A Dialectical Love between Nature and Mind:
An Ecofeminist Reading of Wordsworth’s Poetry

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Abstract

As one of the major poets in British Romantic period, Wordsworth is an important figure in nature writing. Yet, early in the 1960s, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey H. Hartman, and Paul de Man have mentioned that imagination in Wordsworth’s poetry is of the same or more significance as nature. Wordsworth’s dialectical love between nature and mind results in different interpretations among critics: some put emphasis on his love toward nature and some on the rivalry between nature and his imagination. Jonathan Bate believes that Wordsworth’s poetry is an exemplar of nature writing from the perspective of the ecocriticism since his poetry teaches readers how to walk with nature through the depiction of the pleasure derived from natural scenes. This paper, however, through the exploration of the nature represented in Wordsworth’s poetry and the relation between nature and his imagination, tries to demonstrate that Wordsworth’s nature is the result of anthropocentric appropriation of nature and this human-centered attitude is what ecofeminism argues against.

Keywords: Nature, mind, imagination, Wordsworth, ecofeminism

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A significant one among the predominant ideas of the Romantic poetics is the poets’ attitude toward nature. The importance they attach to nature is conspicuous and extraordinary. Most of the great Romantic lyrics begin with the description of natural scenes or landscapes. Nature, instead of being just rhetorical artifice as in the sixteenth-century sonnets and the early seventeenth-century lyrics, often becomes the immediate subject and important inspiration in Romantic lyrics as Keats in “I Stood Tip-Toe . . .” claims, “For what has made the sage or poet write / But the fair paradise of Nature’s light?” (125-26). The Romantics also capture the sensuous nuance and describe natural phenomena with an accuracy of observation, which can find no match in the previous centuries.

Although the Romantics attach great importance to nature and regard nature as the most important inspiration for their poetry, “nature poetry” is a misnomer. Harold Bloom in The Visionary Company has questioned the idea that the Romantics are basically nature poets and Geoffrey Hartman in “A Poet’s Progress: Wordsworth and the Via Naturaliter Negativa”, through the analysis of The Prelude has agreed to the critics who have “pointed to the deeply paradoxical character of Wordsworth’s dealings with nature and suggested that what he calls imagination may be intrinsically opposed to nature” (33). As a matter of fact, imagination is another dominant requisite, in addition to nature, in the Romantic poetry; the Romantics believe that the primary power of imagination can give readers the sense of wonder, which is a major function of poetry. M. H. Abrams
in *The Mirror and the Lamp* has scrutinized this shift of aesthetics from mimesis to expressive theory. According to Abrams, from Plato to the eighteenth century, the purpose of art is to imitate nature, just like the mirror reflecting the outside world, and this is the so-called mimesis theory. In the Romantic period, the stress is “shifted more and more to the poet’s natural genius, creative imagination and emotional spontaneity” (21), and this introduces a new orientation into the theory of art, that is, the expressive theory. Besides, Abrams in *The Correspondent Breeze* also suggests that the greater Romantic lyric usually follows the structure of description-meditation-description, in which the poets’ meditation is of more significance than the description of the landscape (77-79). It seems that the Romantic tradition was grounded upon imagination, not nature.

Because of the antithetic character between the two dominant elements, the external nature and the internal imagination, there seems always a tug-war between nature and mind in the Romantic poetry as Paul de Man in his essay on the Romantic image “Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image” has mentioned: the fundamental ambiguity that characterized the poetics of romanticism results from the theme of imagination linked closely to the theme of nature (24). As a precursor in the British Romantic period, Wordsworth, because of his love to both nature and imagination, causes paradoxical responses among critics. In “Two Roads to Wordsworth” M. H. Abrams suggests that modern critics yield two Wordsworths, one is the simple Wordsworth, who is a simple, forthright, great poet of natural man and the world and affirmative poet of life, love, and joy; the other is the problematic Wordsworth, who is complex, paradoxical, self-divided poet of chiaroscuro, or even darkness.
In this paper, I would explore Wordsworth’s dialectical love between nature and mind/imagination from the echofeminist perspective.

Woman in traditional patriarchal society is deemed inferior to man and her role as a mother is emphasized because being a mother is considered to be the only function woman has. As Julia Kristeva in “Staba Mater” mentions, “[W]e live in a civilization where the consecrated (religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood” (161). While we emphasize the maternal characteristics of women, their identity as autonomous human beings and independent subjects is forgotten. It seems that the only purpose of the existence of women is to be mothers, giving birth to and nourishing the offspring. The value of their life depends on their ability of reproducing and nursing. Likewise, we also hold a similar attitude to nature. As an important element, “Mother Nature” or “Mother Earth” is a common expression in Romantic poetry. According to ecofeminists, this metaphorical connection between nature and mother seems to emphasize and praise the maternal characteristics of natural environment, laying stress on the bountiful resources of the earth which seem never to be exhausted. In this way we limit the role nature plays to the reproducing and nursing role the mother plays. This connection between nature and motherhood finally results in human exploitation and devastation of the natural environment. Hence the ecofeminists advocate a combination of women’s movement with the ecological movement since women and nature have undergone a similar experience—being dominated by men. To Wordsworth, what he gets from nature is the spiritual nourishment, the inspiration of his imagination, and in my analysis of his poems this kind of mother/child
relation will be discussed. Besides, the ecofeminists also fight against the value dualisms and value hierarchies in Western tradition since “[t]he cultural creation of hierarchical relationship between (some) humans and nature is inseparable from the way we see nature, and governs what we do to both” (Cantrell 204). A famous ecofeminist Karen J. Warren has listed the value hierarchy common in Western culture:

> These hierarchically organized value dualisms include reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, human/nature, and man/woman dichotomies . . . whatever is (historically) associated with emotion, body, nature, and women is regarded as inferior to that which is (historically) associated with reason, mind, culture, human (i.e., male), and men.

