

An Ecological Study of Select Nature Poems of William Wordsworth

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Abstract: William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was the greatest poet of the Romantic Age in England. He is called the ‘harbinger of Romanticism’, ‘the high priest of Nature’, ‘the worshipper of Nature’ and the poet of Nature and Man. He has been a poet, a moral teacher, a mystic and a seer. He considers Nature as a Supreme Being who can liberate man and society from evils with which they are afflicted, if man and society go into the lap of Nature and enjoy her beauty calmness, soothing, power and peace. Wordsworth, in his poetry, has united Nature with Man and Man with Nature; and he has found a soul in every object of Nature. He has seen also that every soul is connected with one another, as every soul is the creation of the one Almighty God who pervades everywhere in everything. Wordsworth lived in the age of Britain’s Industrial Revolution, which apparently left a great influence on him. He was also a lover of mankind and he was against materialism and industrialism because he considered materialistic approaches and progress as the evils of society which are found to take the Individuals’ peace into their circled power producing pains and miseries. His poetry is a rich source of ecological study, portraying Nature as a living Being and divine and moral force which are deeply interconnected with humanity. In the light of ecological study, in order to shade light on relationship between Nature and human beings, his selected poems like “Lines Written in Early Spring” (1798), “The Table Turned” (1798), “The World is Too Much With Us” (1807), “Tintern Abbey” (1798), “The Prelude” (1850), “Five Lucy poems and Daffodils” (1807) have been analyzed in this paper. This research paper explores the study of selected poems of William Wordsworth through ecological lens.

Keywords : Harbinger; ecology; materialism; industrialism; revolution.

Introduction

William Wordsworth was not only the greatest poet of the Romantic Age in England but also an early ecologist. He was a poet of Nature and Man. He was the ‘high priest of Nature’ and the poetry of Nature finds its most sublime and sustained expression in his work. He was the prophet of

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Nature. He loved her and saw in her a Being, a Force, a Power, a Spirit, a Teacher, a Benign Mother, a Power of Solace and Consolation, Peace and Sympathy, a Guide, a Lawgiver, Divinity and a God. His faith in her was supreme and he considered her as a power to heal up the human affliction.

Wordsworth was a romantic poet with romantic ideas. He had been influenced by the thinkers and philosophers of the time and of the past age. He was influenced by Godwin, Rousseau, Locke, Berkeley, Spinoza, Kant, Newton, Hartley, Coleridge, Dorothy and others. He was also influenced by Plato and his thoughts, by Shakespeare, Milton and Spencer and their works. But he adopted their views and ideas freely to his own poetic purposes. He was not a slave to any idea or thinker. He utilized their ideas for poetic gain in picturing human life with its joy and sorrow, fears and pleasures, tortures and benefits, darkness and light. He pictured life of Man and Nature in their deep sense and mysticism.

Wordsworth saw Nature also as a living Being. He saw in her a soul. This was his fine discovery and vision. He found her as a living Soul or Anttee or Spirit. He began to think her as a great teacher and healer. Wordsworth, in his fourth stage of his poetic period, began to see oneness of one soul in everything. He began to feel the presence of God in every object of Nature with a celestial light. R.D. Trivedi also is of the view that Wordsworth saw that Nature was a revelation of God. To him:

Nature was not mere physical loveliness,
but a revelation of God. He worshipped
Nature because he saw in all natural
objects the indwelling spirit of the
Supreme Being. To him the myriad
forms and phenomena around us were
nothing but various manifestations of the
divine. In short, he was a mystic, one
who sees unity in diversity. (322)

Compton Rickett says about Wordsworth's divinization of Nature, "It was Wordsworth's aim as a poet to seek beauty in meadow, woodland and the mountain top, and to interpret this beauty in spiritual terms" (308).

