, USA), when Cheryll Glotfelty (at the time a graduate student at Cornell University, subsequently Associate Professor of Literature and the Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno) not only revived the term 'ecocriticism', but urged its adoption to refer to the diffuse critical field that had previously been known as the study of nature writing'. (Barry,161)

The word ecocriticism is combination of ecology and criticism

Ecology :

The word ecology has originated from Greek word Oecology-ecology

[ekoloji'] from Greek, oikoc. Credit for coining ecology in 1869 goes to Ernst Haeckel a German zoologist. He is founder of biogenetics.

Ecology is the branch of biology that deals with the relations of

organisms to one another and to physical surroundings. It is also the study of the interaction of people with their environment. It is also called as bionomics.

Studying ecology is essential because even a minor change in the environment can profoundly impact all living organisms. The extinction of one species can lead to the demise of many others. We must stop harming our environment due to a lack of understanding of ecology; the more knowledge we gain, the better equipped we are to protect it.

Etymologically the word criticism is derived from the Greek word meaning 'judgment' and literary criticism is the exercise of judgment on works of literature. Criticism is play of the mind on a work of literature and its function is to examine its excellences and defects and finally to evaluate its artistic worth.

Eco-criticism is known by a number of other designations such as

“Green (cultural) studies”

“Eco-poetics”

“Environmental literary criticism”

“Literary - ecology”

“Eco - theory”

Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' (1962) unequivocally laid the groundwork for ecocriticism, the dynamic interdisciplinary study of literature and the environment. By masterfully intertwining scientific analysis with evocative poetic language, Carson not only shaped environmental policy but also transformed the literary landscape, compelling writers to confront ecological issues with urgency and depth.

The term 'ecocriticism' was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". It takes an interdisciplinary point of view by analyzing the works of authors, researchers and poets in the context of environmental issues and nature. Some ecocritics brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation, though not all ecocritics agree on the purpose, methodology, or scope of ecocriticism.

Some definitions of Ecocriticism by different scholars:

Lawrence Buell, a pioneering figure in ecocriticism, defines it as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (from his book "The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture").

Glotfelty, another influential scholar in the field, describes ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (from her essay "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis").

Greg Garrard offers a comprehensive definition, stating that ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, and the ways in which literature reflects and shapes human attitudes to the environment" (from his book "Ecocriticism").

Simon C. Estok emphasizes the political dimensions of ecocriticism, defining it as "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment, construed broadly, including both nonfictional and fictional texts, historical and contemporary materials, and discourses of resistance and domination" (from his article "Toward A "Sustainable" Ecocriticism").

Glen A. Love characterizes ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment, emphasizing its potential to challenge the anthropocentrism of Western culture" (from his essay "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism").

## Human-Nature Relationship

Early humans exhibited an impressive ability to utilize a broad spectrum of natural resources, reflecting their resourcefulness and adaptability. They demonstrated significant expertise in hunting, gathering, and fishing, which enabled them to maintain a diverse and sustainable food supply. The subsequent development of agriculture represented a pivotal shift, showcasing their capacity to domesticate plants and animals. This advancement laid the groundwork for the establishment of permanent settlements and contributed to the emergence of complex societies.

In *Walden*, Thoreau emphasized humans' deep spiritual and material dependence on nature.

He advocated for a simple life in harmony with nature, warning against industrialization's detachment from the natural world.

Marx viewed nature as both a source of human survival and a means of production.

In *Das Kapital*, he criticized capitalism for exploiting natural resources unsustainably, arguing that a just system must recognize the ecological limits of production.

Throughout history, humans and nature have coexisted in balance. However, the growing pursuit of human desires and technological advancement has led to the exploitation of nature. This shift has harmed the environment and poses a serious threat to our survival. If we don't take decisive action to reduce our negative impact, we risk causing irreversible damage and further disrupting the delicate balance of our coexistence with nature.

Damien Carrington, The Environment editor of the newspaper 'The Guardian' published an article on climate crisis showing major environmental concern. (19<sup>th</sup> March 2025)

The world is already deep into the climate crisis, with the WMO report saying that for the first time, the 10 hottest years on record all occurred in the last decade. However, global carbon emissions have continued to rise, which will bring even worse impacts. Experts were particularly critical of the purge of climate scientists and programmes by the US president, Donald Trump, saying that ignoring reality left ordinary people paying the price.

“Leaders must step up – seizing the benefits of cheap, clean renewables for their people and economies – with new national climate plans due this year,” said the UN secretary general, António Guterres.

