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Ecological Harmony in William Wordsworth's Selected Poems

*–Raj Kumar Swami**

Abstract

William Wordsworth (1770-1850), who is variously called the 'harbinger of Nature', the 'high priest of Nature' and the 'worshipper of Nature', was a major English Romantic poet. He is considered as a forerunner of English Romanticism. He was England's poet laureate from 1843 till his death in 1850. And historically speaking, Wordsworth lived in the age of Britain's Industrial Revolution, which apparently left a great influence on him. He was greatly disappointed with the adverse impacts of industrialization on Nature and man. 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. Therefore, this paper is an effort to analyze Wordsworth's selected poems like "Lines Written in Early Spring" (1798), "The Tables Turned" (1798), "The World is Too Much With Us" (1807) and "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807) in the light of ecological study in order to shed light on relationship between Nature and man.

Keywords: Romanticism, Industrial Revolution, equality, harmony, ecology, Nature, man.

William Wordsworth is a representative of romantic poets. His love for Nature is easily noticed in his poetry. His poems deeply explore the interconnectedness of Nature and man. The ideas of ecological harmony and holistic unity between human being and Nature are pervasive in his poetry. He condemns the Industrial Revolution and appreciates Nature, and by doing this, he apparently encourages ecological equality and environmental protection. Wordsworth's fame primarily lies in the general notion that he has been considered as England's greatest Nature poet who viewed Nature superior to man whose existence depends upon Nature. 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

* *Associate Professor of English, Department of Foreign Languages, Al-Baha University, Al-Baha- 65431, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Email: drrajswami18@gmail.com*

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.

Wordsworth is regarded as a famous "Poet of Nature" as he was to the Victorians, and this key point proves his ecological and environmental concerns in his poetry. Here, it would be helpful to begin with 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)

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 are totally unaware of true happiness which is found only by loving Nature. The poet says that we are much engrossed in worldly affairs, and constantly think about the world. We are devastating all our energies in earning and spending money. But we have little time to appreciate beauty of Nature which provides us true and everlasting peace and happiness. Nature gives us perfect education to develop our mind and health. But "we have given our hearts away" to worldly wealth or material gains.

A remarkable example of the emphasis on the interdependence of man and Nature 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 should be responsible for the broken relationship between him and Nature. For instance, the poet says:

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man? (Lines 1-8)
…
If this belief from heaven be sent,
If such be Nature's holy plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man? (Lines 21-24)

As the main purpose of this paper is to shed light on the ecological awareness of many readers of Wordsworth's poetry, his poem "The Tables Turned" (1798) is a great example to prove the fact that Wordsworth strongly believes in the great power of Nature that educates human mind and leads it to the perfect direction. In this poem, the poet rejects all human knowledge, i.e. acquired by reading books. The poet says:

Up! up! my friend, and quit your books;
Or surely you'll grow double:
Up! up! my friend, and clear your looks;
Why all this toil and trouble? (Lines 1-4)
…
Books! 'tis a dull an endless strife:
Come, and hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music! on my life,
There's more of wisdom in it.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
He, too, is no mean preacher:
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher. (Lines 9-16)

Further, Wordsworth goes on saying that Nature is the ultimate source of perfect health, wealth, and cheerfulness. He writes:

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things-
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves,
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives. (Lines 21-32)

Here, Wordsworth honours our imagination, but he criticizes "Our meddling intellect" that brings destruction to the world. The poet wants the reader to come out with such a heart "That watches and receives".

Another great example of interconnectedness of man and Nature is Wordsworth's remarkable and lovable poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807). It is a great Nature poem wherein Wordsworth 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 o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. (Lines 1-6)
…
The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed-and gazed-but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought: (Lines 13-18)

In this poem, the poet describes "a host, of golden daffodils" that he saw one spring day when he was walking in the English countryside. The daffodils were under the trees and next to the lake. The daffodils were "tossing their heads" from side to side, appearing to dance in the breeze. The memory of the daffodils brings the poet great pleasure, and he feels that his own heart is dancing along with the daffodils:

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;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils. (Lines 19-24)

Here, it is the breath which, in the climax of recollection, fills the poet's heart with pleasure and sets it to dancing with the "golden daffodils." For Geoffrey Durrant, in *William Wordsworth* (1969), the poem "is only superficially about the daffodils." Instead, it is "an account of the experience of poetic creation." Durrant concludes his analysis by pointing out the following:

Wordsworth in this poem is describing an experience of which all are capable, but which is increasingly neglected as men become preoccupied with business

> and profession. It is the imagination that enables man to enter into and give life and significance to the world. (William Wordsworth, 1969, pp. 20, 25)

To conclude, Wordsworth's "ecological" poems provide the modern man, who lives in a world i.e. haunted by materialism and technology, with a new lens through which he can see the inseparable relation and harmony between Nature and man in a vast ecosystem of the world.

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