

## Nature in Transition: An Ecolinguistic Study of Pre- and Post-Industrial Poetry

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### Abstract

This research paper examines the interplay of ecolinguistics and literary studies by examining the nature poetry of two distinguished British poets—William Wordsworth and Ted Hughes—who exemplify the pre-industrial and post-industrial eras, respectively. Ecolinguistics interrogates linguistic narratives that contribute to environmental degradation while advocating for those that promote ecological sustainability. Within this framework, the study investigates the shifting human perception of nature in response to industrial advancement. Wordsworth's 19th-century poetry idealizes nature as a tranquil, restorative presence—an ever-harmonious force offering solace and spiritual fulfillment. In stark contrast, Hughes' 20th-century works depict nature as tumultuous and antagonistic, reflecting a world unsettled by rapid industrialization and ecological disruption. Utilizing Bookchin's theory of ecosophy and Freud's psychoanalytic criticism, the analysis reveals how each poet's unconscious environmental anxieties and ideological underpinnings manifest through imagery and thematic choices. The selected texts illustrate a broader transition from reverent admiration of nature to an awareness of its fragility and potential retaliation against human exploitation. Through this comparative and interdisciplinary lens, the study underscores the importance of sustainable development and positions literature as a powerful medium for cultivating ecological consciousness and critical reflection on humanity's environmental impact.

**Keywords:** Willaim Wordsworth, Ted Hughes, Bookchin, Theory of Ecosophy, Sigmund Freud, Pre-Industrial and Post-Industrial Era, Ecolinguistics.

### Introduction

Nature has long held a central place in human consciousness, imagination, and creative expression. From early mythologies to contemporary eco-philosophies, individuals across disciplines have sought to articulate their relationship with the natural world. Literature, in particular, has served as a powerful medium through which this relationship has been represented, questioned, and redefined over time (Stibbe, 2015). Among the most expressive forms of literary engagement with nature is poetry, where natural elements not only serve as subjects but also as symbols, metaphors, and reflections of human emotion and ideology. As environmental crises deepen and calls for ecological awareness intensify, there is a growing imperative to reassess literary representations of nature through ecocritical and ecolinguistic lenses. In this context, the field of **ecolinguistics** emerges as a critical tool that interrogates the language patterns shaping human attitudes toward

the environment—identifying narratives that harm ecological well-being and promoting those that support sustainability (Stibbe, 2015).

Ecolinguistics, which evolved from Halliday's early propositions in the 1990s, diverges from traditional sociolinguistics by emphasizing the interconnectedness of language and the broader ecological system (Halliday, 1990). It posits that linguistic practices are embedded not only in society but also within the living ecosystems upon which all life depends. Through this lens, texts—especially literary texts—are not merely aesthetic artifacts, but discursive sites where environmental ideologies are constructed, sustained, or challenged. Ecolinguistics critiques narratives rooted in anthropocentrism, consumerism, and technological domination, and instead advocates for discourses that foster harmony between humans and the natural world. Thus, when applied to poetry, ecolinguistics can reveal how language has historically contributed to the construction of either reverent or exploitative attitudes toward nature (Alwin & Peter, 2001).

The present study investigates the evolving literary portrayal of nature across two distinct historical periods by examining the works of two prominent British poets—**William Wordsworth**, a seminal figure of the Romantic era, and **Ted Hughes**, a major poetic voice of the 20th century. Wordsworth, who served as Britain's Poet Laureate from 1843 until his death in 1850, is often celebrated for his deep veneration of the natural world. His poetry reflects a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature, wherein nature is depicted as a benevolent, nurturing force capable of spiritual and emotional restoration. Poems such as *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, *Daffodils*, and *Lines Written in Early Spring* exemplify this view, revealing a universe where nature and humanity coexist in mutual respect and balance (Abrams, 1979). Conversely, **Ted Hughes**, who held the same laureate title in the late 20th century, portrays a dramatically altered vision of nature. Writing in the wake of two world wars and during an era of industrial and technological acceleration, Hughes' poetry is marked by violent natural imagery and an acute sense of ecological disruption. In works like *Hawk Roosting*, *Thistles*, and *The Hawk in the Rain*, nature is no longer a tranquil sanctuary but a raw, often ruthless force in conflict with humanity. This shift reflects the psychological and cultural anxieties of a post-industrial world where human activities increasingly endanger the environment. By juxtaposing the nature poetry of Wordsworth and Hughes, this study seeks to trace the transformation in human attitudes toward the environment, shaped by historical, social, and industrial change. The research is grounded in **Bookchin's theory of ecosophy**, which challenges hierarchical distinctions between humans and non-human life, advocating for an egalitarian, symbiotic relationship between species (Bookchin, 2005). In addition, **Freud's psychoanalytic criticism** is employed to interpret the unconscious anxieties and desires reflected in each poet's engagement with the natural world. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study explores how underlying ideologies and internal conflicts manifest through poetic language and imagery (Haugen, 1972).

