

Nature as a Moral and Spiritual Force in Wordsworth's Poetry

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Abstract

This study aims at studying the conception of nature in William Wordsworth's poetry. As one of the remarkable representatives of the romantic period, William Wordsworth played an incomparable significant role in the development of English romantic poetry, and also laid a foundation for its further development. Influenced by social background and personal experience, Wordsworth's natural poetry broke through the shackles of neoclassical literature and gradually formed his own unique conception of nature. Wordsworth's conception of nature was based on the relationship between man and nature, and it emphasized the role of nature in social life and spiritual redemption. By analyzing the relationship between man and nature and constantly seeking the essence of life in nature, the poet attempted to find a way to solve human's problems. Although there have been a lot of researches on Wordsworth and his poetry, there are few studies that systematically analyze the conception of nature in William Wordsworth's poems by integrating his natural poetry into a whole. Based on William Wordsworth's personal experience and social background, this thesis attempts to analyze the causes of the formation of Wordsworth's conception of nature. Through the careful interpretation of Wordsworth's natural poetry, this thesis summarizes his conception of nature and its characteristics. It was found that in William Wordsworth's natural poems, nature was the unity of human nature, rational nature and divine nature, and the combination of the three was the highest attribute sought by human beings. Mastering these characteristics is of great reference values for the study of romantic natural poetry and Wordsworth's conception of nature.

Keywords: Romantic poetry, William Wordsworth, Conception of nature

الطبيعة كقوة أخلاقية وروحية في شعر وردزورث

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة مفهوم الطبيعة في شعر ويليام وردزورث. باعتباره أحد الممثلين البارزين للفترة الرومانسية، لعب ويليام وردزورث دوراً مهماً لا يضاهي في تطوير الشعر الرومانسي الإنجليزي، كما وضع أيضاً الأساس لمزيد من التطوير. متأثراً بالخلفية الاجتماعية والخبرة الشخصية، اخترق شعر وردزورث الطبيعي أغلال الأدب الكلاسيكي الجديد وشكل تدريجياً مفهومه الفريد للطبيعة. كان مفهوم

وردزورث للطبيعة مبنياً على العلاقة بين الإنسان والطبيعة، وشدد على دور الطبيعة في الحياة الاجتماعية والفداء الروحي. من خلال تحليل العلاقة بين الإنسان والطبيعة والبحث المستمر عن جوهر الحياة في الطبيعة، حاول الشاعر إيجاد طريقة لحل مشاكل الإنسان. على الرغم من وجود الكثير من الأبحاث حول وردزورث وشعره، إلا أن هناك القليل من الدراسات التي تحلل بشكل منهجي مفهوم الطبيعة في قصائد ويليام وردزورث من خلال دمج شعره الطبيعي في كل بناء على تجربة ويليام وردزورث الشخصية وخلفيته الاجتماعية، تحاول هذه الأطروحة تحليل أسباب تكوين مفهوم وردزورث للطبيعة. ومن خلال التفسير الدقيق لشعر وردزورث الطبيعي، تلخص هذه الأطروحة مفهومه عن الطبيعة وخصائصها. وقد تبين أن الطبيعة في قصائد ويليام وردزورث الطبيعية هي وحدة الطبيعة البشرية، والطبيعة العقلانية، والطبيعة الإلهية، وكان الجمع بين الثلاثة هو أعلى صفة يسعى إليها الإنسان. يعد إتقان هذه الخصائص ذا قيم مرجعية عظيمة لدراسة الشعر الطبيعي الرومانسي ومفهوم وردزورث للطبيعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر الرومانسي، وليام وردزورث، مفهوم الطبيعة

1.1 Introduction

In English literature, the Romantic Period is considered to begin with the publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's Lyrical Ballads and end with the death of novelist Sir Walter Scott. The historical and literary contexts and effects spanned a longer time period. No other period in English literature displays more variety in style, theme, and content than the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' Romantic Movement. Furthermore, no period has been the subject of so much debate and misunderstanding about its defining principles and aesthetics. Romanticism was most influential in England from the late eighteenth century until 1832. Until around 1870, Poetry was its primary mode of expression (Ferber 23).

These new concerns were viewed as a valid response to the era's extremes of change and uncertainty. The Western world had been jolted by two political revolutions, in America (1776) and France (1789), as well as an industrial revolution, that was beginning to erode many people's traditionally agrarian lives. The period during which the Industrial Revolution began to take shape. A revolutionary energy was also at the heart of Romanticism, which set out to transform not only the theory and practice of poetry (and all art), but every perception of the world. Some of its major precepts survived into the twentieth century and continue to have relevance today. New ways of living necessitated new ways of thinking. For lack of a better term, Romanticism came to represent this new world experience. The true Romantic poet was not an overly sensitive dreamer, but a heroic figure confronted with the painful realities of this time - a genius figure (Chiara 20). The Romantic movement in art and literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a reaction to the previous centuries' Neoclassicism. The term romantic literature was coined by the German poet, Friedrich Schlegel, who defined it as "literature depicting emotional matter in an

imaginative form"(21). Romanticism's focal points are undoubtedly imagination, emotion, and freedom. Subjectivity and an emphasis on individualism; spontaneity; freedom from rules; solitary life rather than social life; beliefs that imagination is superior to reason and devotion to beauty; love of and worship of nature; and fascination with the past, especially the myths and mysticism of the middle ages. Romanticism became synonymous with authenticity, integrity, and spontaneity. It was regarded as a positive artistic and intellectual assertion of the human psyche's extremes, areas of experience beyond logic and reason that could only be expressed directly and heartfelt (22). The poet in romantic movement was mainly individualistic creator in which the self-creativity of himself was more important than the restriction of formal rules and traditional methods. The great poets of this movement divided into two generations, the first generation of Romantics was also known as the Lake Poets because of their attachment to the Lake District, in the north-west of England, including William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge(Bloom 6).

1.1 what is Romanticism

The Romantic Movement in English sets in 1798; their main themes are the nature, beauty, purity, and innocence. The term Romantic as a designation for a school of literature opposed to the Classic is first used by the German critic Karl Wilhelm Friedrich at the beginning of the 19th century. The Romantic as a term is first used by the romantic poets in France who depend on the imagination to create a new reality and not to escape from reality. The Romantic poets use their poetry as a medium to change the people's attitude and to evoke their sympathy for the simple and the poor. They express their denial at social injustice (Chiara 20).

Romanticism (also known as the Romantic movement or Romantic era) was an artistic and intellectual movement that originated in Europe towards the end of the 18th century. For most of the Western world, it was at its peak from approximately 1800 to 1850. Romanticism was characterized by its emphasis on emotion and individualism as well as glorification of the past and nature, preferring the medieval over the classical. Romanticism was partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution and the prevailing ideology of the Age of Enlightenment, especially the scientific rationalization of Nature. It was embodied most strongly in the visual arts, music, and literature; it also had a major impact on historiography, education, chess, social sciences, and the natural sciences. It had a significant and complex effect on politics: Romantic thinking influenced conservatism, liberalism, radicalism, and nationalism.

The movement emphasized intense emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience. It granted a new importance to experiences of sympathy, awe, wonder,

and terror, in part by naturalizing such emotions as responses to the "beautiful" and the "sublime" Romantics stressed the nobility of folk art and ancient cultural practices, but also championed radical politics, unconventional behavior, and authentic spontaneity. In contrast to the rationalism and classicism of the Enlightenment, Romanticism revived medievalism and juxtaposed a pastoral conception of a more "authentic" European past with a highly critical view of recent social changes, including urbanization, brought about by the Industrial Revolution. (Sofi 80).

