

Relationship between Man, Nature and Environment in the Poetry of William Wordsworth

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Abstract

Environment is everything that is around us. It also constitutes flora, fauna, atmosphere and human beings. The Romantic poets had contributed a lot towards environment while writing about the importance of environment, nature and its relationship with man. William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is rightly called the 'priest of nature'. He is one of the most important poets of Romantic Age. He was very much disturbed by the industrialization and urbanization with the adverse impact of these activities on nature and man. So; he wrote a number of poems to enhance the harmony between nature and man. His poems prove his environmental concerns. Hence, this paper is an attempt to analyze Wordsworth's selected poems like, Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood (1807), Tintern Abbey (1798), Lines written in Early Spring (1798), The Table Turned (1798), "The World is Too much with us" (1807) and "I wandered Lonely as a Cloud (1807) in the light of environmental problems and man's relationship with nature.

Keywords: Environment, Romanticism, Industrial revolution, Environmental awareness, Nature, Man.

Introduction

Objective of the Study

The objective of this research article is to show the relationship between man, nature, and environment as shown in the poetry of William Wordsworth. The whole world is concerned about environment nowadays but Wordsworth had that concern in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Research Methodology

The analytical and interpretative method has been used for the present research study. The research is based on original works (poetry) of William Wordsworth. It also seeks resourceful assistance from critical works on the writer. It does not require any field work. Moreover, internet has been used for the study.

Meaning of Environment

Generally Speaking, Environment is everything that is around us. It can be living or non-living things. It includes physical, chemical and other natural forces. The word environment is used in different ways by different people.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines environment as "objects or conditions by which one is surrounded; the complex of physical, chemical and biotic factors (such as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival".

Hence, it can be stated that Environment constitutes flora, fauna, atmosphere, and human beings, which maintain a balance for existence and life. Environment is of two types-natural environment and man-made environment or built environment. The natural environment encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally. This term is often used for earth. This environment encompasses the interaction of all living species, climate, weather and natural resources. In contrast to the natural environment, is the man-made or built environment.

The present paper is a humble attempt to examine the relationship among environment, nature and man as reflected in Romantic poetry with special reference to William Wordsworth. The

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relationship between man and nature, according to, Wordsworth is mutual and subtle, each shaped by the other.

Environment, Nature and Romanticism

The greatest thrust for environment and nature originated with the Romantic Movement in the first half of nineteenth century. An aesthetic and intellectual movement came into being which rejected urbanization as well as industrialization. Romanticism stressed not only emotions, mysticism and spiritualism but also nature. This movement of Romantic poets, writers and painters prompted all to turn their attention to the beauty and value of nature.

Wordsworth was a great worshipper of nature. He believed in the interdependence of man and nature. He lived at a time before the Industrial Revolution that had a widespread negative effect on the life of man in England. In the 1830s Wordsworth spoke out forcefully against the idea of bringing the railroad line deeper into his beloved Lake District. Wordsworth's some poems helped to establish the value of naturalistic form of writing that reaches from the poets James Thomson and William Cowper in the eighteenth century to Derek Walcott in the twenty-first century. Although, it is not correct to call Wordsworth an 'environmentalist' as the term was not in existence when he was writing. Both his poetic flowers, birds and emotionally effecting landscape prepared the way for the powerful sense of an essential connection between nature and man.

Even after Wordsworth came back to England, the industrialization and its after maths like deforestation, pollution, the loss of greenery and the artificial ways of living troubled him a lot. Wordsworth was a man who stored his mind with the different experiences of nature. For him every object of nature was a man if estation of God. In the Immortality Ode, Wordsworth laments the loss of the child's instinctual wisdom of the 'visionary gleam' that is lost as one matures. He attains insight from his experience of grief and the human condition and the 'philosophic mind' develops that permits him to understand nature in deeper terms. This is expressed thus:

We will grieve no, rather find Strength in what
Remains behind; In the primary sympathy
Which having been must ever be; In the
soothing
Thoughts that spring Out of the human
suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind
(Lines 184-192)

Hence, in the poem Wordsworth explores the moral development of man and the contradictions between innocence and experience. As the youth matures, he moves farther away from the divinity of God and begins to be corrupted by manking.

Literature Review

In his famous 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, 'holistic vision' of nature. Kroeber's study is also important who has raised issues related to environment and ecology in Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind (1994), a book that shows Wordsworth as the main example of a writer and poet whose writings were very important texts for developing the environmental and ecological awareness.

