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# [ *Sweet is the lore which nature brings*: Continuum of the Human and Non-human Worlds in Wordsworth's Poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* ]

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**[Abstract]** *The following article presents an ecocritical reading of Wordsworth's poems in the Lyrical Ballads (1798–1802). It starts with an interpretation of the notion of the poet's "organic sensibility" as a key to Wordsworth's understanding of appropriate poetic diction, metre and verse, and ultimately the very subject matter of poetry. The subsequent sections of the article discuss several poems from the collection in which Wordsworth addresses the questions of symbiosis between the human and non-human worlds and the mission of poetry to deepen our appreciation of the environment and the role of humanity in protecting the complexity of life around us.*

**[Keywords]** *William Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, English Romantic poetry, ecocriticism*

## [1] Introduction

“Ecology” (*Ökologie*) – as a science dealing with the relations of different organisms to their “environment”, which condition their existence<sup>1</sup> – was defined in 1866, at a time when the height of the Romantic movement had already passed.<sup>2</sup> However, the Romantic aesthetic and emotional “re-discovery” of nature did play a role in shaping the personality of the “father of ecology”, **Ernst Haeckel** (1834–1919). Haeckel was known as a gifted nature and landscape painter<sup>3</sup> whose interest in the aesthetic quality of the “art-forms” (*Kunstformen*) of nature was later materialized in a mature work with the self-same title, *Kunstformen der Natur* (1900).<sup>4</sup> Haeckel’s life thus in many ways exemplifies an important aspect of our modern environmental consciousness: rigorously scientific analysis is not just informed by aesthetic and philosophical considerations, it is, in fact, inseparable from them.

The “revolution” of the *Lyrical Ballads* brought about a new understanding of poetry in relation to the natural world: poetry becomes the supreme voice for the organic continuum of human and non-human elements. The pastoral landscape of the Lake District, narrated in the language of the “common man”, presents a holistic idea of an authentic human existence, whose aesthetic, moral and spiritual sanity depends on the firmness of its bond with the environment.

This paper analyzes the essential principles of this ecological viewpoint articulated in Wordsworth’s poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*. It starts by exploring the general layout and project of the *Lyrical Ballads*: i.e. the role of poetry in re-establishing and restoring a sense of the vital thread between the human and non-human worlds, moving on to the patterns of their co-existence as found in the poems themselves. It is to be hoped that such an eco-critical reading can contribute to the discussion between aesthetic and scientific approaches to one of the most pressing problems of our age.

## [2] *Possessed of more than usual organic sensibility: Wordsworth’s “ecology of poetry”*

The mixed reactions to the first volume (1798) led Wordsworth to reconsider his unwillingness to engage in a “systematic defence” of this specific “class of poetry” that his and Coleridge’s poems produced.<sup>5</sup> He was especially reluctant to force the reader “into an approbation of these Poems” on the basis of some “reasoning” related to their original intention. In an environment defined by the “gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers”, their core element, i.e. the “manners of rural life”, would not quite suit the “public taste” (Wordsworth and Coleridge 47). In the earlier “Advertisement” to the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth’s main line of argument was to present the poems in the volume as “experiments”, whereby he anticipated various difficulties and objections readers and critics may have faced while reading the volume. The preface to the second edition thus presents a more comprehensive explanation of the essentials which determine the form of the poems.

When Wordsworth talks about the greatest poets of the past, he stresses the correspondence of different historical eras with their respective “habits of association”, i.e. their manner of associating ideas and expressions. His manner is based on the “incidents of common life”

communicated in the language “of these men” (Cf. Wordsworth and Coleridge 172). However, their worthy “purpose” transcends the boundaries of mere theoretical discourse: it is not “false refinement or arbitrary innovation”, but instead a poetic process related to the very core of being a “Poet” (Cf. Wordsworth and Coleridge 175). A poet is “possessed of more than usual organic sensibility” and thinks “deeply” about his/her feelings: the naturalness of the linguistic reaction to the outside stimulus (“spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”) turns into a poetic event by being “recollected in tranquillity” through the agency of the poet him/herself. The liberating simplicity of rural life articulated in the “rustic” idiom of the rural people is thus modulated through the poet and comes back refined:

For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act feelings connected with important subjects will be nourished, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much organic sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits we shall describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated. (Wordsworth and Coleridge 175)

Introducing people to poetry means helping them take part in the “organic sensibility” of the poet: indeed, the poet articulates reality in a sense which communicates the “naturalness” of the emotional reaction: “But speaking in less general language, it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature” (Wordsworth and Coleridge 176). This “natural” language re-establishes a fundamental sense of correspondence between human and non-human elements; poetry is thus not an arbitrary entertainment without any real reference to the imagination and the language people speak. In fact, it is the finest form of language, because it articulates the vital link between the organic principles of biological existence and the inner movements of the human “soul”.<sup>6</sup>

Wordsworth's concept of poetry includes more than just an appropriate lexicon of “good” poetry; poetry should be driven by rhythmical patterns that recreate the specific organic sensations found in the natural environment and reflected in the inner rhythm of our bodily existence.<sup>7</sup> For Wordsworth, this means eliminating “poetic diction” from poetry, as it thwarts the “naturalness” of our reaction to poetry; i.e. he affirms the vital continuum between the impersonal (i.e. “natural”) or given aspects, such as rhythmical structures and sound sensations, and their aspiration to meaning in the human world. Indeed, a proper poetic rhythm needs to accommodate the core of the emotional response – the continuum of movement (or “excitement”) and its secondary effect, namely “recollection in tranquillity”. In the context of “poetic diction”, the reader is essentially left at the “mercy of the Poet” without being introduced to the core of poetry, i.e. to the liberating power of poems to valorize our emotions:

Our feelings are the same with respect to metre; for, as it may be proper to remind the Reader, the distinction of metre is regular and uniform, and not, like that which is produced by what is usually called POETIC DICTION, arbitrary, and subject to infinite

caprices upon which no calculation whatever can be made. In the one case, the Reader is utterly at the mercy of the Poet, respecting what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion; whereas, in the other, the metre obeys certain laws, to which the Poet and Reader both willingly submit because they are certain, and because no interference is made by them with the passion, but such as the concurring testimony of ages has shown to heighten and improve the pleasure which co-exists with it. (Wordsworth and Coleridge 425)

This fundamental link articulated in poetry also restores the ethical and moral principles as they are found in nature: a poet has a unique propensity to confront the moral “sentiments” with “human passions”, since he/she possesses a unique gift of expressive power, i.e. his language is characterized by an equilibrium between “excitement” and “thinking”; indeed, these two psychic processes run parallel to each other. This also applies to the balance between “moral sentiments and animal sensations” that define the relationship between the natural and the personal/moral elements of human existence. Since a poet works with language, i.e. he/she expresses the above-mentioned equilibrium in language whose clarity guarantees its poetic effect, there should not be any real difference between “poetic” language and the everyday language of the common man. The communicative gift of the poet elevates “common language” and makes it into a medium conveying “human passions” and their “moral” significance:

The sum of what was said is, that the Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner. But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men, and with what are they connected? Undoubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations of the elements, and the appearances of the visible universe; with storm and sunshine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow. These, and the like, are the sensations and objects which the Poet describes, as they are the sensations of other men, and the objects which interest them. The Poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions. How, then, can his language differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel vividly and see clearly? It might be *proved* that it is impossible. (Wordsworth and Coleridge 424)

The complexity of the “psychosomatic” elements of verse (rhythmical and musical effects, the refined simplicity of the lexicon, etc.) makes poetry especially apt for communicating Wordsworth’s revolution in aesthetics: his poetry – so to speak – in-forms by con-forming with the psychological and bodily disposition of humans. Ultimately, “the end of Poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure” (Wordsworth and Coleridge 181). As James McKusick has aptly pointed out: “Wordsworth’s advocacy of simple vernacular diction is predicated on his view that human passion incorporates the forms of nature. His metaphor of incorporation, or embodiment, is essentially ecological since it suggests that all language, and therefore all human consciousness, is affected by the ‘forms of nature’ that surround it” (36). Wordsworth’s poetry thus aspires to prove a sense of continuum between the “natural” world, “natural” language and the deep sense of sympathy between the human and the non-human worlds.