Wordsworth was a poet who didn't become great in a day. In the beginning he was criticised and abused by the critics for his works. The first stage of his poetry shows that he loved Nature with a passion that

was all physical. It was not intellectual or philosophical. It was his youthful love for her seeing the charming scenes and sights. W.H.Hudson says that his love of Nature was a healing boy's love of the open air and freedom of the fields. J.N.Mundra and S.C.Mundra put Wordsworth's poetry into second stage which he called the period of the senses which brought him thrilling and enchanting joys of the sights and sounds of Nature. Mundra says that the French Revolution opened the eyes of Wordsworth and he was disturbed and tortured by the effects of the revolution.

William Wordsworth, as a rebel, advocated against the poetic theory and manner of the 18th century poets. As Pope was considered a poet of the town, Wordsworth was considered a poet of the countryside and of the life of Nature and her physical as well as spiritual aspects. His nature was also not like those that of Dryden and Pope. The poets of the 18th century declared that 'the proper study of mankind is man'. But Wordsworth was not their follower. Pre-romantic poets like Burns, Cowper, Crabbe and Goldsmith had a fine appreciation for the beauties of Nature in her external aspects delineating the lovely spectacles of Nature in the poems of exquisite beauty and loveliness but none of them had seen a soul in Nature nor were they prepared to take lesson of morality and wisdom from Nature. They were adorers of Nature's external charms without having any mystical and philosophical approaches to her inner life and spiritual message.

Wordsworth was more influenced by the French Revolution and its philosopher. He has been influenced by its thoughts of liberty, equality and fraternity which led him to love the sad music of humanity, and portray the things and objects of Nature for the redemption of mankind from sufferings they have had here. The elemental qualities of man - love simplicity, frugality, industry and all that – that go to make for manhood can be found only in the people who live in the rural areas or in the lap of Nature. The French Revolution as the great event in France left a deep impression on his mind. The spirit of revolt and revolution in his poetry, which is found in his works, is the result of the French Revolution. The humanitarian feelings and thoughts found in his works are also the result of the revolution and thinkers of the time.

Wordsworth is considered as an ecological poet for all his life, he immersed himself in the beautiful landscape. Nature to him was something to console him and purify his soul. In his heart, 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, Wordsworth's ecological views in his poetry can arouse man's ecological ideas to protect Nature.

Wordsworth is regarded as a famous 'poet of Nature' and the key point proves his ecological and environmental concerns in his poetry. Wordsworth's sonnet "The World is Too Much With Us" written in 1802 and published in 1807 is a fine example of ecological study :

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 nature;
It moves us not (Lines 5-9)

This poem is a philosophical sonnet and is full of poetic beauty. In it, the poet condemns the growing materialistic and mercenary age when men have become money-minded and totally unaware of true happiness which is found only by loving Nature. Nature gives us perfect education to develop our mind and health.

A remarkable example of ecological study is Wordsworth's lovable poem- "Lines Written in Early Spring" (1798), wherein Wordsworth places the speaker in the middle of Nature and shows that Nature is right and loyal to man and it is man who is responsible for the broken relationship between him and nature. The poet says:

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grave I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts,

Bring and thoughts to the mind.(Lines1-4)

Wordsworth's other ecological poem- "The Tables Turned" (1798) is a great example to prove the fact that Wordsworth strongly believes in the great power of Nature that educated human mind and leads it to the perfect direction. In this poem the poet respects all human knowledge, i.e. acquired by reading books. The poet says:

Up!up my friend and quit yours books,
Or surely you'll grow double,
Up!up my friend ,and clear your looks;
Why all this tool and trouble? (Lines 1-4)

Wordsworth's another very beautiful ecological poem is "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807).It is a great Nature poem in which the poet appears as a devotee of Nature. He strongly believes that Nature is a store house of infinite joy and delight :

I wandered lonely as a cloud,
That floats on high over vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Besides the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. (Lines 1-6)

The very first few lines bring out a sense of wonder and happiness. The poet's love of freedom, joy and peace is aptly defined in the few significant lines of the poem "Daffodils". The poet has immortalized the reality of joy and happiness in the poem.

