
ALLIANCE OF MAN AND NATURE – AN ECO-CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S TINTERN ABBEY

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Abstract: William Blake says “Poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom”. Any piece of literature attains universal fame when it both delights and instructs the readers. Wordsworth is also one such poet who believed that man should have close rapport with Nature. He viewed it as a ‘life giving spirit’ and a source of creative imagination. Modern man in the recent days has been highly disillusioned since he has been slowly alienating himself from Nature. He leads a very fast but meaningless life. When he realizes the futility of his existence he turns to God but again without real faith. Thus he has become pseudo-religious. He fails to understand God and also himself. It is high time for the modern man to turn to Nature as prophesied by Wordsworth to make his life a meaningful one. His poem Tintern Abbey has stood the test of time and has been a classic for its theme of unifying man and Nature. This research paper is aimed at interpreting Wordsworth’s Tintern Abbey as a poem with contemporary relevance which stresses the importance of man’s unity with Nature.

Keywords: Creative imagination, God, Life-giving spirit, Nature,

Introduction: William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is hailed as one of the most distinguished poets in the history of English literature. His contribution to romantic poetry is remarkable. Wordsworth and Coleridge are considered as the pioneers of Romantic poetry. Romantic poetry is essentially subjective in its spirit but at the same time objective due to its universal theme of unifying man with nature. Wordsworth and other romantic poets were able to establish a close intimacy with nature through which they derive inspiration and imaginative power. Romanticism brings man closer with nature to get a better understanding of it that Nature is a ‘living entity’. Modern man in the twenty first century has been craving for material comforts and has been slowly getting alienated from nature. On the other hand, he also realises that his soul is spiritually empty and his life is futile. Nowadays we can witness modern man to be disillusioned and is searching for mental peace and comfort. Again it is time for man to turn towards nature which can rejuvenate his hollow spirit and mind.

Critical Summary of Tintern Abbey: Wordsworth pays a second visit to the Wye River that runs through Wales after five long years. He feels delighted by

the murmur of the stream, the wooded hills, the clear blue sky and the peaceful seclusion. He also witnesses smoke coming out of a lonely hermit's cave. The poet recollects from his memory the serene beauty of nature which he has missed for the past five years. He realises that nature has nourished and refreshed both his body and spirit thereby leaving him a loving and kind-hearted person. The poet also feels a sense of relief and rejuvenation for his tormented spirit and mind. The poet also travels back and forth in time recollecting his reckless boyhood days, the adolescent days of sensual pleasure and in the third stage; he understands the sad music of humanity through nature. Since he feels enlightened at heart, he realises that nature has been an enricher and a source of great solace and happiness. At the height of his matured understanding, he also perceives the culmination of nature's bounty with man's individual power of imagination. In the last section, the poet directly addresses his sister Dorothy with whom he finds his own part of his former self with a promising future maturity. He advises her sincerely to trust nature completely and he asks her to make nature her guide for her life. He strongly believes that nature can shed light on her dark avenues of life and can assure her mental strength with all the essential virtues. He concludes his poem with a message to his sister-companion that she should worship nature which is always loyal to its followers. He also advises her to visit Wye River in her future days to gain the same enchanting experience.

Wordsworth's Creative Imagination: From the opening lines of the poem we can understand that the poet has been totally depressed by the dull and oppressive city life of England. He can be easily compared with any modern man of the present who feels a spiritual emptiness in his soul due to his busy and routine city life.

“Five years have pas't, five summers with the length of five long winters”(1)

Then we can see the poet slowly getting immersed into the scenic surroundings of nature in the forms of mountain springs, lofty cliffs, dark sycamore, orchard tufts, unripe fruits, hedges, pastoral farms and wreaths of smoke. We can witness him completely surrendering himself to the beauty of nature enjoying it through all his five senses. We can see the poet's longing to become a hermit when he refers to the Hermit as he says,

“Of some hermits cave where by his fire the hermit sits alone”(21)

Even though the hermit is alone he has a noble companion called nature but for the modern man even though surrounded by friends and relatives he feels alienated and secluded. The hollowness in the modern man's spirit does not allow him to enjoy the beauty in nature. As the poet says,

“These beauteous forms, through a long absence have not been to me as is landscape to a blind man's eye”(23)

The poet recollects his innocent boyhood days ; the best portion of a good man's life, and the deeds of love and kindness without any conscious egoism or motives. Man's quest for money and other material comforts makes his world an unintelligible world but nature alone can restore him to be a living soul. Again the vain longings of modern man is depicted as,