Romanticism placed the highest importance on the freedom of the artist to authentically express their sentiments and ideas. Romantics like the German painter Caspar David Friedrich believed that an artist's emotions should dictate their formal approach; Friedrich went as far as declaring that "the artist's feeling is his law" The Romantic poet William Wordsworth, thinking along similar lines, wrote that poetry should begin with "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", which the poet then "recollect[s] in tranquility", enabling the poet to find a suitably unique form for representing such feelings . (Spiazzi and Tavella 3)

The Romantics never doubted that emotionally motivated art would find suitable, harmonious modes for expressing its vital content—if, that is, the artist steered clear of moribund conventions and distracting precedents. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and others thought there were natural laws the imagination of born artists followed instinctively when these individuals were, so to speak, "left alone" during the creative process . (D,G,1973.p92).

The period typically called Romantic varies greatly between different countries and different artistic media or areas of thought. Margaret Drabble described it in literature as taking place "roughly between 1770 and 1848 and few dates much earlier than 1770 will be found. In English literature, M. H. Abrams placed it between 1789, or 1798, this latter a very typical view, and about 1830, perhaps a little later than some other critics Others have proposed 1780–1830.[32] In other fields and other countries the period denominated as Romantic can be considerably different; musical Romanticism, for example, is generally regarded as only having ceased as a major artistic force as late as 1910, but in an extreme extension the Four Last Songs of Richard Strauss are described stylistically as "Late Romantic" and were composed in 1946– 48 However, in most fields the Romantic period is said to be over by about 1850, or earlier. (D.G,1973.p.92)

1.2 Wordsworth's life and style

William Wordsworth (born April 7, 1770, Cockermouth, Cumberland, England—died April 23, 1850, Rydal Mount, Westmorland) English poet whose Lyrical

Ballads (1798), written with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped launch the English Romantic movement. Wordsworth was born in the Lake District of northern England, the second of five children of a modestly prosperous estate manager. He lost his mother when he was 7 and his father when he was 13, upon which the orphan boys were sent off by guardian uncles to a grammar school at Hawkshead, a village in the heart of the Lake District. At Hawkshead Wordsworth received an excellent education in classics, literature, and mathematics, but the chief advantage to him there was the chance to indulge in the boyhood pleasures of living and playing in the outdoors. The natural scenery of the English lakes could terrify as well as nurture, as Wordsworth would later testify in the line —I grew up fostered alike by beauty and by fear,|| but its generally benign aspect gave the growing boy the confidence he articulated in one of his first important poems, —Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey...,|| namely, —that Nature never did betray the heart that loved her.||

Wordsworth moved on in 1787 to St. John's College, Cambridge. Repelled by the competitive pressures there, he elected to idle his way through the university, persuaded that he —was not for that hour, nor for that place. || The most important thing he did in his college years was to devote his summer vacation in 1790 to a long walking tour through revolutionary France. There he was caught up in the passionate enthusiasm that followed the fall of the Bastille, and became an ardent republican sympathizer. Upon taking his Cambridge degree—an undistinguished —pass||—he returned in 1791 to France, where he formed a passionate attachment to a Frenchwoman, Annette Vallon. But before their child was born in December 1792, Wordsworth had to return to England and was cut off there by the outbreak of war between England and France. He was not to see his daughter Caroline until she was nine. (The Prose of William wordsworth.p286)

The three or four years that followed his return to England were the darkest of Wordsworth's life. Unprepared for any profession, rootless, virtually penniless, bitterly hostile to his own country's opposition to the French, he lived in London in the company of radicals like William Godwin and learned to feel a profound sympathy for the abandoned mothers, beggars, children, vagrants, and victims of England's wars who began to march through the sombre poems he began writing at this time. This dark period ended in 1795, when a friend's legacy made possible Wordsworth's reunion with his beloved sister Dorothy—the two were never again to live apart—and their move in 1797 to Alfoxden House, near Bristol. The great decade: 1797– 1808. (Wordsworth.1994.p7)

While living with Dorothy at Alfoxden House, Wordsworth became friends with a fellow poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. They formed a partnership that would

change both poets' lives and alter the course of English poetry. Coleridge and Lyrical Ballads

