



***William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey": An Ecocritical
Reading***

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The present paper argues that William Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" reveals the impressions that nature has left upon him after revisiting the Wye River. These impressions reflect the power of nature and produce strong extramundane emotions in the poet. They help Wordsworth in the process of spiritual renewal as well as they prove that nature has powerful spiritual healing forces. It proves also that Wordsworth's ecological consciousness in the poem revolves around three axes: psychological, ethical and mystical.

Key Words: Ecocriticism, Nature, Ecological Consciousness, Spiritual Renewal.

"دير تينترن" لويليام ووردزورث: قراءة نقدية بينية

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المستخلص

يبرهن البحث الحالي بأن ويليام ووردزورث في قصيدته "دير تينترن" كشف عن الانطباعات التي تركتها الطبيعة عليه بعد زيارته لنهر واي مرة أخرى. عكست هذه الانطباعات قوة الطبيعة وانتجت لدى الشاعر مشاعر خارجة عن المؤلف. هذه الانطباعات القوية ساعدت ووردزورث في عملية التجديد الروحي واثبتت أن الطبيعة لديها قوى شفاء روحية قوية. ويثبت البحث الحالي أيضاً أن الوعي البيئي عند ووردزورث في القصيدة يدور حول ثلاثة محاور: نفسي وأخلاقي وصوفي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النقد البيئي، الطبيعة، الوعي البيئي، التجديد الروحي

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*William Wordsworth's interest in writing poetry about the power of nature started when he joined Hawkshead Grammar School. He got a magnificent education in classics, literature, and mathematics. One of the essential benefits he gained from school was the chance to write poetry at a young age, and before finishing his academic study he went on a walking tour of Europe. This tour increased his adoration for nature and his compassion for the common man. In fact, these were also the two major themes in his poetry generally. In 1793, Wordsworth published his first collection *An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches*. His meeting with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1795 played a pivotal role in his life as a poet. Their collaboration produced the *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of restless poems that launched the genesis of Romanticism. He believes in the unity between man and nature, and normally in man's mind ability to grasp and expose the fundamental beauties of nature. Among his famous poems are, "Prelude," "The Idiot Boy," "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," "I wandered Lonely as a Cloud," and "Tintern Abbey".*

"Tintern Abbey" is William Wordsworth's durably famous poem that narrates his revisit to the ruins of the 12th-century Cistercian monastery



in Wales. The speaker in the poem is Wordsworth himself, who describes this spot as very close and intimate to him. The beautiful scenes of the landscape have not been missed from his memory. They have stuck in his mind and stayed with him though his long absence. In this place, he finds peace and serenity, away from the bustling and pollution of the modern cities. At the end of the poem, it becomes obvious that through the poem, the poet was speaking to his sister, Dorothy. He wants her to share the joy with him. He explains to her that he is dedicated to nature and valued its latent capabilities.

The industrial revolution started in Britain from mid to late 17th century. It changed the aspect of the British society and economy which relied on agriculture and manual labors into an economy and society that was based on industrialization and machines. The industrial revolution had tremendous effects on economic, social and cultural spheres: it transformed Britain into a big industrial power (Allen n.p). In other words, it was a time of massive technological advancement and welfare. Britain was one of the countries that employed the new technological machines and inventions like steam engine, iron and cotton machines. Therefore, these radical changes had their disadvantages internally: urbanization, pollution, and the dehumanization of work conditions. (Chen n.p). Thus, the industrial revolution had a major effect

on the Romantic Movement. In other words, romanticism offered with its rebellious spirit an outlet from mechanical consciousness, densely populated metropolitans, and industrialism, into nature, emotions and imagination.

The Romantic Movement in England began in the late eighteenth century with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798, (Scafield 5) and continued into the mid-nineteenth century. It was a reaction against the age of the Enlightenment, the industrial revolution, the renaissance and neoclassical literature that is characterized by formality and pompousness (Britannica). Instead, the Romantics highlighted on imagination, intuition, feelings and freedom in order to create literary works that celebrated individualism, emotions and nature (Somers n.p). In other words, it moved away from following a set of rules for composing literary works and, instead preferring to celebrate the author's creativity, isolation, melancholy and imagination (Lambardi)

Ecocriticism is a critical literary approach that scrutinizes the relationship between humans and nature (Glotsfelty xviii). The American critic William H. Rueckert invented this term in 1978, and introduced it (107). Since then, it has become one of the main in literary criticism issues under quest for literary critics, environmentalists and researchers.

