

# AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S SELECTED POEMS

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**Abstract:** Ecocriticism has been a significant field of study since the last decade of the twentieth century. The chief focus of ecocriticism is the relationship man shares with nature. With the increasing crisis in ecology, it becomes important to study human-nature relationships more closely. It is known to all that the nineteenth century English romantic poets gave utmost importance on nature and have explored various shades of nature in their poetry. Among the nineteenth century romantics, William Wordsworth has explored nature in a more interesting way and has considered it as a separate entity. This paper is an attempt to study a few selected poems of William Wordsworth from an ecocritical perspective.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism; ecology; romantic poetry; nature; human.

## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism is a field of literary study that addresses human relationship with nature. As an academic discipline, ecocriticism began in earnest in the 1990's, but its roots go back to the late 1970's. The term "ecocriticism" was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." Many critics have defined ecocriticism in different ways. Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers in the field, has defined ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". On the other hand, David Mazel declares it is the analysis of literature "as though nature mattered." The study of ecocriticism, as it is argued, cannot be performed without a keen understanding of the environmental crisis of modern times and thus must inform personal and political actions. Therefore, ecocriticism is, in a sense, a form of activism. Many critics also emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of the enquiry, which is informed by ecological science, politics, ethics, women's studies, Native American studies, and history, among other academic fields.

## 1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this paper is to focus on the ecological consciousness in the nature poems of William Wordsworth.

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY ADOPTED

The study method followed in this paper is analytical. Selected nature centred poems of William Wordsworth have been objectively reviewed to draw some objective conclusions. The poems of the poet are the primary source of the paper. Moreover, the secondary information has also been used, wherever needed.

## 1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Whereas the present paper is based on ecocritical study of the nature poems of the concerned poet, so the paper has been confined to analyse the presentation and treatment of nature in the concerned poems only.

## 2.0 ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF THE SELECTED POEMS OF WORDSWORTH

In the nineteenth century, the English Romantic poets reacted strongly against the eighteenth century emphasis on reason and aristocratic literature. They herald the movement of liberating nature from the hierarchical domination and violence. The spirit of egalitarianism has made the kindred spirit prevail due to the Romantic Movement. In this study I will delineate the contribution of Wordsworth's poetry to the ecological consciousness advocated by ecocriticism today.

He rejects human domination over nature and listens to nature's voice. What distinguishes Wordsworth from other poets is his belief that Nature is not merely a living phenomenon, but a living entity. He ascribes to it all the attributes of humanity; life, feeling, thinking and willing. Wordsworth writes in 'Lines Written in Early Spring':

*And't is my faith that every flower,  
Enjoys the air it breathes*

Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1850) and “Tintern Abbey” record the poet's evolving understanding of nature. In some of the lines of these two poems Nature became an object of passions of the poet, as Wordsworth writes in *Tintern Abbey*:

*The sounding cataract  
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me  
 An appetite: a feeling and a love,  
 That had no need of a remoter charm,  
 Unborrowed from the eye. (Lines 76-83)*

Wordsworth has considered Nature as the best teacher for mankind. His poem *The Prelude* is an account of the best part of the poet's education from nature. Therefore, he says in the poem “Tables Turned”:

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

The romantic poets formulate an innovative and in many original ways of understanding the world. Such an understanding may authentically be termed ‘ecological’, since for the first time in the Western intellectual tradition it evinces the essential elements of a modern ecological worldview. Living in an age of Industrial revolution they preached for an understanding between human and nature. Wordsworth speculates on how the industrial revolution affected humanity's conception of its relationship to nature and its creatures. Therefore, in the poem “The Table Turned” the poet explores whether a conversation is possible between the human mind and the objects of the natural world.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

Some literary critics do not associate Wordsworth's poetry with ecocriticism because they believe that his poetic intention was to transcend the social and natural world in order to understand and inspire the human imagination. However, Hartman states that Wordsworth saw nature as ‘a presence and a power’, not an object and that the poet's missionary zeal to protect the earth because the human imagination needs to coexist physically and intellectually with it. Wordsworth rejected the assumption that humans should dominate nature and in his poetry he artistically attempts to justify his own view. In this sense he is the most environmentally conscious poet of the Romantic age of English literature.

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