The partnership between Wordsworth and Coleridge, rooted in one marvelous year (1797–98) in which they —together wantoned in wild Poesy,|| had two consequences for Wordsworth. First it turned him away from the long poems on which he had laboured since his Cambridge days. These included poems of social protest like Salisbury Plain, loco-descriptive poems such as An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches (published in 1793), and The Borderers, a blank-verse tragedy exploring the psychology of guilt (and not published until 1842). Stimulated by Coleridge and under the healing influences of nature and his sister, Wordsworth began in 1797–98 to compose the short lyrical and dramatic poems for which he is best remembered by many readers. Some of these were affectionate tributes to Dorothy, some were tributes to daffodils, birds, and other elements of —Nature's holy plan,|| and some were portraits of simple rural people intended to illustrate basic truths of human nature.

Many of these short poems were written to a daringly original program formulated jointly by Wordsworth and Coleridge, and aimed at breaking the decorum of Neoclassical verse. These poems appeared in 1798 in a slim, anonymously authored volume entitled Lyrical Ballads, which opened with Coleridge's long poem —The Rime of the Ancient Mariner|| and closed with Wordsworth's —Tintern Abbey.|| All but three of the intervening poems were Wordsworth's, and, as he declared in a preface to a second edition two years later, their object was —to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them...in a selection of language really used by men,...tracing in them...the primary laws of our nature.|| Most of the poems were dramatic in form, designed to reveal the character of the speaker. The manifesto and the accompanying poems thus set forth a new style, a new vocabulary, and new subjects for poetry, all of them foreshadowing 20th- century developments.

2.1 What is the Role of Nature in Romantic Poetry

To the Romantics, "nature" meant many things. As previously stated, it was frequently presented as a work of art in and of itself. Nature as a source of subject and image, nature as a refuge from civilization's artificial constructs, including artificial language—prevailing views accorded nature the status of an organically unified whole. It was viewed as "organic," rather than as a system of "mechanical" laws, as in the scientific or rationalist view, because Romanticism displaced the rationalist view of the universe as a machine. At the same time, Romantics paid more attention to accurately describing natural phenomena as well as capturing "sensuous nuance," and this is true of both Romantic landscape painting and

romantic nature poetry. However, accuracy of observation was not sought for its own sake. Romantic nature poetry is essentially meditative poetry (Sofi 80). The Romantic poets debate the role of nature in gaining significant insights into human attitudes from various perspectives. Romantic poets adore and memorialize nature in all of its forms. They wrote about the splendour of all aspects of nature. Almost all romantic poets addressed the agony of the soul as well as every scene of natural beauty. They employ natural language and impersonate nature as God, man, etc. It has also been associated with acknowledgment and remoteness from everyday life. All of these writers make appeals to nature as if it were a living entity, calling for nature to rescue the struggler and carry their ideas to the world. Romantic poets adore nature and revel in its many facets. They described the beauty of green meadows, dense forests, thin flowers, high hills, river banks, rural scenes, wild wind, fresh air, sun rises and sets, and so on. Almost every romantic poet touched on every natural beauty scene. Love, emotions, imagination, and beauty were substituted by the romantic poets. They saw nature and its magnificence from various perspectives (Ibid) .

There are numerous portrayals and notions of nature in English Romantic poetry. The romantic poets examine the significance of nature in understanding human behavior from many perspectives. These poets allege that nature is some sort of living thing that is calling out for preservation and expressing their ideas to the world. Romantic poets enjoy nature and find solace in all of its facets. Nearly every romantic poet touched the suffering of the soul and every instance of breathtaking natural beauty substitutes the pain and agony of an individual. Romantic artists wrote poetry about nature in an effort to alleviate human suffering. As a result, romantic poets consider nature to be a source of revelation. They speak in simplistic terms and represent nature as God. This study focused on how nature has been portrayed by romantic poets and how it is the best example to live a happy life. The Enlightenment Era's cerebral thought gives way to romanticism, a moment of healing and inspiration. John Keats was a leading figure in the expression of these admirable principles because he was born at the start of Romanticism. John Keats raises numerous queries regarding the nature, survival, passion, love and death justified by these lines —When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face, Huge cloudy symbols of a high romancel where Keats states that the night sky defines the human quality.