".....how oft –In darkness and amid the many shapes of joyless daylight when the fretful stir unprofitable and the fever of the world, have hung upon the beating of my heart"(48)

Man and Nature:The willing surrender of man's spirit to nature makes him achieve a greater state of mind and a better understanding of the harmony that governs the universe. From chaos, he can get a mystic and clear vision of the spiritual world. The poet's mind constantly fluctuates between the troublesome city life in past and serene calmness he relishes in the present. He also moves ahead in time to future which he hopes to have a promising life with the enjoyable reminiscences of Nature. When he recollects his careless boyhood days in which he freely wandered like a ' roe' (deer) he is immediately reminded of his present life as an adult who flies from something that he dreads than one who sought the thing he loved. The pain of the loss of animal joyousness can be seen as he says,

"... The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion..." (75)

Once, when he thinks about his second visit to the Wye River, he feels that he has abundant recompense, that he has gained greater maturity in spirit and is able to hear the sad music of humanity in Nature. He feels that through tranquil restoration he has been experiencing joy of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime and gaining deeper understanding of life. Since the poet is able to view nature as a great life-giving source, he says that he wants to be a lover of the meadows and the woods and the mountains. He addresses nature as

" ...The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, the guide, the guardian of my heart and soul, of all my moral being."

From the above lines, we can infer that modern man's life has become hollow due to lack of moral virtues. The poet stresses that nature can implant the essential virtues to make him a complete human being. We can also notice that the poet has surrendered himself completely to nature be one with it and to mingle with it physically and spiritually. Once again the poet becomes conscious of the impermanence of his genial spirits which are subject to decay inn the due course of time. He turns to his sister-companion Dorothy and almost in a sermonizing tone he says,

".... Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her ; 't is her privilege
Through all the fears of this our life to lead

From Joy to Joy..." (line 122)

Nature as a shield:The poet finally believes that nature alone can guard him from evil tongues, rash judgments, sneers of selfish men and the dreary intercourse of daily life. He advises her to allow nature to mingle with her spirit and permit her mind to be mansion for all lovely forms of nature. From the above lines we can understand that nature can relieve and soothe our pains which arise out of our quest for material pleasures. Like a yoga guru he advises his sister to meditate lonely in nature to understand the real meaning in life. He says ,

"... If solitude, or fear or pain or grief
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of lender joy wilt thou remember me." (143)

He has a strong conviction that nature alone can be the best remedy for all worries. He calls himself a worshipper of nature and in his mission of being a devotee, he never feels tired or bored of following it. He reaches an elite transcendental stage in his excessive love and devotion to nature. He says,

"...With warmer love –oh ! Wise for deeper zeal of holier love..." (154)

He also assures his sister and himself that even after many years of absence, the wonderful sceneries of nature remain dearer for them forever.

Form and Style:The complete title of the poem is little bit lengthy, "Lines composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798. The narrative style and flow of language are very natural. The use of blank verse makes it readable and easy to comprehend. Though the poet follows the stress pattern of iambic pentameter it occasionally gets broken in few lines. Written in the form of an imaginary monologue, memory plays a vital role throughout the poem. The mental reactions of the poet are very sincere as nature is able to offer the poet the gifts of joy, therapeutic reliefs, moral virtues and better understanding of himself. It is undoubtedly a philosophical poem at the same an existential poem too. He has beautifully explicated the inseparable alliance between Nature and man, his place in the universal harmony and his realization of the presence of a Supreme Power which controls the entire universe. The immortal lines of blank verse depict the grandeur of poet's creative imagination and versatility of thought. All these unique features along with the contemporary relevance have raised this poem to a classical level and has given an unchallenged place in the Romantic poetry.

Summing up: Through this poem, one can realize the poet's feelings that Nature has the power to nourish our hearts and souls. It can give us sweet sensations, mental joy, peace and teaches us to be kind and loving by nature. With these messages, the poem gains universal appeal and contemporary significance. Nature alone can restore our mental peace and give soothing effect

to our troubled spirits. The modern man remains disillusioned and disturbed by his futile efforts of searching for material benefits. His soul remains void and mental peace is his need of the hour. This romantic poem with its universal theme of glorifying nature can surely comfort the troubled mind of modern man. Nature can make him gain a better understanding of life as it teaches him to be more loving and kind. It acts like our teacher, our guide and our nurse. Noted critic Graham Hough has rightly observed about the theme of the poem as,

"It fuses together revelation of purely subjective thoughts and feelings, moral deduced from personal experience in the contact with nature, discovery of nature's therapeutic and educative significance for mankind in general and Wordsworth's readiness to initiate the world in this knowledge for the good of the future generation."

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