

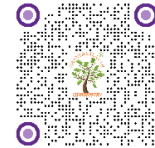


Original Article

NATURE AS AGENCY: A COMPARATIVE ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF SELECTED WORKS OF WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

Deepak ^{1*} 

¹ M.A (English), NET, India



ABSTRACT

Taking the approach of a comparative ecocritical study, this paper compares and contrasts the ways in which the two poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge represent nature not only as a silent, uncommunicative background to humanity, but as an active participant in and participant to human life, an ontological being with its own capacity to communicate. This study draws on the theories of first-wave and second-wave ecocriticism, new materialism and actor-network theory, suggesting that although Wordsworth and Coleridge were philosophically different, they share an understanding of nature as a dynamic entity which influences the consciousness, moral frameworks and spiritual experiences of humans. The paper examines the development of both poets' ecological philosophies from their shared experiments in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) to their later mature poems, and how their own ideas of natural agency prefigure modern ecological philosophy. This essay explores the ways in which Wordsworth and Coleridge's poetry, as part of the Romantic movement, constructs a picture of nature as agent, and investigates the implications of their work for both the new materialism and the Anthropocene. This essay examines the ways in which Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry, as part of the Romantic movement, imagines nature as an agent, and examines the implications of this for the new materialism and the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Romantic Poetry, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Nature as Agency, New Materialism, Anthropocene, Environmental Humanities, *Lyrical Ballads*, Ecological Consciousness

INTRODUCTION

The environmental crisis of the 21st century has brought about a rethinking of the Western philosophical tradition's view of the human-natural world relationship. This rethinking has been most pronounced in the field of literary and cultural studies known as ecocriticism, which has helped to unsettle anthropocentric assumptions that have dominated Western thinking since the Enlightenment. In this important context Romantic poetry has become an important field of research, both because the Romantic era saw the dawn of the industrialisation of the natural world and because Romantic poets constructed highly reflective and advanced notions of nature that continue to shape ecological thinking today.

There is no doubt that the two main figures of English Romanticism, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, are poets of nature. The idea of natural agency—the ability of the natural world to act, to influence, to communicate, and to exist as an independent ontological force—has not, however, been systematically compared in the context of contemporary ecocritical theory,

*Corresponding Author:

Email address: Deepak (deepakboora107@gmail.com)

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with regard to each poet. But the concept of natural agency has not, with respect to each poet, been systematically compared in the light of contemporary ecocritical theory. This paper aims to contribute to this void, in making a comparative ecocritical reading on selected works of both poets, how they represent nature and how they both are challenging or reinforcing the human/nature binary which ecocriticism has identified as a root cause for environmental degradation. The idea of 'nature as agency' is a multireferential concept. In the field of ecocriticism, it is related to Lawrence Buell (1995), Buell (2001) concept of a "presence of the nonhuman environment" as a presence in environmentally oriented texts rather than as an environment used merely as a backdrop. In philosophy, it echoes the new materialism's critique of the sharp dichotomy between people and things Coole and Frost (2010), Bennett (2010). In science studies, it relates to the actor-network theory which asserts that non-human entities are involved in networks of agency Latour (2005). The question asked in this paper is whether and in which ways Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry anticipate and/or complicate more recent accounts of natural agency.

This study is organized as an analytical descriptive review, which summarizes the past critical works on Wordsworth and Coleridge, and offers a new set of interpretations based on recent advances in ecological philosophy. It introduces concepts of ecocritical approaches to Romantic poetry, and considers how specific poems and prose texts by both poets can be analysed through close reading of the texts, before placing their ecological ideas into the wider framework of contemporary environmental humanities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ECOCRITICISM AND THE QUESTION OF AGENCY

Since the institutionalisation of ecocriticism in the 1990s, there have been important shifts in intellectual development. The first wave of ecocriticism (1995–1996), as embodied in the writing of Buell (1995) and Glotfelty (1996), was concerned mainly with the portrayal of nature in literary texts, and held a belief in "nature appreciation" and "wilderness ethics. In its intention to address the environment as a key category, this was a pioneering strategy, but it frequently employed a romantic view of nature that recreated the same human/nature dichotomy that it was challenging.