## **Eco consciousnesses in human-nature relationship**

The Three Ps of Sustainable Development highlight the need to balance three key dimensions:

1. People (Social Sustainability) – Focuses on equity, social well-being, human rights, and quality of life for current and future generations, including education, healthcare, and fair labor practices.
2. Planet (Environmental Sustainability) – Emphasizes the protection of natural resources, pollution reduction, climate change mitigation, and biodiversity conservation.
3. Profit (Economic Sustainability) – Aims for long-term economic growth without depleting resources or exploiting communities, focusing on ethical business practices and fair wages.

Balancing these aspects is essential for true sustainable development.

Under the United Nations Development Programme, the Sustainable Goals (SDGs) are aimed at transforming the world. Where the 13<sup>th</sup> SDG is Climate Action. All the nations of the world actively participate to keep the planet green and safe for the coming generations.

The young Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, 16, addressed the U.N.'s Climate Action Summit in New York City with her thundering voice:

"My message is that we'll be watching you.

"This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!

"You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"

She made a strong appeal to leaders of the world to take strict action by changing the rules to save our planet since it is the dire need of the hour.

Ecocriticism emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the growing environmental crisis. It examines how literature represents and influences human interactions with the natural world. Ecocritics revisit Romantic literature to explore how early literary traditions shaped modern environmental consciousness.

Romantic literature offers a historical foundation for ecocriticism by emphasizing the beauty, power, and necessity of nature. Revisiting Romanticism through an ecocritical lens helps us understand contemporary environmental challenges and the urgent need for sustainable living.

For example, Wordsworth's poetry, when viewed ecocritically, warns of humanity's increasing separation from the natural world—an issue still relevant in today's climate crisis.

## Results and Discussion

### William Wordsworth

Wordsworth's poetry powerfully portrays nature as a profound source of wisdom, emotional richness, and spiritual awakening. His insights foreshadow modern ecological concerns, underscoring the urgent need to reconnect with the natural world in order to safeguard both our environment and the essence of the human spirit. When examined through an ecocritical lens, Wordsworth's verses resonate deeply, offering compelling perspectives on the timeless and essential bond between humanity and nature.

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! (Wordsworth, 2006, p. 1394, lines 1-4)

Wordsworth expresses his displeasure with the way modern man disregards nature and highlights that the consequence of this neglect is the separation of man from the natural elements, which results in the unification of these elements. Wordsworth's words, "For this, for everything, we are out of tune; / It moves us not ..." (Wordsworth, 2006, p. 1394, lines 8-9) further emphasize this point. Wordsworth is upset with the modern man's neglectful treatment of Nature and shows that the punishment of him/her is the unification of the natural elements from which man is banished. Wordsworth was a true nature poet with notable concern for man and environment. McKusick (2000, p. 5) maintains that Wordsworth was not only one of the "founders of English Romanticism", but had a "vital influence" on and "contributed to the fundamental ideas and core values of the modern environmental movement" (p. 11).

Jonathan Bate & Lawrence Buell (*The Environmental Imagination*, 1995) align Wordsworth with the principles of deep ecology, emphasizing that he views nature as a living entity with intrinsic value. They highlight his belief that immersing oneself in the natural world fosters spiritual and moral growth. The *Prelude* presents Wordsworth's personal experiences with nature, illustrating it as a transformative force that shapes his awareness. The *Snowstorm* (Book 11, lines 303-335) Wordsworth vividly illustrates a snowstorm that envelops him, fundamentally altering his perception of his surroundings and reshaping his sense of identity.

*"The perfect stillness of the heavens, the clearness  
Self-presence of the Universe, upheld  
By the perpetual Sabbath of the soul."*

In this moment, he confidently embraces spiritual transcendence, as nature expertly guides him to a deep and lasting inner peace.

"I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807) The poem beautifully illustrates the profound impact nature has on our emotions and thoughts. In moments of solitude, Wordsworth finds uplifting companionship within the embrace of nature.

*"For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude."*

When viewed through an ecocritical lens, "Daffodils" vividly highlights the awe-inspiring beauty and immense power of nature. It powerfully advocates for a meaningful emotional and spiritual connection with the natural world. The memory of the daffodils lingers in Wordsworth's mind, serving as a continuous source of inspiration that reminds us of the profound impact nature can have on our lives.

*"A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company."*

This strongly illustrates Wordsworth's conviction that nature possesses the power to uplift the human spirit. Even in times of solitude, nature inherently brings joy and serves as a vital restorative force.