(*Ecological Feminist Philosophy* xii)

Therefore, how to break down these value dualisms and give back autonomy to those which have been dominated, such as women and nature, becomes an important challenge to ecofeminists.

In addition, Camille Paglia in *Sexual Personae* suggests that the connection of women with nature results from their similar procreative power, which is chthonian to the male.¹ In Paglia’s opinion, nature is chthonian and art represents human beings’ effort to give form and order to this daemonic nature. She also makes use of Nietzsche’s idea of the conflict between Apollo and Dionysus in Greek culture and views Dionysus as the ruler of the chthonian and as the potential subversive power against the rigid social norms, which can be represented by Apollo.

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She argues that “western personality and western achievement are, for better or worse, largely Apollonian. Apollo’s great opponent Dionysus is ruler of the chthonian whose law is procreative femaleness” (12). She further argues that “nineteenth-century aestheticism, a vision of a glittering crystalline world, is a flight from the chthonian swamp into which nature-loving Wordsworth inadvertently led Romanticism” (93). These ideas, I think, are quite insightful and provide a possible perspective for reading Wordsworth’s poetry, although I do not totally agree with her analysis of Wordsworth’s poetry in Chapter 11 “Marriage to Mother Nature”.

Jonathan Bate in Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition has applied ecological criticism to Wordsworth’s poetry and argued for Wordsworth’s nature poetry. Bate claims that Wordsworth’s poetry is what we need now in this time of ecological crisis since Wordsworth enables his readers better to enjoy or to endure life by teaching them to look at and dwell in the natural world (4); that is, he can teach the readers “how to walk with nature” (8). Besides, Bate also puts emphasis on how readers may derive some fresh use or pleasure from his nature poetry. In the first chapter “The Language That Is Ever Green” Bate affirms the importance of nature for Wordsworth and argues that Wordsworth’s language in his pastoral is ever green. In the third chapter “The Moral of Landscape” Bate argues that Wordsworth sacralizes nature and nature’s sanctity must be reaffirmed in our contemporary structure of

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2 Her main argument is that “Wordsworth forfeits maleness for spiritual union with mother nature: wholeness through self-mutilation” (301), and therefore, Wordsworth’s poetry is a-sexual. Besides, she suggests, “Men must be mutilated to get into Wordsworth’s poetry” (304), since Wordsworth always impair his males physically or spiritually.
values (62-84). It is true that Wordsworth’s nature poetry can help readers derive pleasure from nature and I have been attracted by his beautiful description of the natural scenes since the first time I got to know his poems. And it is also true that Wordsworth always worships nature as a religion and praises every beauteous form in it. Yet, is nature’s sanctity or the pleasure that nature can give is what we really need now, on the verge of ecological crisis? Isn’t this a male appropriation of nature, limiting the function of nature to the nourishing or pleasing role?

In Wordsworth’s poetry nature is always considered to be female. He uses the female pronoun “she” to depict nature and in “Expostulation and Reply” he uses “Mother Earth” to mean the natural environment. Besides, in “The Immortality Ode” the concept that nature is the mother to care for men is even more clearly presented:

   Earth fills her lap with pleasure of her own;
   Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
   And, even with something of a Mother’s mind,
   And no unworthy aim,
   The homely Nurse doth all she can
   To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
   Forget the glories he hath known,
   And that imperial palace whence he came. (77-84)

In Wordsworth’s opinion, there is a maternal bond between child and nature as he says in The Prelude: “Among his infant veins are interfused / The gravitation and the filial bond / Of nature that connect him with the world” (II. 242-44). Nature here is like a mother, feeding her child, the
poet, with beautiful scenes. Wordsworth acknowledges the mother-like nourishing power of nature.

In addition, Wordsworth also worships nature as the Supreme Being. As a precursor of the Romantic poetry, Wordsworth begins the worship of nature. To Wordsworth, nature sometimes seems to be the power that makes the world meaningful, so he thus hails nature: “O Power Supreme! / Without whose care this world would cease to breathe” (The Prelude X. 420-21). In “The Tables Turned” Wordsworth emphasizes the dominant power of nature by saying:

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things: —
We murder to dissect.
Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart.
That watches and receives. (25-32)

Here, the poet denies the operation of human mind and think that our meddling intellect would destroy the beauteous forms of nature. Hence, Wordsworth suggests that we should just watch and receive what nature shows us with no attempt to use art to depict or science to dissect nature. This viewpoint somewhat corresponds with some of the keynote ideas in ecofeminism, which argues against anthropocentric domination of nature. Similarly, in “Expostulation and Reply” Wordsworth promotes “wise passiveness” in facing nature and writes: “That we can feed this mind of ours / In a wise passiveness” (23-24). Here nature is regarded as the great
mentor and we can enrich our mind through passive acceptance of nature. Besides, in “My Heart Leaps Up” Wordsworth even worships nature with religious sentiment and wishes that his days “to be / Bound each to each by natural piety” (7). It is often believed that in his younger days he advocated the “religion of nature”. This reverence for nature seems to distinguish Wordsworth from poets in the previous centuries.