Second wave ecocriticism, which began in the early 2000s, extended the critical work into urban spaces, environmental justice and politics of nature. First-wave ecocriticism was criticized by scholars like Michael Bennett (2005) and Dana Phillips (2006) who saw as a pastoral duty to address the complexity of modern environmental problems, such as pollution, climate change, and environmental racism. This change paved the way to more "theoretically advanced" solutions to the problem of natural agency.

In the 2010s, the new materialism also reshaped the theoretical framework of the ecocriticism. In 2010, Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* proposed an extension to this idea of the 'vitality' in matter itself, proposing that agency is not exclusively a human quality. Stacy Alaimo's *Trans-corporeality* Alaimo (2008), Alaimo (2016) illustrated how human bodies are "materially entangled" with the environment and transcended the human/nonhuman divide. In *Agential Realism* (2007), Karen Barad theorizes that agency is not an attribute of the human or nonhuman, but arises from intra-actions between human and nonhuman forces, based on the work of quantum physics. These theoretical insights offer new approaches to the interpretation of representations of nature in Romantic poetry.

The Anthropocene is a concept that is contested, but it has also changed the way that the history of literature is approached from an ecocritical perspective. The Anthropocene's shift to a geological era defined by human activity has muddied the usual ecocritical discourse on humans dominating nature. Nature is not the passive backdrop that modernity so envisioned, as Timothy Morton (2013), Morton (2016) has noted. This sense has significant implications for the reading of Romantic poetry, written in the first decades of the industrial revolution that would give birth to the Anthropocene condition.

WORDSWORTH: NATURE AS MORAL AGENT AND TEACHER

Perhaps one of Wordsworth's best-known uses of nature as an active, moral force is his portrayal of nature in the poem *The World is too Much with Us*. In almost all of Wordsworth's work, whether in his early poems such as *Lyrical Ballads* or in his philosophical late work such as *The Prelude*, nature is not just a backdrop to his characters' actions, but is itself an active character. *Tintern Abbey* (1798) uses nature as:

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul Of all my moral being. (ll. 108-110)

As an example, this passage, which is often referred to in ecocritical interpretations of Wordsworth, presents nature in a positive light as something that can shape humans' consciousness and moral identity. All the verbs used have active, agential connotations, such as 'anchor' or 'nurse', 'guide', or 'guardian', meaning nature is not a subject to be looked upon, but a force acting upon the human subject. The phrase 'soul / Of all my moral being' extends this, however, to imply that nature is not just a force upon the poet's moral being, but rather is the being itself.

But the question of whether Wordsworth's nature is real or only a reflection of human consciousness has been raised by ecocritics. Jonathan Bate (1991), Bate (2000) has claimed Wordsworth has a kind of ecological dwelling in his poetry in which he acknowledges the autonomy of the natural environment. In contrast, Kevin Hutchings (2010) has argued that Wordsworth's nature is essentially anthropocentric – that is, it reflects human consciousness, and not an autonomous ontological entity.

Wordsworth's concept of the agency of nature is at its most complex in *The Prelude* (1805/1850). Famous passages in the poem such as the 'spots of time' evoke moments where nature imposes itself on the poet's mind beyond his or her will and control. Young poet in Book I says he stole a boat and felt a mountain chasing him:

I struck, and struck again, And, struggling hard, with an impetuous blow Sent the small vessel like a living thing That from its cradle had been launched, and lay Upon the smooth water. But when I had got Out of the creek, and turned toward the shore, A rocky steep upreared its head, and seemed To stride after me. (l. 375-382)

The boy's 'striding' in front of the rock is an apparent movement, an active force that seeks to impose itself upon human perception, nature. In this passage, the manner in which nonhumans act beyond human control and intent, which new materialists refer to as the 'vibrancy' of matter, is enacted. The poet continues:

With trembling oars I turned, and through the silent water my small bark Moved to the station of the trees, and there in the stern was laid. But after this There came a trouble on my thoughts, And undistinguished forms of things unknown, Unsteady visitants. (l. 384-390)

The 'trouble' that ensues is the permanent psychological aftermath of this experience of natural agency. The poet's encounter with nature has profoundly changed his consciousness, leaving him with 'undistinguished forms of things unknown' in his mind as he follows the mountain. This idea is further explored in Wordsworth's prose pieces: In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Wordsworth states that 'in that condition, the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature' which suggests a connection between 'forms of knowledge' and 'forms of nature'.