In E. Hershey Sneath's book *Wordsworth: Poet Of Nature & Poet Of Man* says: He possesses an undeniable connection to the all-pervading Spirit in Nature, which resonates powerfully with his soul, fostering a heightened awareness of its presence and activity both in Nature and in humanity—an experience unlike any he has encountered before.

This is precisely why he regards Nature as an unwavering anchor for his noblest thoughts, confidently calling it a "nurse," a "guide," a "guardian" of his heart, and the very essence of his moral being.

*"And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense of sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods.  
And mountains; and of all that we behold  
From this green earth; of all the mighty world  
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,  
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of the sense  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being."*

Derived from Wordsworth's *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, 91-93.

Kate Rigby (*"Topographies of the Sacred,"* 2004) posits that Wordsworth's poetry reflects a profound connection to the natural world, positioning him as a guide. Rigby asserts that Wordsworth's poetry powerfully conveys a sacred connection to the natural world, establishing him as one of the pioneering poets to recognize nature as a profound spiritual and moral guide.

*"Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;  
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,  
And, even with something of a mother's mind,  
And no unworthy aim,  
The homely nurse doth all she can  
To make her foster-child, her inmate Man,  
Forget the glories he hath known."*

--"Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (1804-1806)

These lines reflect Wordsworth's complex relationship with nature. While he reveres nature as a source of wisdom and inspiration, he also acknowledges its role in grounding humans in the physical world, sometimes at the cost of their spiritual awareness. However, throughout the *Ode*, he suggests that nature still holds the power to rekindle this lost connection, allowing humans to glimpse the transcendent even in the midst of earthly life.

In *The Tables Turned* (1798), William Wordsworth presents nature as the ultimate teacher and guide, advocating for a shift from bookish learning to direct experience with the natural world. The poem embodies an early form of eco-consciousness, emphasizing the wisdom, joy, and moral clarity that nature offers to humanity. Wordsworth passionately implores his readers and all of humanity to cast aside the confines of books and fully embrace the profound wisdom that nature has to offer.

*"Come forth into the light of things,  
Let Nature be your teacher."*

*"She has a world of ready wealth,  
Our minds and hearts to bless—  
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,  
Truth breathed by cheerfulness."*

Wordsworth asserts that genuine wisdom transcends academic learning, emerging instead from direct engagement with the natural world. In its simplicity and purity, nature offers a more profound and spiritually enriching education than any formal schooling can provide. In "The Tables Turned," Wordsworth expresses a heartfelt belief that nature serves as a profound teacher, offering insights that go beyond what we can find in books. He gently encourages us to step away from our texts and immerse ourselves in the beauty of the natural world. This perspective reflects an early awareness of our connection to the environment and advocates for a deeper, more respectful relationship with it. By learning from nature, we have the opportunity to rediscover joy, truth, and a sense of moral responsibility toward the earth and all its wonders.

William Wordsworth's poem "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" (1798) presents a profound reflection on nature, illustrating an early awareness of eco-consciousness. The poem emphasizes the spiritual, emotional, and ethical importance of the natural world. Through his heartfelt connection to the Wye Valley landscape, Wordsworth articulates a deep respect for nature and acknowledges its significant role in shaping human thought and morality.

*"Nature never did betray  
The heart that loved her."*

This personification of nature as a nurturing and educational force clearly exemplifies an early form of environmental ethics. It asserts that humans ought to coexist harmoniously with nature's rhythms rather than exploit it for personal gain.

## Conclusion

Thus we can say that Wordsworth's poetry touches on a deep sense of environmental awareness, recognizing the intrinsic value of nature and expressing concern over industrialization's impact. He encourages a nurturing relationship between humans and the natural world, inviting us to reflect on our connection to the environment. His work serves as a poignant reminder for modern eco-conscious movements, urging us to understand that caring for and preserving nature is not only essential for our survival but also a vital moral and spiritual responsibility we share.

William Wordsworth's poetry powerfully delves into the profound and evolving relationship between humanity and nature, illuminating both its spiritual depth and ethical urgency. In celebrated works such as "Tintern Abbey," "The Tables Turned," and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," Wordsworth articulates an early vision of eco-consciousness, passionately advocating for a deep reverence toward nature as a vital teacher, healer, and moral compass.

In essence, Wordsworth envisions the human-nature relationship as one of profound interdependence. He urges us to transcend mere admiration of nature's beauty and to embrace it as an indispensable spiritual and moral guide. This compelling eco-conscious perspective is not only relevant but crucial in our contemporary world, reminding us of the vital connection we share with the environment.

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