This programme defines not only Wordsworth's poetic theory, but also his "poetic ecology": poetry reinstalls a sense of balance between the natural world and the world of the human spirit. For Wordsworth, these two things are – as we shall see – quintessentially inseparable.

### [3] **Connect the landscape with the quiet of the sky: sympathy, nostalgia and a sense of belonging**

In "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth explores the relationship between the magnificent Welsh countryside and the mysterious ruins of an ancient Cistercian monastery. The place emanates a sense of balance and harmony which rests in the mutually beneficial co-existence, i.e. *sym-biosis*, of the countryside and the human element. The walk has an epistemological quality of a kind: the combination of the natural (i.e. given) reality with that of a supreme human achievement creates a unique insight into the reality of things:

Once again Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,  
Which on a wild secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.  
[...] Once again I see  
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines  
Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms  
Green to the very door; and wreathes of smoke  
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,  
With some uncertain notice, as might seem,  
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,  
Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire  
The hermit sits alone. (Wordsworth and Coleridge 142)

The epistemological question is ultimately – as Jonathan Bate interestingly pointed out – that of the difference between human consciousness and nature and their mutual relationship, i.e. the age-old philosophical question of the tension between subject and object. Bate argues that one "strand of environmentalism [...] emphasizes the conservation of landscapes of 'natural beauty'." However, Bate argues that Wordsworth's position is different; it is "ecopoetic": "the 'mind of man' can be part of nature. 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' offers not a view in the manner of the picturesque, but an exploration of the inter-relatedness of perception and creation, a meditation on the networks which link mental and environmental space." (148)<sup>9</sup> In that sense, the other mental categories merge and create a perceptive continuum of space and time: the fragmented nature of the "lonely rooms" and "the din/ Of towns and cities" is lifted, and the poet sees into the "life of things". Moreover, this continuum enables the poet to reflect on his own life:

While here I stand, not only with the sense  
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts

That in this moment there is life and food  
For future years. (Wordsworth and Coleridge 144)

The natural world provides “food” for interpreting this continuum by offering sublime images of the inner movements (“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” [...]) as well as “the anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse/The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/ Of all my moral being” (Wordsworth and Coleridge 145). Indeed, the poem reflects on the human element also in a different context: memories of the poet’s sister Dorothy (referred to as “Friend” and “Sister”) have marked the sensation of the place. The sym-biosis of the human and non-human elements of the environment is completed by being “inhabited” with the memories of the encounter: the weight of the absence of the dear one can be overcome in the presence of the environment to which she naturally belongs. The place is filled with a sense of *continuum that unites time and space*: it is not just a pastoral landscape defined by the fundamental sympathy of the human and the non-human, but it has a “*memory of being*” that fills life with joy and meaning. The two elements are inseparable, since “nature” is not viewed as the opposite of the human, but rather as its inner measure and a safeguard of a person’s sanity:

[...] wilt thou then forget  
That on the banks of this delightful stream  
We stood together; and that I, so long  
A worshipper of Nature, hither came,  
Unwearied in that service: rather say  
With warmer love, oh! with far deeper zeal  
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,  
That after many wanderings, many years  
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,  
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me  
More dear, both for themselves, and for thy sake. (146–147)

In another of the lyrical pieces, “Lines Written in Early Spring”, the central message circles around the impossibility of human flourishing beyond the magnificent “art-forms” and the vital energy of nature. While referring to the beauty and purity of the natural world, the poet “laments” the emptiness of the man-made world. Having destroyed the sense of continuum and distanced him/herself from the unique undivided insight nature can provide, man has made him/herself into an orphan with no “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 thoughts may not prevent,  
If such be of my creed the plan,  
Have I not reason to lament  
What man has made of man? (102)

Wordsworth proves his point by creating a profound feeling of *nostalgia*: the urban civilization not only alienates humans from the non-human, it also alienates them from the core of their humanity.<sup>10</sup> The consciousness of the profound danger threatening the pastoral equilibrium of the environment emphasizes the need to restore this consciousness, at least in the lyrical power of poetry. Poetry thus becomes a recollection of this lost balance: its unique value is the man-made reflection of the natural; it is the platform which conserves the vital continuum between “made” and “given”.