CLOSE READING: 'TINTERN ABBEY'

Perhaps even more than any other Romantic poem, 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' (1798) has received ecocritical attention. The opening lines of the poem set the tone for the intimate familiarity of the poet and the landscape, and the exchange of one with the other:

Five years have past; five summers, with the length of five long winters! and again I hear These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs with a soft inland murmur.-Once again Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs, that on a wild secluded scene impress Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect the landscape with the quiet of the sky. (ll. 1-8)

The waters 'rolling from their mountain-springs' and the cliffs that 'impress / Thoughts of more deep seclusion' are alive and active agents, 'impressing' thoughts onto the poet's consciousness. The landscape is not a passive thing to look at, but something that is active, moving, and touching the perceiving mind.

The middle of the poem details how this landscape has left a lasting impression on the poet's mind when he has not been there for many years:

How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee, O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods, how often has my spirit turned to thee! And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought, with many recognitions, faint and dim, and somewhat of a sad perplexity, the picture of the mind revives again. (ll. 49-55)

It is the landscape that 'turns to' the poet, as well as the poet turning to the landscape, the sylvan Wye is a 'wanderer through the woods' who 'goes' through the landscape for a reason. 'Picture of the mind', 'revives again' is not the passive memory but is an active force still influencing the poet's consciousness.

The famous statement of the poem, 'Never did betray / The heart that loved her' (ll. The idea of nature as a moral agent opens the door to fidelity and betrayal (122-123), an agency that goes beyond the mechanical. The 'beauteous forms' of the landscape are not just aesthetic objects of contemplation but agents that have acted upon the poet's mind during the years he has been away, and have resulted in 'sensations sweet' and 'tranquil restoration' (ll. 65-67).

But there's a twist at the end of the poem, in the closing section towards his sister Dorothy. The poet's desire that nature will 'so impress / With quietness and beauty' (l.6) and 'so inform / Your mind' (l.3). The human consciousness must be receptive to nature's agency, as pointed out in 148-150, in order for its moral and spiritual potential to become reality. The idea of co-constitutiveness of human consciousness and natural agency is anticipated by Barad (2007) 's concept of intra-action'.

'I WANDERED LONELY AS A CLOUD' AND THE AGENCY OF THE DAFFODILS

Another important natural agency representation in Wordsworth's poetry is in 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' (1807). The first simile in the poem is 'I wandered lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o'er vales and hills' (ll. 1-2)-sets the poet up as a passive, drifting onlooker, though this passiveness is soon challenged by the "active" daffodils:

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. (ll. 3-6)

The daffodils are not static entities, but a 'crowd' and a 'host': concepts that socialise the flowers. They 'flutter and dance', doing actions which are intentional and lively:

Continuous as the stars that shine And twinkle on the milky way, They stretched in never-ending line Along the margin of a bay: Ten thousand saw I at a glance, Tossing their heads in sprightly dance. (ll. 9-14)

Let's watch the daffodils do their 'sprightly dance' as they toss their heads. Watch the daffodils toss their heads in 'sprightly dance' – implying conscious, purposeful movement of the flowers. This meeting ultimately changed the poet's life forever, as shown in the final stanza of the poem.

For oft, when on my couch I lie In vacant or in pensive mood, They flash upon that inward eye Which is the bliss of solitude; And then my heart with pleasure fills, And dances with the daffodils. (ll. 19-24)

The daffodils' agency is not limited to the moment of encounter; it's an agency that extends into moments of solitude, 'flashing upon that inward eye' and transforming the poet's emotional state. In this last line, 'And dances with the daffodils,' the poet's heart is implied to be a mechanism that is reacting to and reflecting what the flowers are doing.

