

A Comparative Analysis of Tintern Abbey and Frost at Midnight from the Perspective of Ecocriticism

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ABSTRACT

This comparative analysis exploits the framework of ecocriticism to explore the themes of nature and the environment in William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight." By examining the poetic techniques, imagery, and philosophical discourses employed by both poets, this article aims to shed light on how their respective works portray a deep connection and reverence for nature. The analysis delves into the shared themes of environmental consciousness, the spiritual significance of the natural world, and the role of memory in shaping one's relationship with the environment. Through a comparison of these two seminal Romantic poems, this study reveals the poets' nuanced perspectives on nature and offers insights into the broader ecological concerns of the Romantic period.

1. Introduction

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environments that investigates the relationships between the human and natural world. It is all about environmental issues. It is the idea of literary ecology and it is also known as the Green criticism, especially in England. However, Ecocriticism is a theoretical framework that emerged in the late 20th century as a response to growing environmental awareness and concerns about the impact of human activities on the natural world. It seeks to understand how nature is depicted in literary works, and how literature can contribute to the understanding and protection of the natural world (Garrard, 2012).

By using ecocritical perspective, we can see how nature is represented and ecocritics analyse a comprehensive range of literary texts, including novels, poetry, essays, and even non-literary texts such as environmental reports, to uncover the ways in which they reflect or respond to environmental issues. This analysis goes beyond the literal representation of nature in literature to explore subjects such as environmental justice, sustainability, climate change, human-animal relationships, and the destruction of ecosystems.

Ecocritics believe that human culture is related to the physical world and it shows us that nature is the most important reflection of this theory. Ecocritics study the depiction of the natural world in different media, such as film, visual arts, and digital platforms, to explore how our cultural imagination shapes our relationship with the environment. Moreover, one of the main ideas in ecocriticism is the recognition of nature as an active and interconnected object (Howarth, 1996).

Ecocritics argue that literature can help as a powerful tool to promote ecological awareness and inspire positive environmental action (Mishra, 2016). Through the close reading of literary texts like poetry, novel, or essays ecocriticism offers how literary representations of nature can shape our understanding of the environment and impact our attitudes and behaviors towards it. They also investigate environmental activism, environmental justice movements, and the ways in which literature and culture can contribute to social change and sustainability. These subjects will be discussed in this article.

As discussed above, this article will analyze "Tintern Abbey" by William Wordsworth and "Frost at Midnight" by ST Coleridge from an Ecocritical lens by focusing on the poets' depiction and manifestation of nature (Coleridge, & Adcock, 2004) (Wordsworth, 1975). In "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth powerfully describes the transformative and healing power of nature. The poem opens with a depiction of the Wye Valley, an attractive rural landscape that serves as the environment for the narrator's consideration. Wordsworth utilizes brilliant images of the natural world, such as "woods and orchards, cottages and sheepfolds" to remind a sense of beauty and tranquillity. The speaker just thinks of his past visits to the valley, stating that even in times of absence, the memory of nature's beauty has sustained him. Wordsworth suggests that spending time in nature has a restarting effect on the human spirit, allowing individuals to escape the pressures of urban life and reconnect with their true natures.

Similarly, Coleridge's *Frost at Midnight* portrays the natural world as a source of comfort and inspiration. The poem is set on a frosty winter night, with the narrator sitting by the fireplace and expecting his surroundings. Coleridge describes the snow-covered landscape as "silently expressing...secret ministry" and observes the "frost performs its secret ministry." Here, nature is filled with action and purpose, as it silently carries out its own tasks and processes. The narrator finds peace and relief in this natural scene, connecting with a sense of greater harmony and understanding (Miall, 2000).

Through their depiction of nature, both Wordsworth and Coleridge emphasize the importance of relationships between humans and the environment. They suggest that nature has the power to heal and restore individuals, serving as a Refreshing for the stresses and sorrows of life. In doing so, these poets challenge the main anthropocentric view that placed humans as separate from and superior to nature. From the two poems, we can see also they both poems emphasize the importance of nature in shaping human experiences and emotions. They highlight in the poems the healing and transformative power of the natural world, as well as its ability to inspire creativity and spiritual growth (Eldridge, 1983).

2. Analysis of Tintern Abbey by William Wordsworth

Tintern Abbey by William Wordsworth is a well-known poem that exemplifies the poet's deep connection with nature and the deep impact it has on the human psyche. Through an ecocritical lens, this poem portrays the interdependent relationship between humans and their natural environment, highlighting the transformative and healing power of nature.