In fact, this is true not just in relation to the meditative pieces, but also to the narrative ones. A sense of interpretative continuum between the human and non-human worlds creates the basic tenor of the “lyrical ballads”: stories of simple people whose lives seem to be communicable only within the context of their environment and using metaphors that relate them back to their “natural” settings. This sym-biosis runs both ways. The stories – as we shall see – may be interpreted likewise.

## [4] To dwell alone under the greenwood tree: getting in touch with the unspoilt source of being

The main core of the programme of Wordsworth’s “lyrical ballads” focuses on the poetic narratives of people who in different ways represent this sense of continuum with the natural cycle. As J. Bate suggests in his *Song of the Earth*, “the word ‘environment’ began to be applied to social contexts exactly because of the feeling of the alienation of city-dwelling which was identified by Wordsworth and others” (Bate 13). This insight is central to many of the key poems of the collection.

“Lucy Gray” combines a tragic story of a lost “solitary” girl with a seductive power of a myth: she is sent into town and goes missing during a snowstorm. Her parents start to look for her, but at a certain point her footprints disappear. Nevertheless, her story seems to continue and transform into the timeless presence of the cycle of life:

Yet some maintain that to this day  
She is a living Child,  
That you may see sweet Lucy Gray  
Upon the lonesome Wild.

O'er rough and smooth she trips along,  
And never looks behind;  
And sings a solitary song  
That whistles in the wind. (325)

Her tragic story thus becomes completed in the realm of nature, and only within this realm is it fully comprehensible. The logic of the final metaphor presupposes a sense of unity with the time-and-space continuum of the environment: she is to be identified with the elements of the Earth and the ever-present time frame of nature. If this poem is to be classified as an elegy, then the Freudian “work of mourning” (*Trauerarbeit*) reiterates the following fundamental position:

the transformation of the girl into the “solitary song/That whistles in the wind” can be understood as an interpretative framework that runs both ways. Indeed, the “solitary song” can symbolically (and imaginatively) be attributed to a lost girl, but it also helps to overcome the grief of bereavement in the psychological sense. Wordsworth thus reaffirms the fundamental insight of folklore, for which the sense of radical separation after death seems impossible to bear.

The famous story of “The Idiot Boy” thematizes a similar situation: Betty Foy sends his “idiot-boy” Johnny to fetch a doctor for her neighbor, who happens to be in grave danger and needs to receive care. However, the situation becomes dramatic after a couple of hours, because neither the doctor nor the boy return. The boy sits on the pony, and a double sense of symbiosis and joy overcomes him:

But when the pony moved his legs,  
Oh! then for the poor idiot boy!  
For joy he cannot hold the bridle,  
For joy his head and heels are idle,  
He's idle all for very joy.

[...]

His heart it was so full of glee,  
That till full fifty yards were gone,  
He quite forgot his holly whip,  
And all his skill in horsemanship,  
Oh! happy, happy, happy John. (121)

The story of Johnny's joy contrasts with the tragic moment of Susan Gale's illness and the excruciating troubles of the mother, who fears yet another tragedy. The happy ending of the story, i.e. Johnny being discovered, uncovers yet another aspect of the narrative: i.e. the self-discovery of the main protagonist. His “travel story” represents a liberating contrast to the man-made separation of his existence under permanent supervision. In that sense, it helps him rediscover himself as a part of a broader whole: his natural “organic sensibility” finally finds its self-articulation:

Now Johnny all night long had heard  
The owls in tuneful concert strive;  
No doubt too he the moon had seen;  
For in the moonlight he had been  
From eight o'clock till five.

