

THOREAU'S NATURE VS WORDSWORTH'S NATURE: A CONCEPTUAL DISSONANCE

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Abstract

This research paper aims at exploring the conceptual concerns of two august writers, belonging to different Race, Milieu, and Moment, namely Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850). The former is an active American Romanticist who established connotative relationship between Nature and Self. The Latter is an English Romantic poet belonging to group of poets called the "Lake School [or] the Lakers" (Rustom-90-91). Though they both complement each-other in terms of their subject and area, a great deal of conceptual dissonance can be traced in their treatment of Nature and the way of looking at Nature. The unique imaginative angle through which they look at their Natural surroundings also falls under the area of the research. Thoreau and Wordsworth look at nature as a "source of inspiration" (Witherell 57) yet their inspirations are dissimilar and diverge into different paths. This paper would attempt to present an account in which their ideas and treatment of subject diverge in regards to Nature through having a look at Thoreau's Walden and Wordsworth's Daffodils and Composed Upon Westminster Bridge.

Keywords: *Nature, Self, Inspiration, Solitude, Romantic, Exploration, Transcendentalism.*



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The chief focus of scholarly relation between Wordsworth and Thoreau lies in their thought process of adjoining human and nature. It has been a subject of debate since ages whether Wordsworth's Imagination is codified or not as such is the case with Thoreau. In order to attain a holistic view of the concerned topic discussed in this paper, it is essentially noteworthy to note that the nature observed and examined by Wordsworth and Thoreau is not simply the nature explored and examined by during neoclassical period by poets and philosopher like Dryden or Alexander Pope. Wordsworth' and Thoreau' nature incorporates the human' inward elements as well as outward elements and combine them in to unique oneness and thus human get detached from the worldly elements. For both, Wordsworth and Thoreau, Almighty's presence can be sensed through man and nature alike. This sublime quality of the poet's imaginative mind would best manifest itself in moments of isolation from society which empowers him with a grand longing for unity with the object of his contemplation and appreciation.

When Thoreau perceives nature, he insightfully perceives as a source of wisdom, beauty, and spiritual nourishment. He refers to nature with a great sense of respect and feels intimacy and great comfort with her. A great deal of talk has been undertaken by Thoreau on nature, which considers his awe towards nature, like the ice breaks up on the pond in springtime, to the habits of the rabbits and fish and geese etc. Nature becomes central figure for Thoreau for he sees her as Life fulfilling object that provides him with shelter, food, fuel, and fulfills his all physical as well as spiritual needs. As Thoreau writes in *Walden*;

Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink,
Taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of the earth.

Both the concerned poets have their primary focus on attention to nature. The Romantic poet, Wordsworth', subject selection and subject treatment revolve around description and representation of nature whereas Thoreau does take into account the surroundings with scientific outlook and tries to scrutinize its mysteries and decipher its disguised meanings. Thoreau' nature has layers of significance including spiritual and material ones (Buell 171) which need to be demystified and knowable to him. Emerson, who "sacralized nature as man's mystic counterpart [believing that] nature could be decoded as a spiritually coherent sign-system" (171). Thoreau's reading of nature is enriched with a physical one which fuels his intellectual and spiritual absorption of nature (Schneider 93) (100). The point to be remembered here is that, such empirically and scientifically approached nature only brings him an unnatural allure which he describes as the "cheap but pleasant effect of walking over the hills" (Buell 182). On the contrary, Wordsworth doesn't have such intellectual approach to nature. To Wordsworth, nature has the aura of present and past. It inspires him to go back in time, taste the lost hours of his youth and feel nostalgic for the "I wandered lonely as a cloud.../When all at once I saw a crowd.../I gazed-and gazed-but little thought" (Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" 74-75). Such feeling triggered by the natural scenery is to Wordsworth a means of gloomy pleasure that "haunts [him] like a passion ..." (79). The nostalgic sensation having high frequency in Wordsworth's poetry can equally be seen in Thoreau's work in a different manner. The desired object for Thoreau is not quite the same as Wordsworth's lost and longed for vision. Thoreau wants to go back spatially and temporally to an Eden like *Walden* where he could peel off all unneeded layers trapping him and preventing his "spiritual growth [attained] through nature" (Corrente, Spring 3). Hence, one can see the

difference between Wordsworth and Thoreau in that Wordsworth is lamenting an already diminished or gone state of mind and feeling, whereas Thoreau's progressive growth is feasible in time through an engagement with nature. Thoreau's Walden claims;

There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives
In the midst of nature and has his sense still.

The common ground on which one can compare the two is their deep concern to solitude. They both firmly believe that one can only attain the taste of 'Mother Nature' in the state of solitude. Nevertheless, their very concept of solitude in context of nature differs. Wordsworth's solitude is endowed with the restorative power which is quite contrary to Thoreau's subversive view of it. For Thoreau, Nature is a combination of two different milieus namely city and natural surroundings. For Thoreau no single space alone can give calmness and solace in absence of the 'other'. Thoreau's solitude come in explorative journey between both the world, manly and godly, it is not the product of a state being all alone or in a company of either (Schneider 92). That is why Thoreau's views on nature is that of carnivalesque in tone which deals with two milieus and dwell upon both of them simultaneously. On the other hand, wordsworth's Nature seems to be more aesthetic and realistic which springs out of the truest value of its own bosom. Wordsworth prefers to wander lonely amidst lonely hills and plain lands of nature wherein he can leisurely cherish the beauty of nature with the emotions recollected in tranquility. He himself rejoices with the rhythmic beauty of nature.

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats in high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Another significant difference between both the poets lies in their capacity of using their imagination vividly. Wordsworth's imagination is spontaneous process where as Thoreau' more rational. Wordsworth renders and dwell upon outward nature more than

inward which is much employed and explored by Thoreau. For Thoreau, the connection between internal world and external natural world is more importation for self - exploration while cherishes the external natural beauty and gets mesmerized into self - imaginative pictuarization of natural beauty. Thoreau' depiction of nature is wrapped in coded chunks of meaning (Buell 171). Furthermore, in *Walden*, imagination provides him with the ability to bridge the "material and spiritual worlds ... the earth and the sky" (Schneider 101). However, In Wordsworth's poetry, imagination gains a different texture or what he would name his "purer mind" (Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" 31). His vision is mixed with wonder and admiration at the sight of a nature inspired from outside while reverberating inside. This is the poet's purer mind or his inward eye which creates "harmony and the deep power of joy ... in the life of things" Thoreau considers his capacity of vision as a pioneer to make inward exploration or exploration of self-whereas Wordsworth Vision of nature is pure and true in the sense that he sees the nature with the glorified forms to taste the charm of her beauty. Thoreau is simple as well as vague as it is not easily digestible for everyone where such is not case with Wordsworth. For Thoreau, language and nature is a medium through which he can transform himself into the journey of self-exploration. For Wordsworth, language and nature is just a medium to explore his inner sight. In *Walden*, Thoreau's imagination gives him a chance to connect material world with the spiritual or inner world, "material and spiritual worlds...the earth and the sky" (Schneider 101). Through Walden pond, Thoreau symbolizes spiritual, philosophical, and personal context, pond's depth symbolizing infinity and its purity symbolizing reflective quality. Thoreau attaches holy meaning to pond by referring to Christian baptism by holy water. Thoreau concludes his chapter *Pond* with remarkable line, "Talk of heaven! Ye disgrace earth," by contradicting heaven from earth. For Thoreau, heaven lies within as he said "looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature". Animals also serve as his companion during his stay at Walden pond which detaches him from the men and society and provides him close intimacy with the nature. The example of men coming down to nature to cut and carry ice from the Walden is sheer example of exploitation of nature by mankind. Thus, Thoreau's nature is much symbolic. For Wordsworth' expression of nature is that of sublime in nature. The following lines from the poem *Daffodils* palms the view.

Ten thousands saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

...
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed-and gazed- but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

Wordsworth feels contented with the nature as she gives him the feeling of completeness. He feels being mesmerized with the company of nature and forgets all worldly worries. For Wordsworth, nature is a 'jocund company' which yields him motherly lap in which he can roam freely and carelessly to feel being rejuvenated. But Thoreau requires the company of nature to introspect within in search of inner peace and consolation. For Thoreau, Nature is a unsolved mystery which is infinite. The deeper you go, the deeper you find your being lost in her. It is unfathomable. No man can understand the whole of nature. As Thoreau himself has said in *Walden*;

We need the tonic of wildness... At the same time that we are earnest
To explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious
and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, unsurveyed
and unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature.

Thus, it can be stated that both the writers have different 'eyes' to look at the nature as they both have equally different aims and objectives. It is equally true that for both, Thoreau and Wordsworth, nature serves as "source of inspiration" but their inspirations are dissimilar and diverge into different paths.

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