Besides, Wordsworth also protests against brutal treatment of natural creatures. For example, in “Hart-Leap Well” Wordsworth describes a race between a hart and a knight and after being chased by the knight on the horseback (and this is the third horse that labors in the race) for a long time, the hart exhausts his strength and before he dies he spares no effort to leap down a lofty brow to a fountain, which is believed to be his native place, and breathes his last there. The hart’s striving bravery is admired and glorified, but what is more important is Wordsworth’s comment at the very end of the poem: “One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide, / Taught both by what she [nature] shews, and what conceals, / Never to blend our pleasure or our pride / With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels” (177-180). Wordsworth may be somewhat human-centered in calling the hart “the meanest thing” but his idea here that we human beings should not build our pleasure on the sorrow of other creatures is quite praiseworthy.

In “The Waterfall and the Eglantine” Wordsworth expresses his idea that all living creatures should live peacefully together. At the beginning of the poem, the briar-rose seems to be repressed by the waterfall: “The Flood was tyrannous and strong; / The patient Briar suffer’d long” (15-16). Then in order to change the situation, the briar tries to persuade the waterfall from destroying him. He emphasizes the happy life they once
had and the pleasure the waterfall brought to him and he says: “Nor was it common gratitude / That did your cares repay” (29-30). Then the briar ensures the waterfall the repayment:

When Spring came on with bud and bell,
Among these rocks did I
Before you hang my wreath to tell
That gentle days were nigh!
And in the sultry summer hours
I shelter’d you with leaves and flowers’
And in my leaves now shed and gone
The linnet lodg’d and for us two
Chaunted his pretty songs, when you
Had little voice of none. (31-40)

Then the eglantine keeps on begging for the favor:

But now proud thoughts are in your breast—
What grief is mine, you see.
Ah! would you think, ev’n yet how blest
Together we might be!
Together of both leaf and flower bereft
Some ornaments to me are left—
Rich store of scarlet hips is mine,
With which I in my humble way
Would deck you many a Winter’s day,
A happy Eglantine!” (21-50)

The personification of natural objects and pathetic fallacy conspicuous in
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this poem are considered to be human-centered domination of nature by ecofeminists and this will be further discussed later; yet, this idea of reciprocity between living creatures is really innovative and enlightening.

As mentioned above, Abrams thinks critics have produced two Wordsworths, one simple, the other problematic. According to Abrams, some critics think behind the manifold surface particularities of Romantic poems there is a single submerged plot: “the sustained struggle of the poet’s consciousness (operating in the mode often called ‘imagination’) to achieve ‘autonomy,’ or absolute independence from that adversary which is not itself—namely, ‘nature,’ the world of sensible objects” (86). The Wordsworth analyzed before seems to be the simple Wordsworth and the Wordsworth that Bate argues for, who affirms his love to nature. Yet, this is not the complete Wordsworth and in the following part, I would like to scrutinize the problematic Wordsworth to see how he struggles in a dialectical love between nature and his mind and how he tries to make his imagination independent of nature.

In discussion of the complex Wordsworth, a fragment: “Nutting” is very important because it can represent a turning point in Wordsworth’s attitude toward nature. Different from the amiable and loving attitude toward nature, Wordsworth’s attitude in this poem is quite complex and ambivalent. In this poem, Wordsworth talks about the experience of his nutting of the hazels. There are some opposite interpretations of this poem: some critics view it positively as the necessary step in the poet’s development of imagination and others view it as a typical enactment of male dominance. Inspired by some ideas mentioned in Janice Haney Peritz’s “Sexual Politics and the Subject of ‘Nutting’: Questions of
Ideology, Rhetoric, and Fantasy” I will read this poem in terms of mother/child relationship in psychoanalysis. This fragment at first was intended to be one of the “spots of time” in The Prelude but subsequently it was taken out and was published in the 1800 edition of the Lyrical Ballads. This background knowledge assures us of the importance of the “Nutting” event in the growth of the poet’s mind. In the first half of the poem, with sexual terms Wordsworth shows the rude masculine domination of the natural scene.

….O’er pathless rocks,
Through beds of matted fern, and tangled thickets,
*Forcing my way*³, I came to one dear nook
Unvisited, where not a broken bough
Drooped with its withered leaves, ungracious sign
Of devastation; but the hazels rose
Tall and erect, with tempting clusters hung,
*A virgin scene*⁴! . . . (14-21)

Peritz suggests that this bower scene is pre-Oedipal and accordingly it represents the first stage of the three stages a child will experience after birth, which is related to Lacan’s famous theory of a child’s growth. In this first stage, according to Lacan, the child is born into the order of the real, which is the order preceding the formation of the ego. In this order the child experiences a pure plenitude or fullness. The child feels one with the mother and there is no feeling of separation between self and other.