Ecocriticism employs literature to inspect serious cases such as, the



relationship between the human beings and their natural environment in the city, and the tragic consequences of ecological deterioration. It explores how the power of literary works can enhance our perceptions of the environment. Also, it offers a wide critical view on contemporary and historical works as well in order to provide readers with a comprehensive realization about how our recent natural state has become. Ecocritical theory provides a thoughtful perspective on how human beings should interrelate and communicate with nature. Moreover, it discusses how humans can employ literature to encourage more sustainable practices to interact with nature in their lives. In addition, one of the essential purposes behind promulgating this critical theory is to raise the awareness about the environmental crises, such as deforestation, drought, desertification, global warming, and how literary works generally can evoke a sense of belongingness and interconnection within readers to their natural environment.

The theoretical framework of the present paper depends on Scott Solvic's ideas concerning the use of narrations to create an ecological awareness. He argues that narratives should be employed extensively as a crucial method by ecocritics in interpreting literature. The aim of following such approach is not designed to contend with literary works themselves, but to elucidate and value the process of reading. This

process will help humans to be inclined to literary texts as language which in some way plays a huge role in their lives out in the world (Solvic). This strategy is observed by ecocritics in literary works that focus on nature and deal with it. By exploring the environmental connotations of literature, ecocriticism helps humans to better understand their relationship with the natural world and how it influences their lives. Furthermore, Solvic calls for a better understanding of the role of the academics in raising people's consciousness towards nature. He encourages for a direct confrontation between literary works and the world. Then the result of this encounter should be examined carefully in order to detect the overlapping perspectives and motifs. In Solvic's ideology, storytelling plays a crucial role in this process. In other words, through storytelling two main aims are going to be accomplished: narrating one's personal story, and how the connection with the world formulates our reactions to texts.

Solvic proposes to analyze literary works in terms of their ecological inferences. In other words, he explores how literature can be used to promote and create a thoughtful ecological consciousness. Thus, ecocriticism offers new interpretations to contemporary and classics by inspecting the approaches in which literature can be used to address



environmental plights and handling with them. Therefore, ecocritical theory is seen as an effective tool for ecocritics and environmentalists.

The present paper argues that William Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" reveals the impressions that nature has left upon him after revisiting the Wye River. These impressions reflect the power of nature and produce strong extramundane emotions in the poet. They help Wordsworth in the process of spiritual renewal as well as they prove that nature has powerful spiritual healing forces. It proves also that Wordsworth's ecological consciousness in the poem revolves around three axes: psychological, ethical and mystical. The significance of this paper lies in encouraging for a better understanding to the relationship between man and his physical environment. It also proposes to create a thoughtful ecological consciousness by highlighting on the importance of nature progress, environmental awareness and environmental literacy on environmental issues, and finally calls for an influential action.

As far as the psychological axis is concerned, Wordsworth opens pensively his poem by lamenting his detachment from nature. He depicts the current rejoining with nature as an experience of reconnecting with his beloved. He objectifies nature as a woman to be wooed. He is passionately nostalgic, and is blaming her for this prolonged detachment:

Five years have passed; five summers, with the length

Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.—Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion (Wordsworth 1-7).

Wordsworth expresses his adoration for nature throughout his spiritual and physical union with it. He is completely immersed in this love, and can only reveal his feelings towards nature when he is in touch with it. The extraordinary passion that is absorbed from the natural placidity is also exposed in these lines. Wordsworth's second visit is engulfed by his profound love to nature (Bhandari 811). Also, the opening lines reveal

Wordsworth's deep admiration for nature because through them he expresses a sense of sentimental connection to the natural world since they reflect nature's ability to evoke strong feelings in the poet. They help to comprehend nature as a source of spiritual revivification.