Ultimately, this research underscores the potential of literature—and particularly poetry—as a medium for ecological awareness and critique. By analyzing the language and symbolism employed by Wordsworth and Hughes, the study illuminates how literary discourse both mirrors and shapes cultural perceptions of nature. In doing so, it draws attention to the broader ethical imperative of fostering sustainable development and reimagining human-environment relations in an era of ecological crisis.

## Literature Review

In recent years, scholars have increasingly explored how literature can influence the way people think about the environment. This field of inquiry is significant because literature does not merely reflect the world—it helps shape how individuals and societies perceive and interact with nature.

One important area of study within this broader field is ecolinguistics. Ecolinguistics examines how language shapes our views, attitudes, and behaviors toward the environment. According to researchers like Arran Stibbe, ecolinguistics helps us understand that some ways of talking about the environment can be harmful by encouraging exploitation, domination, or neglect, while other ways of speaking can promote care, respect, and ecological sustainability. When applied to literature, especially poetry, ecolinguistics enables scholars to analyze how writers express attitudes toward nature across different historical periods, revealing evolving cultural perspectives (Halliday, 2001).

Two poets often studied in this context are William Wordsworth and Ted Hughes, as their works represent contrasting views of the natural world that correspond to their different historical moments and personal outlooks. Wordsworth, writing during the early 19th century, is famous for presenting nature as peaceful, healing, and spiritually uplifting. His poetry often emphasizes a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural environment. Scholars like Jonathan Bate and James McKusick have shown how Wordsworth's poems encourage readers to develop a deep emotional and almost spiritual connection with nature. For example, in *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth describes nature as a kind and guiding force that provides solace and moral guidance. This reflects a time before large-scale industrialization, when many people viewed the natural world as a source of comfort, inspiration, and renewal. Wordsworth's idealized vision of nature also reflects Romantic-era values, which emphasized emotion, individual experience, and a close bond with the natural environment. His work captures a longing for a simpler, more balanced existence that seems increasingly threatened by the rapid technological and social changes of his time. By focusing on nature's beauty and its positive impact on the human spirit, Wordsworth's poetry invites readers to appreciate and protect the environment.

In contrast, Ted Hughes, a 20th-century poet, offers a much darker and more complex view of nature. His poems often depict nature as wild, dangerous, and unpredictable, rather than peaceful or comforting. Critics such as Terry Gifford have described Hughes' style as "post-pastoral," a term that suggests his poetry no longer idealizes nature but presents it in a more raw, honest, and sometimes violent way. For example, in poems like *Wind and Hawk Roosting*, Hughes shows nature as a powerful and uncontrollable force, indifferent to human concerns (Hughes, 1970). His portrayal reflects the fears and anxieties of a modern world shaped by industrialization, war, and environmental degradation.

Hughes' poetry reveals a natural world that is both awe-inspiring and terrifying—a place where survival depends on strength, aggression, and dominance. His vivid and sometimes brutal imagery challenges readers to confront the realities of nature's violence and humanity's fragile place within it. This perspective differs sharply from Wordsworth's, emphasizing the impact of industrialization and environmental harm that characterized the 20th century. To better understand these contrasting perspectives, some scholars turn to Murray Bookchin's theory of ecosophy. Bookchin argued that the way humans treat the environment is deeply connected to broader social issues like inequality, domination, and hierarchical power structures. Ecosophy, as a philosophical framework, encourages a more ethical and egalitarian relationship with nature. This theory helps explain why Wordsworth's gentle, harmonious view of nature fits with a more balanced, pre-industrial society, while Hughes' darker vision reflects the destructive effects of modern industrial society on both the environment and human communities.