Wordsworth is regarded as a famous 'Poet of Nature' and this key point proves his ecological and environmental concerns in his poetry. "The Prelude" is a fine example for ecological study. The poet analyses his childhood memories and draws valuable lessons from them with the fine pictures of the memories of childhood in the "The Prelude, Book-I" and "The Prelude, Book-II". In "The Prelude Book-I", he recollects his childhood in a mystical and analytical way. He says :

Even then I felt,
Gleams like the flashing of a shield, the earth,
A common face of Nature space time,
Rememberable things; sometimes, it is true,
By chance collisions and quaint accidents,

(Like those ill-sorted unions, works supposed.
Of evil-minded fairies), yet not vain
Nor profitters, if Happy they impressed
Collateral objects and appearances,
Albeit lifeless, then, and doomed to sleep,
Until Nature seasons call him forth,
To impregnate and to elevate the mind. (Lines 585-596).

In “The Prelude, Book-II” Wordsworth presents a fine picture of the child in his mother’s arms rocking on his mother’s breast and drinking in the feelings of his mother’s eye:

Blest the infant Babe ,
(For with my best conjecture I would face
Our being’s earthly progress) Blest the Bible,
Nursed in his Mother’s arms, who sinks to sleep,
Rocked on his Mother’s breast, who with his soul,
Drinks in the feelings of his Mother’ eye. (Lines 233-238)

The poet tells in Book-II, a child is a ‘frail creature’ and ‘an inmate of this active universe. ‘And through the creative faculties of sense and feeling, he ‘like an agent of the one great mind’ creates. He is a ‘creator and receiver both and his these creative faculties and imagination remain with him consciously or unconsciously, till his death.

Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” serves as a fundamental text for ecological study. This is a poem where Wordsworth is seen not only as Nature poet but also as Nature mystic. Giving here an account of the different stages of development of his love for Nature, he passed on through a contact with the ‘still sad music of humanity to a realisation of all pervading spirit in Nature. Wordsworth’s ecological idea can be seen here :

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to build man’s eye.
But oft, lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them.
In hours of weariness, sensations, sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart. (Lines 22-28)

This poem also depicts his firm faith in Nature as ‘Nature never does betray the heart that loves her’.

Wordsworth's "Lucy poems" are an excellent source for ecological study. It is said that "Lucy" poems are Wordsworth's most famous ones. His "Lucy" poems, lyrics, odes, sonnets and elegies are his poems which are the best examples of his poetic theory that 'poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility. Lucy poems show man with Nature combined with love, death and beauty of person and things natural objects present on earth and sky. Wordsworth's beautiful Lucy poems are "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known" (1798), "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways" (1798), "I Travelled among Unknown Men" (1807), "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower" (1798) and "A Slumber did my Spirit Seal" (1798) which show Lucy's growth, perfection and death or any of these three or two of these three or any one of the three. The poet makes Lucy immortal in his poems.

Wordsworth's poems also picture the presence of the birds, animals, insects and other creatures. Their pictures show the poet's love for them. It is because he is a humanitarian and a democrat. His humanitarian flows within his heart for all the creatures and the objects of the world, because he thinks that all are the creations of one Divine Force God.

Wordsworth is considered as an ecological poet. Nature to him was something to console him and purify his soul. In his heart 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, Wordsworth's ecological views in his poetry can be arouse man's ecological ideas to protect Nature.

It is the Age of science and technology. These days, due to the rapid development of the society and industrialization, people's thoughts have been greatly changed. They pay more attention to the material things. Their life has become money centered. 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. Now people realize that they rely on Nature and they should protect and respect Nature.

On the whole, we can say that Wordsworth is one of the greatest romantic poets of the Romantic Age and an early ecologist. We find that

Nature is the supreme force and Benign Mother. We also find that he believes in the oneness of the soul of every creature' of the world. We can get peace and prosperity only in the lap of Nature. He also believes that everything Nature or Man has come out of the one Divine God. His poetry also gives us a message that one must be kind, peace loving, endurant with all secularity, a lover of all beings alike as an object/being has the same soul of God.

Wordsworth's poetry reminds us of the teachings of the Gita, the Vedas and the other religious scriptures of the world and all this places the poet to his great philosophic and humanist height.

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