

Analysis of Wordsworth's Poetry of Nature in the Poetry

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the different meanings for the term —nature || . Moreover, it seeks to identify the major similarities and differences in the use of nature in the poetry of William Wordsworth and Robert Frost. Since this research is theoretical in nature, it depends primarily on reviewing already published works on the topic. The researchers consulted a significant number of published references on the topic as well as specialized literary dictionaries, encyclopedias, and the internet. The research concludes that the term —nature || has not always had the same meaning or carries the same level of significance. Also, the concept of nature in British literature should be studied, not only as it was employed by English romantic poets, but also as it was used by authors before and after the English Romantic Movement in order to see if nature was used in the same way. Moreover, scholars and literary critics should also research the concept of nature as used in the United States of America before and after Robert frost. Finally, the use of nature in poetry that reflects meditation under the influence of the bible should be explored especially that composed by early colonial poets.

1. Introduction

Poets have long been inspired to tune their lyrics to the variations in landscape, the changes in season, and the natural phenomena around them. The Greek poet Theocritus began writing idylls in the third century B.C.E. to glorify and honor the simplicity of nature-creating such well known characters as Lycidas, who has inspired dozens of poems as the archetypal shepherd, including the famous poem "Lycidas" by John Milton. An idyll was originally a short, peaceful pastoral lyric-, but has come to include poems of epic adventure set in an idealized past, including Lord Alfred Tennyson's take on Arthurian legend, The Idylls of the King. The Biblical Song of Songs is also considered an idyll, for it tells its story of love and passion by continuously evoking imagery from the natural world. The more familiar form of surviving pastoral poetry that has retained its integrity is the eclogue, a poem attuned to the natural world and seasons, placed in a pleasant, serene, and rural place, and in which shepherds often converse. The first eclogue was written by Virgil in 37 B.C.E. The eclogue also flourished in the Italian Renaissance, its most notable authors being Dante and Petrarch. It became something of a requirement for young poets, a form they had to master before embarking upon great original work. Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia and Edmund Spenser's The Shepheard's Calendar are English triumphs of the form, the latter relying on the months of the year to trace the changes in a shepherd's life. In "January," Spenser compares the shepherd's unreturned affection with "the frosty ground," "the frozen trees" and "his own winter beaten flocks". In "April," he writes "Like April showers, so streams the trickling tears." It was the tradition of natural poetry that William Wordsworth had in mind when he proposed that poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility". "This tranquil state might be most easily inspired if the poet would go out into nature, observe the world around him, and translate those emotions and observations into verse. Later, transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau did exactly that in his poem,

"Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood".

2. I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

The Daffodils (Dance, Dance Revolution): In the first line, the daffodils are like little yellow people who keep the speaker company when he is feeling lonely. The happiness of the daffodils can always cheer him up, and he can tell that they are happy because they dance. Some variation of the word "dance" occurs in each of the four stanzas. Also, the speaker is taken aback by how many daffodils there are. We often think of daffodils as a flower that people plant in their gardens in the springtime, so it would be surprising to come upon thousands of them by an isolated lake.

Lines 3-4: The daffodils are personified as a crowd of people. This personification will continue throughout the poem. Lines 6: Daffodils cannot actually "dance," so Wordsworth is ascribing to them an action that is associated with people.

Line 9: The speaker says that the line of daffodils is "never-ending," but we know this can't be strictly true: all good things come to an end. This is an example of hyperbole, or exaggeration.

Lines 12: The personification of the daffodils becomes more specific. The "heads" of the daffodils are the part of the flower with the petals. It is larger and heavier than the stem, and so it bobs in a breeze.

Lines 13-14: The waves also get in on some of the dancing (and personification) action, but the daffodils are not to be out-done – they are happier than the waves.

Lines 21-24: Wordsworth imagines the daffodils in his spiritual vision, for which he uses the metaphor of an "inward eye." His heart dances like a person, too.

3. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening Woods:

The woods in this poem are something to meditate over. Our speaker cannot get enough of them, telling us that "the woods are lovely, dark and deep" (13), as though he were hypnotized. The woods must be so attractive and compelling, because the speaker is compelled to stop and stare at them in the freezing, dark winter evening. There is a mysterious element to these woods as well, and we get the sense that the speaker is not alone, even though he is very much by himself. Whenever we see woods in literature, we almost automatically see them in contrast to civilization (see Appendix 3). If you have read *The Scarlet Letter*, think about the woods Hester Prynne frequents. People also think of woods as being mazelike and full of hidden obstacles, like the Fire Swamp in *The Princess Bride*. These are some pretty intense woods, so the reader can feel free to interpret them how he or she desires. We will offer a few ideas below. Lines 1,4,7,13: Some interpret the woods as an extended metaphor for death. Line 4: Here we see woods as a clear and crisp image as our speaker describes them filling up with snow. The Natural World: Our speaker is digging the natural world. Picture him hanging out with his horse, between a frozen lake and the edge of the woods, while the snows falls gently all around him. The ideas of the village, of a farmhouse, or of the promises he must keep are not nearly as appetizing to our speaker as the cold beauty of the world around him. There's something very lulling about the "easy wind and downy flake", and we get the sense that the natural world is pretty compelling and pretty good at convincing our speaker to forget about civilization. Nature is powerful in this poem (Irwin, 1963).

Lines 6-8: With these lines, we get a crystal clear image of the snowy woods and frozen lake at night.

Line 11: We can almost hear the sound of the wind in the alliteration of "sound's the sweep."

Line 13: While the fact that the woods are "lovely, dark and deep" might not seem visually helpful, this description actually helps us visualize the image of the woods even more clearly. Others: Alone as alone can be. That's our speaker on this snowy evening. Why then, do we feel like he's not alone? Is it his little horse that seems to have a mind of its own, is it the landowner who is snug in his cozy house in the cozy village, or is it the presence of something else entirely?

Line 2: The "village" can be interpreted as a symbol for society and civilization.

Line 5: Horses have thoughts? We knew it all along. The horse is personified in this line. Line 6: Farmhouses may not be the most hoppin' places in the world, but they do usually involve people. Because of this, the farmhouse that our speaker mentions seems like a symbol for society and civilization.

Line 10: Giving his harness bells a shake, the horse is personified once more as he asks "if there is some mistake."

Lines 15-16: "Sleep" is a solitary activity, no? In these lines, "sleep" could be interpreted as a metaphor for death.

4. Transcendentalism Legacy

The Transcendental Movement dramatically shaped the direction of American literature, although perhaps not in the ways its adherents had imagined. Many writers were and still are inspired and taught by Emerson and Thoreau in particular, and struck out in new directions because of the literary and philosophical lessons they had learned. Walt Whitman was not

the only writer to claim that he was "simmering, simmering, simmering" until reading Emerson brought him "to a boil" (Johnson, 2015). Emily Dickinson's poetic direction was quite different, but she too was a thoughtful reader of Emerson and Fuller. In his own way, even Frederick Douglass incorporated many lessons of transcendental thought from Emerson. This is significant to the present research since it illustrates that various poets treated nature in differing ways depending on how they personally view it. Other writers would deliberately take their direction away from transcendentalism, toward realism and "anti-transcendentalism" or what Michael Hoffman calls "negative Romanticism". Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville found extraordinarily creative ways to object to many aspects of their transcendental contemporaries, even as they incorporated others. Few American writers since have been completely free of the influence of Emerson and Thoreau, whether in reaction or imitation. Books have been written on this subject, and this is only an introduction. Perhaps the most visible manifestation of transcendental ideas and form today is in the developing genre of nature writing. With its roots firmly in a world-view adapted from Emerson's *Nature* and the literary inspiration of Thoreau's *Walden* in particular, this interdisciplinary yet literary genre has evolved under the pens of numerous writers, from John Muir and John Burroughs to writers as diverse as Annie Dillard, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Loren Eiseley, Ed Abbey, Gary Snyder, Barbara Kingsolver--and the list expands every year (Woodlief, 2015).

5. Nature in Romanticism

The Romantic association of nature and spirit expressed itself in one of two ways. The landscape was, on one hand regarded as an extension of the human personality, capable of sympathy with man's emotional state. On the other hand, nature was regarded as a vehicle for spirit just as man; the breath of God fills both man and the earth. Delight in unspoiled scenery and in the (presumably) innocent life of rural dwellers was a popular literary theme. Often combined with this feeling for rural life is a generalized romantic melancholy, a sense that change is imminent and that a way of life is being threatened (Johnson, 2015).