Additionally, the psychological axis is revealed also when Wordsworth inventively depicts "Tintern Abbey" as a stage of a transcendental dramatic journey since it is astutely set. Tintern Abbey represents archeological ruins of old belief. Implicitly, it involves a transformation within Wordsworth's psyche. This shift produces his new autonomous spirituality. It can be defined as the free, non-contingent and



unconditioned spirit that defines itself in relation to nature. His

attachment to nature expands his spirit:

*For she [nature] can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings. (126-134)*

Wordsworth's explicit argument here is that his independent spirit transcends the barriers of the materialistic, destitute and deformed awareness of the industrial revolution. Thus, Wordsworth's spiritual transition of a new kind is instituted and insinuated safe on the pillar of spiritual resuscitation and transcendental perception.

The ethical sphere is elucidated creatively when Wordsworth crystallizes the advantages of his connectedness with nature by making a direct comparison between the life in the city during the industrial revolution and the life in nature:

*Though absent long,
These forms of beauty, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in 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;
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure (23-32).

Wordsworth's past experience with the life in the city is entwined with a contemplative admiration for the beauty and power of the surrounding natural place. Therefore, these lines mirror the perceptions that nature produces in the poet and come as a powerful protest and critique against environmental decadence and the damage that industrial capitalism have caused to nature. Furthermore, the city in Wordsworth's ideology is the place of ethical perversion since it is manufactured by the Enlightenment. The city's materialistic and arid perspective damages man's spirit. Thus, the poet's life in nature is characterized by restfulness, and then comes in contrast with it his life in the city which is colored by spiritual lassitude.

This implied rhetorical comparison includes also another essential difference between the two experiences: in nature, he is deliberately in solitude, while in the city he is forced to loneliness (Barbour 159). Thus, his residence in nature is not stultified by the jejune course that he felt in urban life.

For this reason, Wordsworth distinctively puts the chasms between the two lives in triple phases: nature, repose and solitude confronting city, weariness, and loneliness. Wordsworth's personal meditative reflections throughout these lines emphasize the ethical connections between him and



the environment, which in turn free Wordsworth from the despondency and dejection of modern industrialized polluted cities.

In fact, one of the basic roles of poetry is to cultivate human's soul.

This process could be accomplished by offering man the universe to embrace. Embracing the universe implies reducing strategies, activities and policies followed by humans that controlled nature and misuse its powers. Thus, humans should elevate the practices and behaviors that empower their relationship with nature. These enlightened and sober thoughts towards nature turn the man in to a crossway where fruitful positive perspectives about his nature will be fused and interweaved. Thus, Wordsworth employs poetry as a powerful tool that would be able to penetrate man's spirit, and rehabilitate man's relationship with nature

(Pogne 109-110).

Wordsworth offers a new substitute vision for the mechanical consciousness that is produced by the industrial revolution. In his ideology, nature is a source of inspiration and a teacher as well, since it broadens his consciousness:

Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul

Of all my moral being. (103-112).

Thus, nature establishes, heals, protects, leads, and it is the spiritual creed of his ethics. Intelligently, Wordsworth sets the essentials of his morality. In his ideology, it is nature that is considered the cornerstone of his ethics. Stoutly, he believes that nature refines and ameliorates man's life, since the course of bliss is superfluous. In this respect Wordsworth follows the general trend in the nineteenth century which prefers non religious ethics. Therefore, his ethical doctrine is a naturalist one (Barbour 165-166). In other words, he institutes the basics of his autonomous spirituality away from the mysteries of the supernatural. Wordsworth's deep connection to nature is proposed to release his ecological consciousness within himself and his readers as well. So, nature teaches him also how to meditate. Wordsworth suggests that his deep connection to nature allows him to think with clarity about the aspects of his new ethical principles that are purely naturalistic. Nature plays the biggest role in formulating Wordsworth's newly heterodox views.