Bookchin's ideas also suggest that environmental problems cannot be fully addressed without considering their social and political roots. In this way, literature that portrays nature in different ways can be seen as reflecting and responding to these larger societal dynamics (Bookchin, 2005). Wordsworth's peaceful vision may represent a longing for social harmony and balance, while

Hughes' aggressive imagery may symbolize the conflicts and crises of contemporary life. Another useful approach to analyzing poetry about nature is Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which allows critics to explore the unconscious feelings and desires that influence literary works. Scholars such as Harold Bloom and Peter Rudnytsky have used Freud's ideas to study hidden emotions in poetry, revealing deeper psychological meanings. For example, Wordsworth's calm and peaceful descriptions of nature might express a desire for inner peace and stability during times of social upheaval. In contrast, Hughes' violent and chaotic imagery could reflect feelings of guilt, anxiety, or fear related to humanity's destructive impact on the environment.

In this way, nature in poetry is not simply a physical setting but also a symbol of deeper personal and cultural emotions. The poets' differing portrayals of nature reveal different emotional responses to environmental and societal change—Wordsworth's nostalgic yearning for harmony versus Hughes' urgent confrontation with conflict and destruction. Beyond ecolinguistics and psychoanalysis, eco-criticism offers another valuable framework by linking literary texts to environmental ethics and activism. Eco-critics argue that literature plays an important role in shaping how people think about and respond to ecological issues. According to scholars like Lawrence Buell, literature serves as a cultural space where environmental concerns are debated and where readers can develop new ways of understanding the natural world.

From this perspective, Wordsworth's nostalgic and idealized depiction of nature may be viewed as a call to preserve and respect the environment, encouraging readers to cherish its beauty and value. On the other hand, Hughes' raw and sometimes brutal portrayal of nature challenges readers to face the harsh realities of environmental degradation and to recognize the urgent need for action. Together, these poets demonstrate how literature reflects and influences evolving environmental attitudes, from romantic reverence to modern realism. Importantly, these differing literary responses highlight the complexity of human relationships with nature. They reveal how cultural, historical, and psychological factors shape our perceptions and interactions with the environment. By examining these factors, scholars gain insight into how literature can both reflect and affect ecological awareness.

This study builds on all these theoretical perspectives to compare Wordsworth's and Hughes' poetry through both ecolinguistic and psychological lenses. It shows that literature does more than simply reflect environmental changes—it actively challenges harmful ways of thinking and encourages readers to develop a deeper, more responsible relationship with nature. By carefully analyzing language, imagery, and themes, this research reveals how poetry can inspire readers to reconsider their role within the environment. Highlighting this connection between literature and ecological consciousness is particularly important today, as environmental challenges such as climate change, habitat loss, and pollution become increasingly urgent. Literature's ability to foster emotional engagement with nature and to promote sustainable thinking can contribute to broader efforts to address these crises. Through these combined perspectives, this research contributes to ongoing conversations about how art and language shape our understanding of the natural world. It emphasizes literature's vital role in encouraging a more thoughtful, respectful coexistence with nature, inviting readers to move beyond passive observation toward active care and stewardship. By tracing the evolution of nature poetry from Wordsworth's hopeful idealism to Hughes' stark realism, this study underscores how literature remains a powerful tool for raising ecological awareness and inspiring change.

## Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This study draws from ecolinguistics, literary criticism, psychoanalysis, and ecophilosophy to explore how poetry reflects changing human attitudes toward nature, focusing specifically on the works of William Wordsworth and Ted Hughes in relation to the profound effects of industrialization. Wordsworth, writing in the early 19th century before industrialization deeply transformed society, often depicted nature as a source of peace, spiritual renewal, and moral guidance. His poetry embodies a reverence for the natural world, portraying it as harmonious and nurturing. In contrast, Hughes, writing in the 20th century amid rapid industrial and technological advances, presents a more complex and often unsettling vision of nature—one that is violent, chaotic, and conflicted, reflecting the fractured relationship between humanity and the environment in a post-industrial age. By examining their poetry within these distinct historical and cultural contexts, the study reveals how human perceptions and relationships with the natural world have evolved dramatically over time, mirroring broader social, economic, and environmental changes.