COLERIDGE: NATURE AS SYMBOLIC AND IMAGINATIVE FORCE

The nature connection of Coleridge is more complicated than Wordsworth's, and less obviously 'ecological'. Wordsworth's nature is seen as a direct moral and spiritual power; Coleridge's nature is simply mediated by symbolic thinking, philosophy or theology. Coleridge makes a clear distinction between 'fancy' and 'imagination' in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), claiming that the secondary imagination 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate' and that 'it is a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM' (Ch. XIII). In this philosophical view, nature is not autonomous but a product of an active and creative power that also informs the human mind, for Coleridge.

Since then, however, ecocritical analyses of Coleridge have questioned the notion that his philosophical idealism is limited to nothing but a symbol of human consciousness. Derek Mahony (1997), McKusick (2000) have suggested that Coleridge's later philosophical work, including his work on the Naturphilosophie of Schelling, evolves a notion of nature as an organism in self-organizing, self-moving motion, endowed with intrinsic agency.

In the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) Coleridge's most dramatic image of natural agency is found. The poem's action is created by the mariner's violation of the natural world (slaying the albatross) and the punishment the natural world visits upon him:

With my cross-bow I shot the ALBATROSS. God save thee, ancient Mariner! From the fiends, that plague thee thus!- Why look'st thou so? - With my cross-bow I shot the ALBATROSS. (Part I, ll. 79-82; Part VII, ll. 612-615)

The killing at the end of the poem implies that the murder is never resolved: The mariner's disrespect of nature will continue to haunt him. The sea, the wind, the sun, the moon and the polar spirit are all agents that work on the mariner:

The very deep did rot: O Christ! That ever this should be! Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs Upon the slimy sea. Day after day, day after day, We stuck, nor breath nor motion; As idle as a painted ship Upon a painted ocean. (Part II, ll. 121-124; 111-114)

The sea itself is a punishment: 'slimy things did crawl with legs / Upon the slimy sea'-the ocean is now a place of terror and revenge. The moral of the poem, 'He prayeth well, who loveth well / Both man and bird and beast' (Part VII, ll. The central theme of the book (612-613) is love with a moral purpose that is beyond the realm of the human person.

A more complicated view of natural agency is offered in 'Kubla Khan' (1797/1816):

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan A stately pleasure-dome decree: Where Alph, the sacred river, ran Through caverns measureless to man Down to a sunless sea. (ll. 1-5)

The sacred river Alph that flows down 'caverns measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea' is an element of nature that is beyond a man's ability to comprehend and control. The 'deep romantic chasm' adds to the sublime force of nature described in the poem:

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething, As plentiful and sacred as the stream That ran through caverns measureless to man Down to a lifeless ocean. (ll. 12-15)

The ceaseless turmoil seething signifies nature's dynamic and violent quality, one that cannot be controlled by man-made means. The poetry's vision of poetic inspiration as the recovery of the 'symphony and song' of the Abyssinian maid implies that "true creativity" requires a surrender to the forces of nature that the pleasure dome of artifice attempts to restrain.

COLERIDGE'S CONVERSATIONAL POEMS AND THE AGENCY OF PLACE

The *Eolian Harp* (1795), *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison* (1797), *Frost at Midnight* (1798) and *The Nightingale* (1798) are all conversational poems by Coleridge, some of the most subtle depictions of natural agency in Romantic poetry.

The poet is disappointed that he must stay in his garden and has to deal with 'this Lime-Tree Bower My Prison':

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain, This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost Beauties and feelings, such as would have been Most sweet to my remembrance even when age Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness! (ll. 1-5)

But, as the poem evolves, the bower itself turns out to be beautiful and meaningful. The poet envisions his friends walking through the landscape, but then focuses his attention on his surroundings:

No sound of dissonance! The lark Is singing o'er my head; and the sweet air Breathes o'er me, and the sun Shines on me, and the green leaves Are dancing round me in the light wind. (ll. 48-52)

No dissonant sound! The lark is singing over my head, and the sweet breeze is blowing over me, and the sun is shining on me, and the green leaves are dancing round me in the light breeze. (ll. 48-52)

The beauty of the bower is not a consolation, but is a reality, with its own agency: the dancing leaves in the light wind, the breathing air o'er me, the shining sun on me. All elements of the natural world are alive and are interacting with the poet.