And thus to Betty's question, he made answer,  
like a traveller bold, (His very words I give to you,)  
“The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,  
And the sun did shine so cold.”  
—Thus answered Johnny in his glory,  
And that was all his travel's story. (132)

His happiness and joy become the “glory” of this seemingly failed “story”. In fact, the choice of the rhyme stresses the organic correspondence between the lyrical and narrative aspects of the text: indeed, the story is also to be interpreted against the “organic sensibility” of the lyrical. The dynamic interpretative relationship between the human and the non-human is thus deeply affirmed.

In “We Are Seven”, the logic of a family community is interpreted in the light of a time-and-space continuum. The narrator (“a little cottage girl”) tells a sad story of her large family which has been struck by two deaths, yet she insists “we are seven”. The imagery of her paradoxically joyful visits to the grave is again related to the natural cycle: the greenness of the grave represents the certainty of their being alive, or the impossibility of their being lost. Similarly to “Lucy Gray”, the unifying logic transcends the boundaries of the “human” and “non-human” worlds, or, indeed, the difference between the human world of ideas and the living, animated soul of nature. The two worlds interpret one another in the symbiotic framework of a pastoral: she cannot leave them, which creates a comically absurd vision of her daily jobs done in the graveyard and her meals eaten there:

“Their graves are green, they may be seen,”  
The little Maid replied,  
“Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door,  
And they are side by side.

My stockings there I often knit,  
My ’kerchief there I hem;  
And there up on the ground I sit  
— I sit and sing to them.

And often after sunset, Sir,  
When it is light and fair,  
I take my little porringer,  
And eat my supper there. (101)

In “Ruth”, the protagonist flees her family after her father took another “Mate”. She finds a new partner (“a lovely Youth”), gets married and is to embark for America. However, before they leave, her husband abandons her. Ruth goes mad, and the only “respite” she gets is the comfort of the pastoral environment:

Among the fields she breath’d again:  
The master-current of her brain  
Ran permanent and free,  
And to the pleasant Banks of Tone  
She took her way, to dwell alone  
Under the greenwood tree. (345-346)

She has been betrayed on the human level, yet the “gentle” natural world substitutes for the missing communion of the family: she finds a sense of belonging that she has lost. The final image of the ballad is that of the “hallow’d mold” of the grave and the embracing congregation of the faithful in the church, in which the continuum of the human and non-human worlds

reaches an ultimate climax. As in the earlier poems, the two worlds collide: the Wordsworthian vision presupposes a form of organic unity, in which the human element articulates and poetically liberates the life of non-human species, whereby the epistemological concept completes a full circle.

## [5] Conclusion

Ecocritical readings of literature provide an important impetus for our responsibility to the environment by drawing our attention to the different intellectual and aesthetic concepts of the environment and the interaction between the human element and the non-human world. Scientific reflection is informed by our ability to grasp and to reflect on the aesthetic and philosophical concepts of the period, and vice versa.

As we have seen in this study of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth attempted to restore a sense of a mutually beneficial relationship between human and non-human worlds by positing a continuum that defines the form and the subject matter of his poetry. His notion of “organic sensibility” can thus be understood not only as a theoretical and methodical approach “how to write poetry today”, but also as an epistemological framework to understand the “sweet lore that the nature brings”: a new self-definition of the human element defined by the gradually alienating urban landscape of a dramatically industrializing Britain at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries on the one hand, and the “poetic diction” of “belles lettres” on the other. As I have attempted to show, Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s “revolution” also involves a revolution in epistemology: knowledge and cognizance cannot be separated from the sensual experience of “nature” and the environment. Its fundamental element is participation, not domination. “Such a perspective may legitimately be termed an ecological view of the natural world, since their poetry consistently expresses a deep and abiding interest in the Earth as a dwelling-place for all living things. [...] the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge clearly foreshadows the modern science of ecology in its holistic conception of the Earth as a household, a dwelling-place for an interdependent biological community.” (McKusik 28–29)

If Haeckel defined ecology as a “science dealing with the relations of different organisms to their ‘environment’, which condition their existence”, Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* provide a literary version of the self-same concept: *humans are conditioned in their existence by the natural environment and the forms it provides*. This poetic ecology, based on the continuum of the human and non-human aspects of the environment, thus creates an important addendum to the scientific environmental consciousness, and so the pastoral reconciliation of nature with humanity cannot be understood as a nostalgic, escapist concept, as some authors seem to suggest.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it is a moving invitation to think otherwise, and that makes this type of poetry more relevant now than ever.