This research engages in a close analysis of the poets' language, imagery, and thematic concerns to uncover the deeper ideological and emotional layers embedded within their works. It highlights a significant shift from Wordsworth's idealized harmony with nature to Hughes's expression of anxiety and confrontation with ecological degradation, thereby demonstrating how poetry functions not only as artistic expression but also as a form of ecological critique and awareness-raising. Central to this inquiry is ecolinguistics, which examines how language shapes environmental thought, discourse, and behavior. Drawing on Arran Stibbe's (2015) work, this approach allows the study to dissect how the poets' linguistic choices—such as metaphor, diction, and narrative structure—construct distinct representations of nature, communicate particular values, and influence readers' understanding of human-nature interactions.

Further enriching the analysis is Murray Bookchin's theory of ecosophy, which situates environmental issues within their broader socio-political and economic contexts. Bookchin argues that ecological crises stem from hierarchical social systems and exploitative economic structures. Applying ecosophy enables the study to trace ideological undercurrents in the poets' depictions of nature—contrasting Wordsworth's vision of a balanced, almost sacred natural order with Hughes's portrayal of a wild, sometimes menacing natural world shaped by conflict and survival. This ideological lens helps reveal the poets' implicit critiques of industrial progress and human domination over nature, as well as their differing responses to environmental and social upheavals. Additionally, the study employs Freudian psychoanalytic theory to explore the emotional and subconscious dimensions of the poetry. Freud's idea that literary works act as symbolic expressions of repressed fears, desires, and anxieties provides a valuable tool for interpreting how both poets project their inner psychological responses to environmental change and industrialization. Wordsworth's nature often serves as a sanctuary for emotional restoration and a site of nostalgic longing, while Hughes's nature reflects struggle, aggression, and existential unease, revealing deeper psychological tensions about humanity's place in a rapidly changing world.

Methodologically, this qualitative study relies on comparative literary analysis of carefully selected poems that engage deeply with ecological themes. Wordsworth's *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, and passages from *The Prelude* are juxtaposed with Hughes's *Wind*, *Hawk Roosting*, and selections from *Crow* and *Lupercal*. These texts were chosen for their rich and contrasting depictions of nature, allowing the study to examine how poetic language, symbolism, and thematic concerns evolve across different historical periods

and cultural milieus. The analysis is structured in three interconnected stages: an ecolinguistic examination of linguistic and metaphorical strategies shaping ecological meaning; a psychoanalytic interpretation that uncovers hidden emotional and subconscious content; and an ideological critique through ecosophy that exposes the social and political beliefs embedded within the poems. Together, these approaches provide a multi-layered, interdisciplinary understanding of how poetry not only reflects changing human experiences with nature but also challenges readers to rethink their ecological responsibilities in an era of environmental crisis.

## Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive exploration of William Wordsworth and Ted Hughes shows changes in how people think about nature before and after industrialization. Using ideas from ecolinguistics and literary studies, the study shows how language shapes our view of the environment. Wordsworth's 19th-century poems describe nature as calm, peaceful, and a source of comfort and spiritual renewal. On the other hand, Hughes's 20th-century poems present nature as wild, chaotic, and sometimes threatening, reflecting worries about the damage caused by industrial progress. This difference reveals a major shift from admiring nature to worrying about its vulnerability and response to human harm. The study also uses Murray Bookchin's ecosophy and Freud's psychoanalytic theory to understand deeper meanings in the poems. Bookchin's ideas help explain how social and political problems contribute to environmental damage, and these ideas show up in how the poets describe nature. Freud's theory helps uncover hidden feelings and fears about environmental change that influence the tone and themes of the poems. Together, these approaches explain why Wordsworth's poetry often feels hopeful and peaceful, while Hughes's work feels tense and troubled.

In the end, this research shows that poetry is an important way to think about and discuss environmental issues. By studying how poets use language to express changing ideas about nature, we see how literature can help raise awareness and encourage people to care more about protecting the environment. This study invites readers to rethink our relationship with nature and highlights the need for responsible and thoughtful actions to address today's environmental challenges.

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