Wordsworth has subjective and distinctive mystical views about the characterization of the natural world. His mystical creed differentiates between 'things and objects'. For Wordsworth, objects remain inoperative, desolated, existing whether humans conceive or employ them

or not (Gaul 52), whereas 'things' are antonyms to objects: they are spirited, fundamental and harmonious. Thus, the mystical axis is manifested when Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" deliberately avoids representing noticeable 'objects'; architects and historical sites that were found in and around abbey like Berkeley and Chepstow Castles and the ruined abbey. (52-53). Therefore, he intentionally bypasses representing objects in "Tintern Abbey" although their magnitude and grandeur, and, instead, prefers representing things:

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,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye (77-81)

The reason behind Wordsworth's obsession in things (cataract, rock, mountain, wood) rather than objects is his intention to reflect an intensive attachment between himself and nature. He brings life to these things, and describes them as speaking creatures that have voices. Wordsworth's magniloquent characterization creates a powerful image of nature as an integral part of his transcendentalism. He believes that nature and humans are one; they are inseparable. And this is in fact a romantic view of Oneness. That's why he urges in his poem for a profound connection with nature. For this reason, Wordsworth prioritizes 'things' than 'objects' and

sees them as incomparable (Potkay 391). Moreover, this insightful and passionate engagement is designed on purpose by the poet in order to enlighten people that they could find their pure selves and tranquility when they define themselves in aligning with nature. Wordsworth in his poetry skillfully utilizes the representation of things in order to draw his readers' attention on his spiritual consciousness. This shift in orientation towards nature and its elements strengthens the relationship between man and nature (Lake 446).

Added to that, these lines expose the ways in which Wordsworth explores man's place in the natural world. His acute observations connect the poem to a broader ecological discourse and stimulate readers to gain a better understanding of Wordsworthian holistic and mystic vision of nature. In this respect, Francis Ponge argues that, poets have a remarkable mission, because they are seen as the interpreters of the mysterious and speechless world. They probe into the basic constituents of its elements.

They whisper, mumble until they arrive at the bottom of the origins,

So, Wordsworth is the “where things and formulas are one” (110). translator of the innermost deposits of the natural world. His transcendental view is uncovered about the metaphysical connection between man and nature. Wordsworth's use of his talent is important in this regard; his lyrical descriptions of the manifestations of things found in the ecological system



bring an intimate estimation about the essential role of nature in the
process of spiritual revival.

There are many different interpretations for "Tintern Abbey" since its first publication, like William Richey's "The Politicized Landscape of "Tintern Abbey" and Karen Hadley's "The Commodification of Time in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey". But in my view, it has perhaps been best understood through ecocriticism. Adopting ecocritical theory in analyzing "Tintern Abbey" in the present paper is proposed to bring an appreciation of the poem's rhetorical beauty and the focal significance of nature to Wordsworth's naturalistic vision. In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth expresses the level of mystical, ethical and psychological connections he has to nature, portraying it as a cohesive system. In fact, Wordsworth in his poem emphasizes on the importance of understanding the ecological system and its impact on human beings. Thus, literary works that tackle nature and its impacts on man's life and his ethical system must be analyzed minutely to detect the roles they have in forming a better relationship between man and nature (Meeker 3-4). The ecocritical reading of the poem resonates Mathew Arnold's evaluation about Wordsworth's poetry as he describes it as a great poetry because it has the capability to transfer "The joy offered to us in nature" (18). Therefore, literature plays a vital role in the process of reconciliation between man and nature

In conclusion, in “Tintern Abbey” Wordsworth exposes nature’s ability to both revitalize and inspire. Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” calls for a reformation: he urges people to reestablish their relationship with nature.

The ecological crises that are facing nature today like global warming, deforestation, drought and pollution can be solved when humans rectify their ecological system and embrace nature and its constitutive powers.

Nature affects man’s deepest emotions and helps him to discover his cognitive and spiritual truths. The ecocritical reading of the poem proves that nature is the major source of man’s spiritual renewal, solidarity and

equanimity. This paper recommends to incorporate extensive and intensive ecocritical curriculums which in turn will create a thoughtful ecological awareness within pupils and students alike. These curricula should be chosen carefully by experts from both Ministry of Education and Ministry of higher Education and Scientific Research in Iraq with didactic objectives that guide students concerning how they should reply and act toward ecological issues in their culture.

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