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³ Italics mine.
⁴ Italics mine.
Morris Dickstein uses Spencer’s Bower of Bliss to expound Wordsworth’s unvisited nook and suggests that the difference of Wordsworth’s bower is that it is deeply concerned with the idea of Bildung (32-33). Hartman sees the boy’s destruction of the bower as a necessary step in the growth of the poet’s mind (Wordsworth’s Poetry 73-75). I basically agree that this event is an important step in the growth of the poet’s mind because he starts to form the perception of self and sets up his ego and he starts to realize the difference between (him)self and the (m)other, that is, nature. However, in my opinion, it is not the pre-Oedipal stage but a turning point from the first stage to the second one, the mirror stage. Here we can see the male poet’s merciless ravage and sullying of the virgin scene, which represents his forming of his subjectivity and his separation from the mother nature. Later Wordsworth seems to regret his rudeness and in the last part of the poem he thus puts:

Ere from the mutilated bower I turned
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky.—
Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods. (50-56)

When he is leaving he feels “a sense of pain”, this pain probably results from his regret of his rude behavior; yet, this pain can also be considered to be the pain of the separation, the separation between the newly-formed ego and the (m)other. Through this process, he affirms his own autonomous
subjectivity and he also realizes the autonomy of nature: “there is a spirit in
the woods.” “It is a necessary initiation, and a sexual one, that brings the
boy into contact with the vital spirit of nature” (Dickstein 34).

Actually Wordsworth has undergone a complex process in his
interaction with nature and the role of nature changes in different phases of
his life. In the eighth book of The Prelude, just as in “Tintern Abbey,”
Wordsworth divides his own life into three stages. The first stage is in
his boyhood when as Wordsworth says, there are the “coarse pleasures of
my boyish day, / And their glad animal movements” (“Tintern Abbey”
73-74). At that time animal activities and trivial pleasure are his main
pursuit and little Wordsworth holds only the physical responsiveness to
nature. This may be similar to the pre-Oedipal, the real stage of Lacanian
psychoanalysis. Nature at that time fills his mind with beautiful and
sublime forms to cause him to love them and Wordsworth is not conscious
of the difference or separation between him and nature. As the poet says:
“How nature by extrinsic passion first / Peopled the mind with forms
sublime or fair, / And made me love them” (The Prelude I. 545-47). And
this kind of experience nourishes his mind and helps him become a poet.
In Wordsworth’s opinion, the presence of nature mysteriously fills the
surface of the universal earth with symbols and feelings and therefore
makes the earth abundant like a sea:

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky

5 See The Prelude (1850) “Book Eighth” ll. 340-364, and “Tintern Abbey” ll. 66-111. However, in
“Tintern Abbey,” the second stage, when nature is “all in all” to Wordsworth, is subdivided into
two periods of time. One is the time when his love of nature “had no need of a remoter charm, / By
thought supplied, nor any interest / Unborrowed from the eye” (81-83). The other is the time
when he adds thought to sense.
And on the earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
And Souls of lonely places! Can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
Such ministry, when ye through many a year
Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
Impressed upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire; and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
Work like a sea? (The Prelude I. 464-75)

When he becomes older, nature becomes the main concern to him as Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” recollects his first visit of that place:

. . . when like a roe
I bounded o’er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep river, and the lonely stream,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarse pleasures of my boyish day,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all. (67-75)

In his post-adolescent’s days nature is all in all to Wordsworth, but he seems to be driven to nature by something he dreads instead of by his love of nature. Nevertheless, nature still fills his mind with love and feeling:
. . . .  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, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. (76-83)

Here comes the second stage of his life, when the “incidental charms” in his childhood grow weaker and nature, “intervenient till this time / And secondary, now at length was sought / For her own sake” (The Prelude II. 200-03). At that time he enjoys nature as if to satisfy a physical appetite, without adding thought to the senses. During the five-year interim, however, Wordsworth has experienced the purifying power of “these beauteous forms” of nature and so he has 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” (“Tintern Abbey” 27-30). This may be considered the mirror stage in the growth of the poet’s mind; that is, he begins his separation from the mother/nature and he realizes that mother/nature and himself are two different identities. “Nutting” should be a poem concerning this phase of his growth.

When Wordsworth revisits the same place five years later, he realizes: “—That time is past, / And all its aching joys are now no more, / And all its dizzy raptures” (“Tintern Abbey 83-85). The joy and rapture brought by pure physical sensations are gone. Now nature to him is not only the
external objects but something interacts with his inward mind, his soul. With the assistance of nature, Wordsworth sees the meaning of the external world and recognizes the wholeness behind the miscellaneous shapes. Therefore, all the external things mingle into one song. “One song they sang, and it was audible, / Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear, / O’ercome by humblest prelude of that strain, / Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed” (The Prelude II. 415-18). Steeped in nature, Wordsworth learns to feel the life of things by heart instead of by the bodily senses. Only when the bodily senses are no longer dominant, can the poet see the wholeness behind the sundry scenes. As Wordsworth says in “Tintern Abbey”:

    Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
    And even the motion of our human blood
    Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
    In body, and become a living soul:
    While with an eye made quiet by the power
    Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
    We see into the life of things. (43-49)

In Wordsworth’s opinion, the external forms, through the mutual influence between him and nature, are no longer objective because they can arouse reciprocal power in the poet’s mind. This is the third stage and this is the important stage for the building of Wordsworth’s imagination. In this stage, Wordsworth undergoes the process of making his imagination, the subjective sublime, independent from nature.