From the very beginning, Wordsworth sets the stage for a contemplative journey by describing the calm and scenic landscape surrounding *Tintern Abbey*. He portrays the scene as a sanctuary which means to preserve, where the speaker seeks comfort while being enveloped by nature's peaceful beauty. The poet's use of vivid imagery, such as "steep and lofty cliffs," "wild secluded scene," and "wreaths of smoke," reminds a sense of the beautiful grandeur offered by nature. This depiction highlights the vastness and timelessness of the natural world, reinforcing its eternal presence and ability to provide comfort and inspiration.

Wordsworth represents nature as a source of spiritual renewal. The speaker reflects on his memories of the Abbey, sorrowful about the years spent away from it. He describes these memories as a means of solace, interlinking the landscape with his spiritual and emotional well-being. This connection with nature is portrayed as crucial for his growth and a reminder of his youthful self. The poem asserts that unity with the natural world fills the human spirit and recovers our connection with the divine.

Wordsworth personifies nature by referring to it as a "nurse, beggar, and guide" to convey its nurturing and guiding qualities. By attributing human characteristics to nature, the poet emphasizes its role as a caregiver, teacher, and companion to humans. This personification reinforces the idea that nature has a profound impact on the human psyche and plays an active role in shaping one's character and well-being.

Moreover, Wordsworth presents an ecological perspective by supporting the preservation and appreciation of the natural world. Through the role of the speaker, he implores his sister to cultivate a deep connection with nature, encouraging her to recognize its transformative power. The poet believes that nature can provide relief and comfort during difficult times and urges his sister to embrace it as a source of strength and inspiration.

In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth also emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings. He asserts that humans are not separate from nature but rather part of a harmonious ecosystem, where all organisms coexist and depend on each other. Through his profound observations of the landscape, the poet recognizes the interdependence of humans and their natural environment. He believes that this understanding fosters a greater sense of responsibility towards nature, urging individuals to preserve and respect it.

William Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* beautifully illustrates the transformative power of nature through an ecocritical lens. The poem highlights the importance of our relationship with nature, portraying it as a source of comfort, spiritual renewal, self-awareness, and a reminder of our interconnectedness with the natural world. Wordsworth's poetic exploration of nature's impact on the human psyche helps as a reminder of the profound influence it can have on our lives.

3. Analysis of Frost at Midnight by ST Coleridge

Frost at Midnight, written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is a beautiful poem that can be analysed through an ecocritical lens, exploring the close relationship between the natural world and human consciousness. Through evocative imagery and the use of various figures of speech, Coleridge highlights the interconnectedness between nature and the speaker's inner thoughts, reflecting the principles of ecocriticism.

The poem begins with the speaker sitting by his own fireside "on a wintry night," surrounded by a peaceful night landscape. The natural environment plays a central role in the speaker's contemplation, as it serves as a catalyst for his reflections on his own past and his connection to the wider world. The figure of speech used here is personification, as the night itself is described as "Full many a time/ I have been half in love with easeful Death." By giving the night human-like qualities, Coleridge enhances the sense of understanding and emotional connection between the speaker and the natural world, showing the speaker's empathy with nature and his liability.

The poem then shifts its focus to the speaker's childhood memories, starting with the silent and peaceful atmosphere of the night. Coleridge employs simile to describe the speaker's solitude, comparing it to "a leaf in midmost air." This simile conveys the speaker's sense of isolation and transience but also highlights his connection to nature. In this eco-conscious interpretation, it can be argued that the speaker, like the leaf, is a part of the natural world, subject to the same processes and cycles.

As the poem progresses, the speaker's attention turns to his infant son, who is peacefully sleeping in the cradle. Coleridge creates vivid imagery of the child "like a foster-child of Nature" and compares his innocence and purity to a "little brook," highlighting the child's connection to the natural world. This figure of speech, known as metaphor, not only reveals the speaker's love and attachment to his child but also emphasizes the importance of a pleasant relationship between humans and nature, in line with ecocritical principles. The whole poem is filled with peace, joy, and spiritual growth and it is also emphasized to be protective the nature.

In the final section, the poem returns to the present moment, with the speaker reflecting on the possible future of his son. Coleridge uses a metaphor to describe the influence of the surrounding natural environment on the child's character, stating that he will "learn far other lore/ and in far other scenes!" In this figure of speech, the natural landscape is portrayed as a teacher, informing and shaping the child's understanding of the world. This metaphor reinforces the central ecocritical idea that nature is not only a source of beauty and inspiration but also an important element in the development of human awareness.

Through various figures of speech such as personification, simile, and metaphor, Coleridge brings nature to life, portraying it as a powerful force that influences and shapes human experiences. By exploring the complex relationship between humans and their environment, the poem emphasizes the importance of maintaining a pleasant, sustainable, and respectful connection with the natural world.

4. Tintern Abbey and Frost at Midnight: A Comparison

In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth expresses a deep appreciation for nature and its healing power. He describes the abbey's natural surroundings as a source of comfort and peace, highlighting the significance of connecting with nature for human well-being. Wordsworth emphasizes that being in nature helps him gain perspective and find spiritual relief.

Similarly, in "Frost at Midnight," Coleridge presents nature as a calming and healing force. He describes the frozen landscape outside his cottage, finding beauty in the silence and solitary nature of his surroundings. The speaker is filled with a sense of wonder and spiritual connection with the natural world.

Both poems emphasize the healing power of nature and its ability to provide comfort and peace for the human spirit. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge see nature as a source of connection, spirituality, and transformation.

Through an ecocritical perspective, we can observe how humans interact with and affect the natural world. Wordsworth reflects on his past experiences in nature, highlighting the impact they have had on his present self. He shows appreciation for the way nature transcends time, noting that the memories he has of the landscape continue to shape his present connection with the natural world.

Coleridge, on the other hand, reflects on the impact of human actions on the natural world. He expresses concern about the industrial development of cities and how it disrupts the tranquility and harmony found in nature. Coleridge mourns the loss of the natural world, presenting it as an essential element for human well-being and spiritual growth.

Both poems convey a deep understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural world. They emphasize the importance of appreciating and preserving nature, not only for its beauty but also for its ability to nurture the human spirit.

Simply, both poems show us how being in nature can have a positive impact on human emotions, thoughts, and creativity. Wordsworth emphasizes the soothing and spiritual aspect of nature, while Coleridge focuses on its role in nurturing imagination, especially in childhood. Both poets see nature as a valuable source of inspiration and connection to something greater than themselves.

Moreover, in both poems, we can see their shared belief in the healing power of nature. They highlight the need for humans to maintain a connection with the natural world, emphasizing its vital role in providing comfort, solace, and spiritual growth. In addition, both poets reflect on the impact of human actions on the environment, expressing concern for the preservation of nature.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the ecocritical lens sheds light on the profound connections between nature, self-reflection, and the human experience in William Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* and Samuel Coleridge's *Frost at Midnight*. Both poems explore the transformative power of nature and the importance of the individual's relationship with the environment. In "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth celebrates the healing and refreshing effect of nature on the human psyche. Through vivid descriptions of the landscape and contemplations on memory, he suggests that unity with the natural world can lead to spiritual and emotional growth.

Wordsworth's portrayal of the River Wye exemplifies an ecological perspective, emphasizing the interdependence of humans and nature.

Coleridge's *Frost at Midnight* further explores the connection between nature and personal growth. As the poet contemplates in a wintry cottage, he reflects on the joining and enlightening aspects of the natural world. Coleridge's depiction of the moonlight, the frost, and the "mute Bird" emphasizes the stillness and tranquillity that can be found in nature. This sense of calmness encourages reflection and fosters a deeper understanding of oneself. Through an ecocritical reading, we can interpret these natural elements as symbols of renewal and rebirth, reflecting the potential for personal transformation through engagement with the environment.

By analyzing both poems through an ecocritical lens, it becomes evident that Wordsworth and Coleridge view nature as a powerful force that has the capacity to encourage the soul and awaken the senses. The poems not only describe the beauty of the natural world but also explore the mutual relationship between humans and their environment.

Hence, the ecocritical perspective provides a valuable framework for understanding the fundamental themes within *Tintern Abbey* and *Frost at Midnight*. As we engage ourselves in these poems, we are reminded of the eternal bond between humans and nature, the essential value of natural landscapes, and the transformative potential found within the depths of the environment. By reflecting on these works through an ecocritical lens, we gain a deeper appreciation for the profound effects nature has on both the individual and society as a whole. In a world facing increasing environmental challenges, these poems serve as a reminder of the importance of preserving and cherishing our natural surroundings for future generations.

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