## [Notes]

<sup>1</sup> “Unter Oecologie verstehen wir die gesamte Wissenschaft von den Beziehungen des Organismus zur umgebenden Außenwelt, wohin wir im weiteren Sinne alle Existenzbedingungen rechnen können.” Haeckel (*Allgemeine*), 286.

<sup>2</sup> Further on the topic Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, 36–37.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gerd Weigmann: “ErnstHaeckel –Vater der Ökologie“ (*Vordenker und Vorreiter der Ökobewegung: 40 ausgewählte Portraits*. Simonis, Udo E. (Hrsg.). Hirzel Verlag: Stuttgart: 2014; p. 25).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Haeckel, Ernst.: *Kunstformen der Natur*. (Verlag des Bibliographischen Instituts: Berlin, Leipzig, 1900.)

<sup>5</sup> “Several of my Friends are anxious for the success of these Poems from a belief, that if the views, with which they were composed, were indeed realized, a class of Poetry would be produced, well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and not unimportant in the multiplicity and in the quality of its moral relations: and on this account they have advised me to prefix a systematic defence of the theory, upon which the poems were written. But I was unwilling to undertake the task, because I knew that on this occasion the Reader would look coldly upon my arguments, since I might be suspected of having been principally influenced by the selfish and foolish hope of reasoning him into an approbation of these particular Poems: and I was still more unwilling to undertake the task, because adequately to display my opinions and fully to enforce my arguments would require a space wholly disproportionate to the nature of a preface. For to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence, of which I believe it susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which again could not be determined, without pointing out, in what manner language and the human mind act and react on each other, and without retracing the revolutions not of literature alone but likewise of society itself. I have therefore altogether declined to enter regularly upon this defence; yet I am sensible, that there would be some impropriety in abruptly obtruding upon the Public, without a few words of introduction, Poems so materially different from those, upon which general approbation is at present bestowed.” *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 (172).

<sup>6</sup> For a further discussion, see “A Language That Is Ever Green” (Bate, Jonathan. *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*. London: Routledge, 1991; pp. 12–35).

<sup>7</sup> In his informative and illuminating book on Romantic ecology, James McKusick talks about a brand new epistemological approach to reality in the poetry of the early English Romantics: being exposed to reality weighs more than “boring, irrelevant book-learning”: “Indeed, it should be apparent to any reader of Wordsworth’s poetry that the main theme of the ‘Walking’ essay is largely indebted to such poems as ‘Expostulation and Reply’ and ‘The Tables Turned.’ Both of these poems develop a contrast between boring, irrelevant book-learning and the vital stimulus of meditative wandering in the natural world.” (McKusick 5).

<sup>8</sup> Dewey W. Hall in his insightful book *Romantic Naturalists, Early Environmentalists: An Ecocritical Study, 1789–1912* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2014) deals with the meaning of the “wreathes of smoke” in the pastoral landscape and, based on substantial historical evidence, explains it a sign of industrial production in the area (either of ironworks or of paper mills): “Wordsworth would have seen signs of industry during his tour while visiting Goodrich Castle, Tintern Abbey, and Chepstow Castle” (Hall 128).

<sup>9</sup> For further discussion on this topic see Ashton 193.

<sup>10</sup> More on nostalgia and poetry as “the science of feelings” in Goodmann 208–209.

<sup>11</sup> “[...] Wordsworth and Thoreau had a tendency to hold the natural world at an arm's length in their aesthetic and philosophical contemplation of nature” (Tobin 59).

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