In this phase of lifetime, Wordsworth thinks that he is both a receiver
and creator in this kind of reciprocal relationship with nature. Nature presents beautiful scenes before him, and at the same time, man’s mind or imagination gives life to the outside world. He says: “For feeling has to him imparted power / That through the growing faculties of sense / Doth like an agent of the one great Mind / Create, creator and receiver both, / Working but in alliance with the works / Which it beholds . . . .” (The Prelude II. 255-60). According to Wordsworth, in the phase when nature becomes “all in all” to him, he still possesses his infantile creative sensibility, which sometimes is capricious and uncomfortable with the general rule. Yet, by subordination to nature, this creativity can be stabilized. The poet reports: “A plastic power / Abode with me; a forming hand, at times / Rebellious, acting in a devious mood; / A local spirit of his own, at war / With general tendency, but, for the most, / Subservient strictly to external things / With which it communed” (The Prelude II. 362-68). On the other hand, however, nature also must be subordinate to his creative sensibility and then every outward shape to him is full of life. The poet remembers, “An auxiliary light / Came from my mind, which on the setting sun / Bestowed new splendour” (The Prelude II. 368-70). Under the influence of this light from his mind, the birds, the breezes, the fountains “obeyed / A like dominion” and “[h]ence my obeisance, my devotion hence, / And hence my transport” (The Prelude II. 376-77). Wordsworth always emphasizes the great influence of nature on his poetic spirit and he also reiterates the reciprocal relationship and the mutual interdependence between nature and him, the poet. He admires the power of nature but as a poet he also values his own imagination and this conflict between nature and his imagination becomes the main theme in The
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Prelude, Wordsworth’s autobiographical epic and his crowning achievement, also titled Growth of a Poet’s Mind.

In Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814, Hartman has scrutinized the conflict between imagination and nature presented in The Prelude. Here I would put stress on the climatic ascent of Mount Snowdon in the last book of The Prelude because I hold a different understanding from Hartman’s. Hartman thinks that the whole event represents “a true ‘mounting of the mind’; it is also a culmination evidence that imagination and the light of nature are one” (Wordsworth’s Poetry 60). Actually, in my opinion, the ascent of Snowdon represents Wordsworth’s idea that the higher mind of human beings is more powerful than the power of nature.

In the beginning of the Fourteenth Book, the poet states that in order to see the sunrise from the summit of Snowdon, at couching time he starts to climb the mountain with a youthful friend and a guide. While ascending, the mist soon surrounds them. The poet climbs with eager pace and after a while, Wordsworth chances to climb ahead of the others, and he consequently sees first the earth brightened by a light which shines on the ground like a flash. As he looks up, “The Moon hung naked in a firmament / Of azure without cloud, and at my feet / Rested a silent sea of hoary mist” (The Prelude XIV. 40-42). Because of the stretching mist, the Atlantic is covered by the solid vapour. This mist is the symbol of the poet’s imagination, his creative power and “[this] creative energy can be blinding and bewildering” (Prickett 97), since the poet’s creativity can be a kind of usurpation of the natural surroundings. The poet thus describes: “Far, far beyond, the solid vapours stretched, / In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes, / Into the main Atlantic, that appeared / To dwindle,
and give up his majesty, / Usurped upon far as the sight could reach” (*The Prelude* XIV. 45-49). Under the power of the poet’s imagination, even the big Atlantic gives up his majesty. Though the roar of the waters can be heard from a rift, yet no one can see the torrents. Opposite to the Atlantic, the sky, however, is clear without any encroachment, except “the clear presence of the full-orbed Moon, / Who, from her sovereign elevation, gazed / Upon the billowy ocean, as it lay / All meek and silent” (*The Prelude* XIV. 53-56). After the vision dissolves into the air, the poet himself reflects in tranquility, and regards the Moon as “the emblem of a mind

That feeds upon infinity, that broods  
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear  
Its voices issuing forth to silent light  
In one continuous stream; a mind sustained  
By recognitions of transcendent power,  
In sense conduction to ideal form,  
In soul of more than moral privilege. (*The Prelude* XIV. 70-77)

In Wordsworth’s opinion, a mind which is nourished by “the transcendent power” can convert sensory objects into ideal forms, and “the transcendent power” is imagination. Amid awful and sublime circumstances, nature can make the outward things endowed with “interchangeable supremacy,” so that even least sensitive men can see, hear, perceive, and feel. The sea of mist, for example, has changed the scene of Snowdon and occupies the sovereignty of the real sea. Nature makes the interaction between the outside world and the mind possible. Yet, at the same time, nature is also
subordinate to imagination, which, according to Wordsworth, can endow nature with life. Wordsworth thinks that only people with higher minds have imagination, the glorious faculty, and they always deal with the universe in this spirit. With this faculty, the minds can project “kindred mutations” to the outside world, and create a “like existence,” so that “they build up greatest things / From least suggestion” (*The Prelude* XIV. 101-02). Wordsworth seems to suggest that the external forms in nature may be not so admirable but imagination can help make them ideal. These higher minds live in a world of life because they can give life to the outside world; they can transcend the bodily senses and communicate with the spiritual world; therefore, they can reach eternity. The poet explains:

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Such minds are truly from the Deity,
For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss
That flesh can know is theirs—the consciousness
Of whom they are, habitually infused
Through every image and through every thought
And all affections, by communion raised
From earth to heaven, from human to divine. (*The Prelude* XIV. 112-18)
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The poet’s imagination seems to get its independence finally. No doubt, Wordsworth cherishes nature and the role nature plays as his poetical inspiration; yet after a long dialectical struggle between nature and mind, he finally still holds human mind in a higher regard. *The Prelude* ends with the “Restoration of Imagination”:

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... the mind of man becomes
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A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, 'mid all revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine. (XIV. 450-56)

For Wordsworth the mind is more magnificent than nature and he gradually gets his subjectivity in facing nature through the application of his imagination. Now he does not just accept what nature gives passively; he will project his own thinking onto the external world. So, in “Prospectus to The Recluse” he says “… the Mind of man—/ My haunt, and the main region of my song” (40-41). In the same poem Wordsworth also expresses his belief that Paradise can be regained by the marriage of the “intellect of Man” and “this goodly universe” and he intends to proclaim:

How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:--and exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish:--this is our high argument. (63-71)

It should be noticed that nature here is not the nature of the universe in itself but the nature in its relation to man. In his letter to Wrangham of
January, 1816, Wordsworth himself writes:

Throughout, objects . . . derive their influence not from properties inherent in them, not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects. Thus the Poetry . . . proceeds whence it ought to do, from the soul of Man, communicating its creative energies to the images of the external world.

Therefore, for Wordsworth what really matters is the properties endowed by the mind on the external objects. Wordsworth wants to praise the glory of nature but he also cannot forget the molding ability of his mind, or imagination. Yet, as Paul de Man mentions in “Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image” that there is a “fundamental ambiguity” or “tension” that “never cease to be problematic” in Romantics attempts to link the polarities of imagination and nature. Accordingly, through most of Wordsworth’s poems on nature and mind, we see the conflict, instead of marriage, between the two. As Geoffrey Hartman says:

One part of him said, leave nature and cleave to imagination. The other part, fearing that imagination could not be cleaved to, indeed that it would take him beyond human-heartedness even out of this world, answered, cleave to nature and leave vision and romance, those errors of the childhood of poetry. (Wordsworth’s Poetry)

Therefore, The Prelude, though deals chiefly with nature, is a study of the imagination, and how nature serves the need of the human spirit.

Besides, in “Prospectus to The Recluse” Wordsworth expresses his belief that the marriage between nature and mind can help man regain the
lost paradise. In *The Visionary Company* Bloom analyzes the inter-relationship between mind and nature in Wordsworth’s poems and suggests that imagination in Wordsworth’s works is expected to be a bridge between the poet, the subject and nature, the object; that is, imagination should integrate nature and the poet. Therefore, in his career as a poet, Wordsworth tries to wed “the discerning intellect of Man” to “this goodly universe”. However Wordsworth’s attempt seems to be a failure, though his poems are great and beautiful. In my opinion, Wordsworth does not really wed the mind to “this goodly universe”. He just appropriates nature through his subjective thinking or imagination and his description of nature is based on the anthropocentric bias.

The most conspicuous subjective appropriation of nature can be seen in Wordsworth’s belief in “this goodly universe” and the opposition between human suffering and natural comfort presented in his poems. An obvious example can be found in “Immortality Ode” in which Wordsworth postulates the idea that we human beings come from the imperial palace of heaven and the process of growing is the process of forgetting. In Wordsworth’s opinion, “The Child is the father of Man” (“My Heart Leaps Up” 6) because the child is closer to the glory and freshness of the pre-existence and growing up is a process of loss. In order to help human beings forget the glory of our pre-existence, the earth, or the nature, Wordsworth believes, tries her best to give us pleasure:

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Earth fills her lap with pleasure of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a Mother’s mind,
And no unworthy aim,
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The homely Nurse doth all she can
To make her Forster-child, her Inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came. (77-84)

The glory that is lost can never be found again but Wordsworth is not pessimistic; he thinks, “Though nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower; / We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind” (“The Immortality Ode” 177-80). Part of what remains behind in which he can find strength is “years that bring the philosophic mind” (“The Immortality Ode” 186). To Wordsworth, the philosophic mind, or the discursive understanding, not the “wise passiveness”, is the means that helps the poet find the lost visionary gleam he once knew. Maybe because of this belief, Wordsworth makes every effort to exhibit the beauteous nature. Yet this attitude also implies that to Wordsworth nature is not good enough, and hence he works hard to beautify it through his imagination.