6. Wordsworth's Attitude towards Nature

William Wordsworth is known as the father of English romantic poetry, his attitude towards nature is extremely important. The concept of nature is important not only for William Wordsworth, but also for other English romantic poets who lived during the time of Wordsworth and those who lived after him. Nature in itself is a very crucial component of English romanticism making it one of the most significant characteristics of English romantic poetry. This emphasis on nature becomes very obvious when looking at lyrical ballads, the very first volume of poetry composed by William Wordsworth and co-authored by his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and published for the first time in 1798. The second edition of the same volume was published in 1800, while the third and final edition was published in 1802 (Cop, 2014). As mentioned above, the understanding of nature and the meanings associated with it depends primarily on the subject and age in which the natural work appears. This is also true for lyrical ballads. The poems included in this volume celebrate

nature and put it before any other consideration. The poems were very simple and lyrical meant to be sung by shepherds who are naturally associated with nature and have a strong bond with it since they spend most of their time with their flocks in the open natural space in the country side of England. The language in the volume is simple to reflect the simplicity of nature itself. In brief, for Wordsworth, nature is something holy and viewed as a teacher since he states specifically "let nature be your teacher" (Cop, 2014). On the other hand, other English romantic poets looked at nature as something enjoyable attempting to imitate Wordsworth's attitude towards it and considering it as a primary source of inspiration for their poetry.

7. Frost's Attitude towards Nature Versus English Romantic Poets

This section answers the third question of this research "What differentiates Frost's attitude towards nature from that of English romantic poets?" In an attempt to compare Frost's attitude towards nature to the attitude of English romantic poets, it may be fair to claim that his attitude was significantly different. Using Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" as an illustrative example, it may be concluded that he looked at nature in a different view point from that held by English romantic poets who resided in England. Frost seemed to be influenced by the transcendentalist movement pioneered by Ralf Waldo Emerson. Nature to Frost was somehow associated with the spiritual and supernatural. This view goes in line with the view of those who believed in the teaching of Transcendentalism of the 1840s. Although Frost celebrates nature in a way similar to that of the English romantic poets in his poem used as an illustrative example for purposes of this research, his influence by Transcendentalism becomes clear in the last stanza when he talks about how the woods are lovely, dark and deep, but he adds that he has promises to keep and a long way to go before he sleeps, meaning before he dies. This signifies the relationship that Frost establishes between nature and death and the life here after. This goes along the same lines at Emerson's school of thought represented specifically by the beliefs held by those who follow the Transcendentalist movement.

8. Frost's View of Nature Versus Wordsworth's

This last section attempts to make a comparison between frost and Wordsworth in terms of their attitudes towards nature and how the concept of nature was employed by each attempting to answer the final question —How did Wordsworth's view of nature differ from that of Frost's?". As hinted to above, Wordsworth, like other English romantic poets during his time, viewed nature as a source of beauty that can

be enjoyed. This view and attitude were evident in his poem *Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, used as an illustrative example for purposes of this paper. Furthermore, and just like it was for other English romantic poets, Wordsworth viewed nature as a clear primary source of inspiration in the composition of his poetry. It was also used by Wordsworth as a means through which he can use his imagination that helps him in the creation of his verse. Finally, Wordsworth looked at nature also as a source of knowledge and information. Nature becomes an effective teacher. He specifically says "let nature be your teacher. Frost, on the other hand, viewed nature in a relatively different way. Although he seems to enjoy nature and being in the presence of nature which becomes a spiritual vehicle through which he can reach a higher and more elevated level of religion and spirituality. It seems to be used by Frost as a means for meditation to arrive at certain conclusions that have to do with the creation of the universe and the life here after. Frost's view of nature seems to be influenced by the Bible and Biblical teachings. This relates it directly to the church and to the Transcendentalist school pioneered by Ralf Waldo Emerson during the first half of the 19th century.

9. Conclusion

In light of the four research questions clearly stated in the research questions section of this research, a number of important conclusions can be reached. The term —nature has not always had the same meaning or carries the same level of significance. The meaning of nature has continually changed throughout history. This paper outlined such semantic changes in meaning starting with the Greek and roman empires leading to the meaning that nature carries and signifies at the present time. The paper also specified how nature was used by English romantic poets with special reference to William Wordsworth compared to how the same concept was used in America with special reference to Robert Frost. Wordsworth's attitude towards nature can be described as that of a source of inspiration for the composition of verse as well as a source of beauty to be enjoyed. Nature to Wordsworth was something to create a bond with and with which a very affectionate and passionate relationship can be established. In other words, it is something that an intimate relationship can be created with. To Wordsworth, nature can certainly be a source of knowledge and instruction. We can learn a lot from our surrounding environment and the natural things that live in our world. The attitudes of other English romantic poets such as Blake, Shelley and Keats were very similar to that of Wordsworth's since he was the pioneer of English romantic poetry and the father of English romantic verse.

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