Nature as a Living Entity in Select Poems of William Wordsworth

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Abstract:
The age of Wordsworth is the age of the revolution in the history of politics and of what is broadly called the romantic age of literature. William Wordsworth was born in 1770 at Cockermouth, Cumberland, and spent much of his boyhood among the shepherds and dalesmen of his native country. He got the influence from his early surroundings, profound and lasting; for rough and rugged as they were, these simple peasant folk were types of the homely virtues of manhood and womanhood untainted by contact with the corruptions of civilization, and from his familiar intercourse with them he learned faith in humanity and reverence for the elemental things of life. He was educated at Hawkeshead School, Lancashire, with the Girondist party. This paper focuses on Wordsworth’s views on nature in his life from his poems, Daffodils and Tintern Abbey. He brings two different feelings in these two poems. In Daffodils, he expresses his own wish to become a part of nature thus he compares himself as a cloud and wanders in the sky there he sees a field of daffodils beside a lake. On seeing the beauteous form of the flowers, he thinks that they are the stars in the Milky Way, which are very happily dancing and fluttering and also influence the waves of the lake to dance beside them. Then he senses that nature is his jocund company because it gives him pleasure, when he is in solitude. The next poem, Tintern Abbey deals with the naturalistic elements in his life in special forms. Here he describes nature as a mother, nurse, guide and a fellow friend who revive him when he is in isolation, and in vacant mood. He visits the river Wye after five years and he expresses his strong love for the beautiful mountains, waterfalls and Sycamore tree. The first visit to that river didn’t make much change in him. He was like a happy child and roaming here and there. Whereas his second visit to the place brings more about life with nature to him. He resumes his memories of the river Wye whenever he is away from it. During the departure, the scenes of the river give him pleasure to lead his life not only for the present but also for his future.

The age of Wordsworth is the age of the revolution in the history of politics and of what is broadly called the Romantic Age of Literature. The triumph of romanticism was accompanied by naturalism in which Wordsworth brings the blend of nature throughout his life with the company of his sister Dorothy Wordsworth. William Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth, Cumberland, in 1770, and spent much of his boyhood among the shepherds and dalesmen of his native country. He got the influence from his early surroundings, profound and lasting; for rough and rugged as they were, these simple peasant folk were types of the homely virtues of manhood and womanhood untainted by contact with the corruptions of civilization, and from his familiar intercourse with them he learned faith in humanity and reverence for the elemental things of life.

“Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” says, Cheryll Glotfelty. Form nature to culture we have four aspects to be concentrated; the first is ‘the wilderness’- deserts, oceans, uninhabited, continents. The second area is ‘the scenic sublime’- forests, lakes, mountains, waterfalls. The next area is ‘the country side’- hills, fields, woods. The final
area which is of ‘the domestic picturesque’- parks, gardens and lanes.

In the poems of *Daffodils* and in *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth applies the fourth area where he brings the feeling of domestic picturesque as well as the third area which is known as the scenic sublime.

Wordsworth brings the presence of nature in his life even he is away from it. He expresses his love for nature through two poems, the *Daffodils* and *Tintern Abbey*. In *Daffodils* he says that he was wandering like a cloud which was floating above hills and valleys.

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. (The Daffodils, 1-4)

There he encountered a field of daffodils beside a lake. The dancing, fluttering flowers stretched endlessly along the shore, and though the waves of the lake danced beside the flowers, the daffodils outdid the water in glee. The flowers were thousand in number and they were happily tossing their heads in the breeze. In the mean time he could not help but be happy in such a jocund company of flowers. He says that he stared and stared, but did not realize what wealth the scene would bring him. For now, whenever he feels “vacant” or “pensive,” the memory flashes upon his inward eye and his heart fills with pleasure and dances with the daffodils. In this poem he loves the presence of the daffodils and he cherishes and compares the company of the flowers as jocund company. It gives him serenity when he is in pensive mood.

On the other hand the poem *Tintern Abbey* which is a memory specifically, childhood memories of unison with natural beauty. The full title of this poem is “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye” during a Tour. July 13, 1798. It opens with Wordsworth’s assertion that five years have passed since he last visited this location, encountered its relaxing, rustic scenery, and heard the murmuring waters of the river. He recites the objects he sees again, and describes their effect upon him: the “steep and lofty cliffs” impress upon him “thoughts of more deep seclusion”; he leans against the dark sycamore tree and looks at the cottage-grounds and the orchard trees, whose fruit is still unripe.

He sees the “wreaths of smoke” rising up from cottage chimneys between the trees, and imagines that they might rise from “vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,” or from the cave of a hermit in the deep forest. The speaker then describes how his memory of these “beauteous forms” has worked upon him in his absence from them: when he was alone, or in crowded towns and cities, they provided him with “sensations sweet, Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart.” The memory of the woods and cottages offered “tranquil restoration” to his mind, and even affected him when he was not aware of the memory, influencing his deeds of kindness and love. He further credits the memory of the scene with offering him access to that mental and
spiritual state in which the burden of the world is lightened, in which he becomes a “living soul” with a view into “the life of things.” Even in the present moment, the memory of his past experiences in these surroundings floats over his present view of them, and he feels bittersweet joy in reviving them. He refers the memory of the river Wye is bittersweet because when he senses the presence of the river is the sweetest experience he has. Whereas on the other hand he thinks that he could not visit the river whenever he wishes to visit may be that as a bitter one. He considers happily, that his present experience will provide many happy memories for future years. He acknowledges that he is different now from how he was in those long-ago times, when, as a boy, he “bounded o’er the mountains” and through the streams.

In those days, he says, nature made up his whole world: waterfalls, mountains, and woods gave shape to his passions, his appetites, and his love. That time is now past, he says, but he does not mourn it, for though he cannot resume his old relationship with nature, he has been amply compensated by a new set of more mature gifts; for instance, he can now do,

To look on nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue. (Tintern Abbey, 90-94)

And he can now sense the presence of something far more subtle, powerful, and fundamental in the light of the setting suns, the ocean, the air itself, and even in the mind of man; this energy seems to him as,

A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods,  
And mountains:

For that reason, he says, he still loves nature, still loves mountains and pastures and woods, for they anchor his purest thoughts and guard the heart and soul of his “moral being.”

He says that even if he did not feel this way or understand these things, he would still be in good spirits on this day, for he is in the company of his “dear, dear (d) Sister,” who is also his “dear, dear Friend,” and in whose voice and manner he observes his former self, and beholds “what I was once.” He offers a prayer to nature that he might continue to do so for a little while, knowing, as he says, that “Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her,” but leads rather “from joy to joy.” Nature’s power over the mind that seeks her out is such that
it renders that mind impervious to “evil tongues,” “rash judgments,” and “the sneers of selfish men,” instilling instead a “cheerful faith” that the world is full of blessings. The speaker then encourages the moon to shine upon his sister, and the wind to blow against her, and he says to her that in later years, when she is sad or fearful, the memory of this experience will help to heal her. And if he himself is dead, she can remember the love with which he worshipped nature. In that case, too, she will remember what the woods meant to the speaker, the way in which, after so many years of absence, they became dearer to him both for themselves and for the fact that she is in them.

Wordsworth exemplifies his perception on nature as a living entity through these verses, which gives him an acute thinking power when he is in isolation; it takes care of him as a nurse and gives tranquility in his depression.

Works Cited:


