

An Eco-Stylistic Analysis of Wordsworth's The World Is Too Much with Us

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to conduct an eco-stylistics analysis of Wordsworth's *The World is Too Much with Us* (1807). The basic aim of this study was to foreground the ecological elements through metaphors, deviations and parallelisms. The current study was qualitative and based on an interpretivist paradigm. The text was used as a primary source of data for the analysis. The data was analyzed through closed reading and textual analysis. The present study used Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (1985) and Zurrú's (2017) approach as a theoretical framework. The analysis highlighted that through his poetic language, Wordsworth enable readers to see nature speak for itself using symbols that demonstrate its strength and generosity. The poem showed how the Industrial Revolution made people more focused on human needs while highlighting nature's life force and unique existence. Today, we still feel the power of Wordsworth's Romantic vision, which rejects excessive greed and pushes us to reconnect with our natural environment.

Keywords: Ecostylistics, Wordsworth, *The World is Too Much with Us*, deviation, parallelism, qualitative, interpretivist, Systemic functional grammar, Zurrú's approach

Introduction

Mick Short's influential book, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose* (1996), opens with an intriguing chapter title: "Who is Stylistics?" Short (1996) says that he classifies stylistics as a friend because of its active and innovative response; there is always something new to work on as this field continually presents different attitudes, techniques, thinking, and concepts. One of them is green stylistics or eco-stylistics, which crosses eco-linguistics and eco-criticism (Mohamed and Jaafar, 2023). The term "eco-stylistics" was coined by Goatly (2010) at the Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA) conference. Eco-stylistic work includes examining natural environments, people, and environments in different text forms and the development of current aesthetic debates on the environment, landscapes, and their effects on people (Viridis, 2022). Following Bate (1991), eco-stylistics can be viewed as the 'new' type of the Romantic ideology, in which people being aware of and accepting the dynamic energy of nature can maintain a proper relationship with the surrounding environment. Using eco-stylistics concepts, Zurrú (2017) explains that two main goals force their implementation. Firstly, it reflects the semantics of articles, realizing the connections between the linguistic signs and physical space and the features of the literary texts' style. Second, it analyses and assesses the patterns of ecological linguistics in the texts to raise people's awareness of environmental problems worldwide. This is similar to what Douthwaite (2017) agrees with because, according to him,

eco-stylistics has two objectives. The first aim is Environmental, dealing with representations of physical or metaphorical terrains and milieus in textual contexts. The second goal is ecological in, focusing on the social relations between people and the environment. Consequently, eco-stylistics encompasses two primary areas of investigation: environmental and ecological. In developing these areas, eco-stylistics uses a stylistic method to identify how a text adopts a particular stance or view. According to Short (1996), stylistic analysis is defined as connecting text in form with interpretation offered by the reader in a very elaborate manner and detail. It thus attempts to provide as much evidential support for and against, a specific understanding of the texts as is possible. As described by Philip Sidney in 1591, the poetical speaking picture is an enriching method of teaching and holding the mirror for ecological issues and their impacts on humanity. Using pragmatic and aesthetic means of authors, poets introduce topical climate change issues and the effects of applicable measures for global communities. In his renowned poem, *The World is Too Much with Us* (1807), William Wordsworth uses different stylistic devices to show how the Industrial Revolution made people more focused on human needs while highlighting nature's life force and unique existence. Today, we still feel the power of Wordsworth's Romantic vision, which rejects excessive greed and pushes us to reconnect with our natural environment. This research article attempts to investigate stylistic devices in *The World is Too Much with Us* (1807) from an ecological point of view.

Literature review

This section overviews prior studies and literature that address the concept of eco-stylistics. Goatly (2017) provided a classroom application of the Eco-stylistic analysis of Thomas's poems (1936), with a focus on Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistic framework (1985). Goatly's semiotic exploration of adages pointed out season, month, weather, water, tree, light, dark and bird as important aspects and characters of nature that strike at the scene's active notion. He said that Thomas intentionally misled the boundary between nature and people by using coordination and personification and non-animated and animated tokens of non-human and human things. Goatly opined that the poet oughter erred on the side of imagism and metaphors in steering the style to point out literally to similes, an approach that creolizes nature and human nature, an element of romantic ecology. Zurru (2017) undertook an eco-stylistic analysis of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* (2005). Her study focused on searching for ecological characteristics and identifying the differences between the roles of people and animals. Incorporating stylistic analysis into Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Grammar, Zurru offered complex notes on the ecosystem. She opined that the Sundarbans is a model of a geographic region where the organisms live and support each other through a life cycle. In their 2023 eco-stylistic study of selected extracts from Michaels Punke's novels *The Revenant* (2002), Mohammad and Jaafar focused on. In their work, the authors wished to analyze how nature and its forces relate to SH humans in the texts and how members of SH affect and are affected by parts of nature. The researchers used Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (1985) and Zurru's approach (2017) to achieve this. From their study, the authors endorsed the idea that rather than perceiving nature as a passive object that impacts people's lives, it is actually an active force. As a result, they appreciate natural resource conservation and preservation.

Research Method

This study is based on an interpretivist philosophy and adopts a descriptive research approach suitable for the study objectives. The primary data is derived from the poetry titled *The World is Too Much with Us* (1807), written by Wordsworth. Specifically, closed reading and textual analysis features are employed in the analysis of the data collected from the observation. This paper employs methods from various disciplines since eco-stylistics is a research area within stylistics (Jaafar and Ganapathy, 2022; Jaafar, 2014, 2022). More specifically, it applies Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (1985) as

well as Zurrú's (2017) framework. Zurrú employs figurative language indicators, variation, and repetition in order to make ecological aspects stand out in the text and then analyzes them using Halliday's SFG model.

Analysis and Discussion

William Wordsworth's sonnet, *The World is Too Much with Us*, written in 1802 and published in 1807, is a classic Romantic literary protest against the Industrial Revolution in human society about suppression of nature. The poem is a social protest against materialism and a strain from the natural world as an early protest poem of ecology. This paper utilizes the Zurrú model based on the idea of eco-stylistics to present how the poem's language and style amplify ecological concerns introduced by Wordsworth. This poem can be viewed and analyzed in terms of the tradition that dominated English literature in the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, which was Romanticism. The Industrial Revolution introduced urbanization, mechanization, and exploitation of natural resources, which created an unnatural gap between people and nature. The poem likened Wordsworth's age to the present because it does not appreciate nature's organic intrusion into human society. With the help of Zurrú's approach, one can grasp how elements of stylistics in the poem reveal such an ecological alienation.

Foregrounding through deviation and parallelism

In this poem, Wordsworth uses deviation and parallelism to foreground the ecological elements in the following ways:

Deviations:

In the line "Great God! I'd rather be A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn." Wordsworth disrupts the flow of the sonnet by using exclamatory language. This kind of deviation from the genre's norm is used to establish a contemplative and emotional tone related to the relationship between nature and humanity. The poet expresses his despair at humanity's disconnection from nature through this deviation. The poet's desire to be a "pagan" rather than a traditional Christian shows his longing an ancient harmonious relationship with nature. The phrase "Creed outworn" also deviates from the traditional norms of poetry to foreground the ecological relevance, suggesting that even traditional outdated beliefs would offer greater reverence and respect for nature than modern materialism.

Parallelism

In the line "The winds that will be howling at all hours, / And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers," Wordsworth uses parallelism to draw comparisons between human action and natural phenomena in order to foreground the ecological theme. The dynamic and tranquil wind is juxtaposed with "sleeping flowers" to foreground nature's inherent order and humanity's chaos. Such parallelism in the form of juxtapositions shows the vitality and independence of nature, thereby challenging the anthropocentric views of dominance over nature.

Imagery and Symbolism

In order to foreground the beauty and autonomy of nature's world, Wordsworth uses imagery and symbolism in the following ways:

Nature's vitality

In the line "This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon; / The winds that will be howling at all hours," nature is personified and imbued with agency. The "sea" gives a feminine and nurturing quality by using the pronoun "her," which stresses its life-giving qualities. Further, the word "bosom" symbolizes the

foreground generosity of nature despite its exploitation by humans. In the same way, autonomous and unrestricted attributes are given to “wind,” which suggests resistance against human control.

Ecological symbols

The poet uses ecological symbols like “moon” and “lea” in order to evoke spiritual solace and harmony. The “moon” and “lea” symbolize the natural cycle and pastoral simplicity, which shows Wordsworth’s romantic idealization of rural life.

Critique of anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism refers to putting humanity at the center of everything. It says how to please and displease humans. Wordsworth criticizes this attitude by using oxymorons and irony in lines such as “We have given our hearts away, a sordid.” In the phrase “sordid boon,” the poet uses an oxymoron to foreground modern achievements such as industrialization and material wealth at the cost of ecological impoverishment.

Tone and Mood

The tone and mood of the poem shift from despair to nostalgia, which reflects Wordsworth’s ecological awareness. The very opening lines, “The world is too much with us; late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers,” convey despair at disconnection. Hence, in the opening lines, the tone and mood of the poem are despairing. However, at the poem's end, the mood and tone become nostalgic for ecological harmony. In the line “So might I, standing on this pleasant lea, / Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn,” the tone and mood become nostalgic, foregrounding simplicity and reverence for nature.

Conclusion

A study of William Wordsworth's *The World is Too Much with Us* (1807) reveals how the poet expresses his concern about nature and his romantic rejection of industrial progress. The poet separates humanity from nature by creating breaks and repeating patterns in his writing. The poet's emergency interruption expresses his deep woe about how humans have lost their bond with the natural world. Through references to Pagan worship, Wordsworth demonstrates how current attitudes toward nature stand in contrast with earlier traditional practices. The phrase “creed outworn” further underscores that even outdated beliefs offered greater respect for nature than the materialism of the industrial age. Similarly, parallelism in lines such as “The winds that will be howling at all hours, / And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers” juxtaposes the dynamic vitality of nature with humanity’s chaos, amplifying the contrast between natural harmony and human disorder. Through his poetic language, Wordsworth enables readers to see nature speak for itself using symbols that demonstrate its strength and generosity. The sea is personified as a maternal figure that bares “her bosom to the moon,” symbolizing nature’s life-giving force and generosity. Nature shows its strength and freedom through the freely blowing winds that resist human domination. Additionally, ecological symbols such as the “moon” and “lea” evoke themes of natural cycles, spiritual solace, and pastoral simplicity, reflecting Wordsworth’s Romantic idealization of rural life and harmony with nature. Using symbolism promotes nature's power and freedom to show its pure beauty, even against human attempts to control it. The poem shows how humans focus too much on themselves rather than the world in its main message. Wordsworth challenges our belief that people are supreme by using parallel expressions and dark humor. In the phrase “sordid boon,” he critiques modern achievements like industrialization and material wealth, which, while considered “boons,” come at the cost of ecological degradation. Using contradiction, Wordsworth demonstrates how people's choice of wealth and profits above nature results in both environmental loss and moral decay. Through the poem, he moves from feeling desperate to homesick because he

understands more about nature and wants to connect better with it. The opening lines, “The world is too much with us; late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers,” express disillusionment with materialism and its role in humanity’s estrangement from nature. However, the closing lines, “So might I, standing on this pleasant lea, / Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn,” evoke a wistful longing for a simpler time when humans lived in harmony with the natural world. The poet's changed tone shows his deep respect for nature while exposing how industrial development has separated people from their natural surroundings. The World is Too Much with Us illustrates Wordsworth's strong concern about people's lack of connection to their natural environment through stylistic elements, including varied word pairs, descriptive phrases, and nature-based symbols. The poem shows how the Industrial Revolution made people more focused on human needs while highlighting nature's life force and unique existence. Today, we still feel the power of Wordsworth's Romantic vision, which rejects excessive greed and pushes us to reconnect with our natural environment.

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