Thus nature is always endowed with happiness and pleasure in Wordsworth’s poems. He intentionally ignores the wild, violent, uncontrollable side of nature. As Raymond Dexter Havens says:

... it seems strange that Wordsworth could have closed his eyes to the many aspects of the physical world which are unpleasant or which do not fit in with his preconceptions. We have seen that he ignored sudden, cataclysmic changes, such as floods, fires, and earthquakes, as well as the short life of most plans and animals, and dwelt upon the permanence, moderation, and regularity of nature.
Havens, however, does not explain the reason that Wordsworth deliberately ignores the unpleasant aspects of the physical world. In my opinion, Wordsworth makes use of some aspects of natural scenes to create a preferable world, in which the mind, by means of imagination, builds a secluded natural nook inside him and help him evade “the sad music of humanity” and transcend the physical world. Or perhaps as Paglia suggests, Wordsworth imposes order and peace on the chthonian nature to make it beautiful and admirable. This kind of imposition of course is a kind of human appropriation and domination. We can find quite a few examples in Wordsworth’s poems that play “the sad music of humanity”. In some of Wordsworth’s famous ballads, such as “Michael,” “The Ruined Cottage,” “The Female Vagrant,” “The Thorn,” “The Mad Mother,” “The Last of the Flock,” “Ruth,” human suffering and grief are depicted. The political and social upheaval, caused by French Revolution and Industrial Revolution, at that time resulted in agitation and disquiet, which must have depressed Wordsworth. Thanks to the nourishing and comforting nature, Wordsworth can find peace in his mind. In “To My Sister” Wordsworth asks his sister and brother to come out to the field to enjoy the greenness of spring and he says: “One moment now may give us more / Than fifty years of reason; / Our minds shall drink at every pore / The spirit of the season” (25-28). The mind will drink from “the spirit of the season” to get the nourishment that is “more than fifty years of reason” and this is the function of those beauteous natural objects. In “Lines Written near Richmond, upon the Thames at Evening” the contrast between the grief and pain in the human world and the gleam and peace in the natural scene
is deliberately presented. While viewing the beautiful sunset upon the Thames in a summer, Wordsworth says:

Such views the youthful bard allure,
But, heedless of the following gloom,
He deems their colours shall endure
’Till peace go with him to the tomb.
--And let him nurse his fond deceit,
And what if he must die in sorrow!
Who would not cherish dreams so sweet,
Though grief and pain may come to-morrow? (9-16)

After viewing such a beautiful, dream-like natural scene, the youthful bard, “heedless of the following gloom”, is lured to believe that he can have this peace even after his death. To Wordsworth the natural world has the immortality that man lacks but forever pursuits and only through the purgation of the natural scene can man possibly get close to that immortality, which comforts him and soothes his sorrow. Therefore Wordsworth invokes the Thames:

Glide gently, thus for ever glide,
O Thames! That other bards may see,
As lovely visions by thy side
As now, fair river! Come to me.
Oh glide, fair stream! For ever so;
Thy quiet soul on all bestowing,
’Till all our minds for ever flow,
As thy deep waters now are flowing. (17-24)
In Wordsworth’s mind the Thames represents something forever fair and lovely. Sometimes the beauty and peace in the natural world reminds Wordsworth of the sorrowful human world, which is a sharp contrast to the comfort nature can bring. In “Lines Written in Early Spring” Wordsworth says:

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it griev’d my heart to think
What man has made of man. (1-8)

And in the next four stanzas of this poem, in order to stress the distinction between nature and the human world, Wordsworth says:

Through primrose-tufts, in that sweet bower,
The periwinkle trail’d its wreathes;
And ’tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopp’d and play’d:
Their thoughts I cannot measure,
But the least motion which they made,
It seem’d a thrill of pleasure.
The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

If I these thought may not prevent,
If such be of my creed the plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man? (9-24)

Wordsworth supposes that the flowers, the birds, and the budding twigs present a picture of pleasure and enjoyment. Through the interaction between his mind and nature he finds an immanent presence, which exists in the elements of the external world. In Wordsworth’s poetry, this immanent presence, this sense of life in natural objects, instead of a metaphor for rhetoric, is regarded almost as literal truth. Yet, how does he know the feeling of those natural objects? I think Wordsworth projects his own hope or his pleasure caused by the landscape onto those flowers, birds and twigs. Wordsworth intentionally personifies those natural objects to create a beautiful and peaceful nook in his mind to evade the sorrow in the human world. Maybe as Havens suggests, “At times Wordsworth’s personification of external nature merges with, or is expressed in a way that suggests, belief in Mother Earth . . .” (74). However, in ecofeminist point of view, the personification of natural objects represents a kind of human domination over nature since we impose on the natural world the human standard of value. Undoubtedly
Wordsworth has a great regard for nature’s surpassing power and deliberately juxtaposes the comforting nature with the suffering human world, but through imagination, his mind chooses, cuts, and reorganizes the natural scene to prove what he believes, that is, nature is pleasant. As Val Plumwood says, when criticizing pantheism, “Nature is treated as fully sentient and as having, through its possession of spirit, human qualities. In this case there is no recognition of difference. Nature is anthropomorphized in fact or fancy, and the human is taken as the basic model. Such a position does not succeed in genuinely escaping a dualistic model” (127). Personification is obviously Wordsworth’s subjective appropriation of nature.