William Wordsworth directed readers' attention to mountains and hills, the sky and stars, rivers, and forests. Man has forgotten this beauty of nature as a result of modern living. Globalization and urbanization are slowly consuming rural communities' natural beauty, which also influences both men's and women's laughter. He personifies the natural world and its elements in the most creative

way. He laments the separation between nature and humanity. He opposes the world's most unhealthy civilization which begins with the industrialization. Nature is personified by the poem — Daffodils

*Besides the lake, beneath the tree
Fluttering and dancing in the
bridge"*

"Nature is a teacher whose wisdom we can learn, and without human is vain and incomplete," according to Wordsworth. William Wordsworth saw that if a man treats nature as a friend, he would heal himself from all the diseases. Nature serves as a source of healing therapy. He considers nature as his companion, teacher, and protector. In Tintern abbey he writes:

*Through a long absence, have not been to
me As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the
din Of towns and cities, that owned
to them. In hours of weariness,
sensation sweat, (22-27)es*

Wordsworth emphasizes how the memory of beautiful images may uplift a person beyond his physical demands and also from the confusion of the concrete world.

2.2 How does Wordsworth use Nature in his Poetry

Several critics and writers have expressed their views about Wordsworth and treatment of nature in his poetry. Parab remarks that —Wordsworth as romantics urges that a union with nature is what frees the mind from the stir and thrust of its own dark emotions (p.1589). Mir asserts that —his heart is enriched in the company of nature and he does not want to leave its company (p. 723). Zeng affirms that —he eulogizes nature's landscape---pastoral countryside full of flowers, trees, birds, sky and streams, he pays attention to the influence of nature on human's hearts (p.30). For Jabeen —nature is beautiful, enjoyable and a source of pleasure for Wordsworth (p.194).

Khan admires Wordsworth and writes —he can foresee the future pleasures, or rather the unification with nature; the thoughts of nature produce a heightened sense of mental stimulation in the poet (p.2). Wordsworth points out the beauty of the nature and its harmony. Bilal and Cheema claim that —this harmony of the nature reminds him the disharmony of the world (p.32). Yang and Zeng think that —he regarded nature as his spiritual home (p.338). Neha maintains that —Wordsworth emphasized the moral influence of Nature. He spiritualized nature and regarded her as a great moral teacher, as the best mother, guardian and nurse of

man, and as an elevating influence (p.1). Huang, Pei and Fu assert that living in the crowded and noisy society, Wordsworth felt greatly miserable.

Only in nature, —he can find beauty and purity going into his own thinking; natural world is his ideal world (p.114). Almiqdady, AbuMelhim and Al-Sobh consider William Wordsworth as —a worshipper of nature, nature’s devotee or high-priest, and his love of nature was probably truer and tenderer than that of any other English poet (p.156). Compton-Rickett mentions that it was Wordsworth’s aim as a poet to —seek for beauty in meadow, woodland, and the mountain top, and to interpret this beauty in spiritual terms (p.308). Rader believes that —the poet recognizes a sense of joy in nature and a blessed power that rolls through all things about us (p.188). Willy talking about Wordsworth points out that —nature’s healing power, which for some may be merely an outworn doctrine, was for him a fact of experience, and the rapture of that experience (p.283). Read concerning the theme of Words

worth’s poetry maintains that nature as —the highest theme of poetry (p.127). Grierson and Smith consider that — Wordsworth had keen ear too for all natural sounds, the calls of beasts and birds, and the sounds of winds and waters; the sighing of boughs in a high wind set his mind working, and he composed thousands of lines wandering by the side of a stream (p.307). Wordsworth takes nature as a teacher. Legouis and Cazamian claim that —to him nature appears as a formative influence superior to any other, the educator of senses and mind alike (p.1010). Arnold admires Wordsworth and asserts that —his poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which he feels the joy offered to us in nature (p.153).