In Song of the Earth (2000), Bate studied Wordsworth with new perspective giving treatment of a new eco poetics -- a new way of environmental writing. He provided a new aspect to Wordsworth's poems. In recent years many critics discussed romantic poets, especially Wordsworth from the point of view of environmental and ecological awareness. Among these writers and critics are Kevin Hutchings, Kurt Fossoand Timothy Morton. Timothy Morton, in his work, 'The Ecological Thought' (2010) proclaimed Wordsworth's writing on nature and environment as revolutionary. He has placed Wordsworth among those English poets who are discussed in reference to environmental awareness. Furthermore, there is a great text 'An Eco-Feminist interpretation of Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' and 'Lucy Poems'(2018) by Das, who studied non-human environment and there are some ethical aspects also (2018 Das-2). Here, a description of the relationship between human beings and environment is given.

The new mentality which Romantic Poets speak of - is what Bate explains as "a respect for the earth and skepticis mas to the orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society

Wordsworth's Sonnet, 'The World is too Much with Us' written in 1802 and published in 1807, can be a good example for Bate's argument where in 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 distressed with the present man's passive treatment of nature.

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

Hence in this very philosophical poem, the poet criticizes the increasing materialism of man

where he has become so money-minded and is completely out of tune of nature. Day and night, man is destroying all his energies in earning and spending money. But men have no time to enjoy and appreciate the divine beauty of nature which gives us everlasting happiness and peace. Nature, truly guides us, but “we have given hearts away” to worldly things and monetary gains.

Wordsworth is a great interpreter of the message of nature. In his famous poem ‘Tintern Abbey’, he advises his younger sister Dorothy to maintain her close relationship with the nature and he assures her that:

Nature never did betray
The heart that loves her. (Lines 125-26)

According to Wordsworth, nature gives joy, purifies mind and heals the sorrow-stricken hearts. He mentions the moral influence of nature on human beings and proclaims that there is a spiritual relationship between man and nature. He regards nature as

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul of all my moral being. (Lines 108-111)

Wordsworth had the pantheistic view i.e. ‘God is all and all is God’. He feels the presence of a sublime divine spirit pervading all objects of nature – in the setting sun, around the ocean, the living air, the blue sky, the mind of man etc.

He says:

A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts And
rolls through all things, (Lines 100-103)

Thus, the poet made it clear that the greatest wisdom of the world lies in the great company of nature. According to him, “There’s more of Wisdom in it” than in any book or scripture of man. In the same way, Wordsworth explains that nature is also the source of health, wealth and happiness for man. He writes:

One impulse from a vernal wood,
May teach you more of man,
Of moral, evil and of good,
Than all the sag can. (Lines 21 to 24)

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves,
Come forth, and bring with you a heart,
That Watches and receives. (Lines 29 to 32)

‘I Wandered Lonely as a cloud’ (1807) is another important poem of Wordsworth in which he sings of the great relationship between man and nature. In this poem he seems to worship nature. He has a great faith that nature always gifts, us with infinite joy and delight, which ultimately is the aim of our life. He says:

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 they show to me had brought
(Lines 13- 18)

Thus, we see, that when the poet recollects, the ‘golden daffodils’, it fills his heart with pleasure. Geoffrey Durrant points out that “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.

Another example of the emphasis on the relationship and interdependence of man and nature is Wordsworth’s poem, ‘Lines Written in Early Spring’ (1798), wherein the poet finds the speaker in the lap of nature and reveals that nature is always right and faithful to man, and it is only man who is responsible for the shattered relationship between him and nature, for example the poet says;

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 4-8)

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)

In the same way, his poem ‘The Tables Turned’ (1798) is a great example to prove the fact that Wordsworth always had great faith in the power of Nature that inspires human mind and proceeds it to the right and perfect directions. In the present poem, the poet discards all human knowledge which is gained by reading books. The poet proclaims:

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! It is a dull and 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 throttle sings!
He, too, is no mean preacher:

Come forth into the light of things,
Let nature be your teacher. (Lines 9-16)

Hence, the poems of Wordsworth enable the modern man, who is always “running after earning and spending money”, with a new lens through which he can see the interdependence and harmony among environment, Nature and man in this vast universe

Conclusion

It can be said that environment is everything around us. It constitutes flora, fauna, atmosphere, living creatures and human being and the Romantic poets particularly William Wordsworth contributed a lot towards environment or nature. He had defined its

relationship with man in a new perspective. His environmental and natural poems provide the modern man, who is always spending his time in "earning and spending money" day and night, with a new glimpse through which he can see the great relationship between nature and man.

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