Wordsworth’s anthropocentric appropriation of nature can also be seen in the subjective wording he uses in depicting natural scenes. For example in the first stanza of “Resolution and Independence” Wordsworth thus describes the scene:

There was a roaring in the wind all night;
The rain came heavily and fell in floods,
But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
The birds are singing in the distant woods;
Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters. (1-7)

In this stanza, the wind and the rain are depicted quite objectively, but how is the sun calm, how does the Stock-dove brood, and why is the noise of water pleasant? Of course, it is because the poet feels so. No doubt, all
literary works are somewhat subjective and this subjective depiction does not prevent Wordsworth from being a great poet. What I am trying to stress is that when the poet imposes his subjective judgment on the natural world, it implies that he still holds a kind of anthropocentric bias in facing nature. Wordsworth seldom depicts nature objectively in his poems and he also seldom describes his immediate response to a landscape as he believes that good poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reason, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion . . . is gradually produced and does itself actually exist in the mind.” Therefore his poetry is often the consequence of his contemplation of an emotion and a natural scene becomes meaningful only after his contemplation. For Wordsworth the imagined natural landscape provides him with food for speculation. And the famous “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” is a good example. At first Wordsworth personifies the daffodils so he saw “a crowd” “a host” of golden daffodils, “dancing in the breeze” (6), “Tossing their heads in sprightly dance” (12), and they “Outdid the sparkling waves in glee” (14). This personification is actually the subordination of nature since all these descriptions are just the poet’s projection of his own mood onto the external world. As Frederick A. Pottle in “The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth” says, in Wordsworth’s poems “The subject is a mental image and the eye is that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude” (76). Besides, Dorothy Wordsworth’s The Grasmere Journals on April 15, 1802 shows us a quite different scene from what Wordsworth depicts two years later in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”. In her journal on April 15, 1802, Dorothy thus depicts the weather when they saw the daffodils: “The
Bays were stormy, and we heard the waves at different distances and in the middle of the water like the sea. Rain came on—we were wet when we reached Luffs but we called in. Luckily all was cheerless and gloomy so we faced the storm— . . . .” So, what inspires Wordsworth is not his immediate experience but his contemplation later. Besides, Wordsworth depicts the daffodils in the first three stanzas yet the most important part seems to be the last one, in which the poet says: “For oft, when on my couch I lie / In vacant or in pensive mood, / They flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude / And then my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the daffodils” (19-24). When he saw them the poet writes: “I gazed—and gazed—but little thought / What wealth the show to me had brought” (17-18). At that very moment, he could not really understand the meaning of the daffodils. Only when they flash in his inward eye later in reminiscence can his heart fill with pleasure.

In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth has mentioned that the purpose of the poet is a particular purpose of “giving pleasure”, and his poems, his description of beautiful, glorious nature really give the reader pleasure. Besides, the dialectical love between nature and mind becomes the subject of many of his great poems; this kind of conflict, instead of being an obstacle, actually becomes the source of his inspiration. What I want to argue against is the subjective appropriation and human-centered depiction of nature. Bate thinks that Wordsworth’s poetry gives us pleasure derived from nature so it can teach us “how to walk with nature”. However, is the nature in Wordsworth’s poetry the real nature or his beautification of nature? What if we find that the real nature is not so beautiful, so pleasant? There are violent storms, fierce beasts in nature.
If we just want to get pleasure from nature we sure will be disappointed. In ecofeminist viewpoint, we should consider nature, instead of as the nourishing mother, as an autonomous being and respect its right of existence. When we choose what can please us from nature and delude ourselves with the false hope that nature will always be pleasant, we are still human-centered and we still hold the human being superior to the natural world. “The treatment of nature as no more than a resource for human ends, and as having its significance and value conferred by or through human interests, presents the class of humans as the master” (Plumwood 147). In “The Moral of Landscape” Bate mentions many times that Wordsworth’s landscapes reflect his own spiritual state and in Wordsworth’s poetry, nature is subordinated to the poet’s self and yet at the end he still thinks that Wordsworth sacralizes nature. This attitude seems to reveal that Bate himself is still human-centered in facing nature. Wordsworth’s attitude toward nature has its historical background and it may be not really fair to criticize his poems from a perspective of the twenty-first century. Yet, an ecofeminist reading of his poems perhaps can help us get a more moderate attitude toward nature and this is the purpose of this paper.

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A Dialectical Love between Nature and Mind


自然與心靈間互啟相詰的愛：
華茲華斯詩作之一種生態女性主義的解讀

郭慧珍*

提 要

作為英國浪漫時期經典詩人，華茲華斯是書寫自然的重要人物。不過早在六零年代 Harold Bloom、Geoffrey H. Hartman 及 Paul de Man 就曾提出想像力在華氏詩中享有與自然同等或更重要的地位。華氏對自然與心靈的矛盾情感導致評論家對其詩作的不同解讀：有的強調他對自然的喜愛，有的側重想像與自然的抗衡。Jonathan Bates 認為華氏詩作是書寫自然的典範，因爲它的詩藉由描述得自於自然景致之愉悅，教導讀者如何與自然共處。本篇論文經由探討華氏詩中所呈現之自然及自然與他的想像力的關係，試圖證明華氏詩中的自然是以「人」為中心的撰用，而此種以人為本的態度正是生態女性主義所要反駁的。

關鍵詞：自然、心靈、想像力、華茲華斯、生態女性主義

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