Besides a great lover of nature, Wordsworth was a moralist. The same belief is expressed by Compton-Rickett that —he is a moralist at heart (p.311). Mukherjee considers Wordsworth —a prolific writer (p.9). His contribution of romantic poetry to the field of English literature is paramount.

The poet presents Nature in divergent ways in his poetry. He views Nature as a source of love, perpetual joy, soothing and healing power, knowledge and spirituality. Nature and God become one for him. He believes that Nature is the Universal Spirit guiding anyone who like to be guided by her. The poet in his boyish days looked upon Nature as a source and scene for animal pleasure like skating, riding, fishing and walking. His first love was his romantic passion for Nature as he describes in

“Tintern Abbey”:

The coarser pleasure of my boyish days,

And their glad animal movements (Lines: 73-74)

In —The Prelude Book VIII, the poet in this early stage

portrays Nature as:

But secondary to my own
pursuits And animal activities,
and all

Their trivial pleasures (Lines: 344-346)

In the second stage, he develops a passion for sensuous beauty of Nature. He views Nature with a purely physical passion and he finds himself in close communion with Nature, as he mentions in

“The

Prelude Book II”:

The mind lay open to a more exact

And close communion. (Lines: 302-303)

becomes the object of a passion. —In Tintern Abbey¹, he writes: I cannot paint,
What then I was. The sounding cataract Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood, Their colors and their forms (Lines:
77-81)

As the poet sees the French Revolution and human sufferings, they make him realize the dignity of the common folk. Then his love of Nature becomes linked with the love of man. He can hear the music of humanity in Nature, as he asserts in —Tintern Abbey¹: The still sad music of humanity, Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power To chasten and subdue. (Lines: 93-95)

Conclusion

Nature was like the nurturer and guide of human beings, who was constantly giving the protection of human spirit. William Wordsworth believed that by being close to nature, human beings could not only get the support of thought and moral pleasure, but also find the source of inexhaustible moral power. William Wordsworth claimed that the universe was in harmony and all things enjoyed their own happiness. It was deplorable that only human beings often did the opposite things. Nature have the power to reduce the impetuous and turbulence brought by industrial civilization. Nature was the embodiment of rationality, which could eliminate the confusion and bondage brought by industrial civilization to human beings. William Wordsworth argued that nature not only provided pleasure for human minds, but also gave people the rationality. In the face of the hustle and bustle of the city and the impetuosity of the human heart, nature could provide a kind of faith for human beings. Nature could make man’s heart get rid of the reality of pain and suffering, and acquire the wisdom of the rational.

The use of the childhood conception and the image of the child as important devices for carrying the poets' thoughts, attitudes and feelings have been a common practice among the Romantics. William Blake and William Wordsworth are the first Romantic Poets, who deal with childhood as a symbol of a state of the soul and is therefore, perfectly compatible with maturity.

Wordsworth thinks that the adults can't enjoy the same innocence that child enjoy, this goes in contrast to Blake, who thinks that we can keep innocence after we grow up, even we get experiences. These experiences make us stronger and at the same time, we can enjoy life more. For Blake, childhood can live more than this; it can penetrate the minds of adults if they still love each other and try to protect each other. In —Songs of Innocence, Blake deals with the innocent joyous perspective of the child and the more worldly-wise perspective of the adult. For him, children were no occasional interest, no vehicle for a mere nostalgia. They are not only a symbol of innocence, but also the expression of imaginative joy and essential humanity. As for Wordsworth, whose poems about the lost childhood and the memory of his childhood with nature in the innocent world still an inspiration for all the young poets who came after him who want to describe the relationship between man and nature and specifically between child and nature. Wordsworth is a gentle poet who believes that innocence is too pure to be held by adults who are exposed to the cruel and harm world. It is an ordinary thing to have nostalgia for home, but for Wordsworth, he always has the nostalgia for the period of his childhood and spent the rest of his life regrets that he becomes older and shortly finished his wonderful childhood and he reflects this clearly in his poems the Prelude.

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