The Frost performs its secret ministry, Unhelped by any wind. The owl's cry Came loud-and hark, again! loud as before. The inmates of my cottage, all at rest, Have left me to that solitude, Which suits abstruser thoughts. (ll. 1-6)

The frost's 'secret ministry' is an activity that occurs 'unhelped by any wind'-that is, it is an autonomous agent that works without outside assistance. The poet speaks to his little boy, and imagines him roaming 'like a breeze / By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags / Of ancient mountain, or beneath the clouds,' implying a notion of human-nature relationship, where the child's consciousness is formed by the agency of natural surroundings.

The Nightingale' (1798) directly challenges the melancholy interpretation of the nightingale's song:

In nature there is nothing melancholy. And hark! the nightingale begins his song, 'A most musical, a most melodious note!' And hark! again! a tinkling harmony, A quick, quick, quick! yes, quick, quick, quick! 'Most musical, most melodious bird!' (ll. 12; 15-16; 20-22)

The statement "In nature, there is nothing sad" is a direct challenge to the tendency of humans to anthropomorphize nature. The nightingale's song is not sad, it's 'most musical, most melodious'--it's a song of the bird's own life, not the life of the human who hears it. It is a statement of ecological thinking, which is an attempt to freed natural expression from human emotional projection, and which foreshadows the modern attacks on anthropocentrism.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES

In this comparative study of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's ecological philosophies, there are many points of similarity as well as many points of difference. Both poets are opposed to the mechanistic idea of nature which was inherited from Enlightenment science, and both describe nature as a presence that is active, creative, and meaningful, affecting human consciousness and moral identity. Both poets have a sense that the industrialization of the natural landscape is a spiritual and ecological loss, and that poetry can be used to express it and, perhaps, to make up for its loss.

But the conceptual basis on which each poet positions his ecological thinking varies greatly. Wordsworth sees nature as a direct, unmediated presence, which speaks to moral and spiritual truths through the senses. His ecological thinking is based on the experiences of the 'body' in the natural landscape, or the 'feelings' or 'stirrings' of the natural world in the human subject. "Those to whom the Tablets Turned' (1798) speaks:

One impulse from a vernal wood May teach you more of man, Of moral evil and of good, Than all the sages can. Let Nature be your teacher. (ll. 13-16; 19)

The phrase 'Let Nature be your teacher' captures Wordsworth's belief that nature is more authoritative as an educator than human institutions. Coleridge, however, tries to understand nature in terms of the philosophical and theological framework, seeking to understand it as a symbolic, symbolic structure that leads to a deeper metaphysical truth.

The differences have important implications for ecocritical interpretation. Wordsworth's embodied and sensory engagement with nature aligns with the embodied cognition and ecological self theories of the present day [Abram \(1996\)](#). From his depiction of the natural world as a direct source of moral and spiritual insight he anticipates the deep ecology movement which emphasis the intrinsic value of the natural world. Coleridge's more philosophical perspective, on the other hand, is more in line with present-day theories of symbolic ecology, and the cultural construction of nature [Cronon \(1995\)](#). His awareness that nature is already "symbolic" makes his analysis of the environment a more complicated form of naive realism, a type of environmental discourse.

Though they differ in certain aspects, both poets acknowledge that nature has its own agency, beyond the reach and comprehension of humans. The poet replies to his friend's request for active thinking and books in Wordsworth's 'Expostulation and Reply' (1798):

'Why, William, on that old stone bank Why sit you thus? The eye of man Hath not, nor ever had, the power To see the life of things.' 'Then, ask me not where knowledge is, When thus I sit upon the grass, And feel the life of things.' (ll. 1-4; 17-19)

Wordsworth's sense of the 'life of things' in the midst of grass is a non-conceptual, sensory, embodied knowledge, one that is gained by a physical encounter with the natural world. Such a focus on the 'life of things' as a source of knowledge beyond human conceptualization is in keeping with the core tenets of the new materialism of the present day, which holds that agency is not an exclusive human attribute, but one that comes out of the weaving to-and-fro of human and non-human forces.

ROMANTIC ECOLOGY AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

Today's Anthropocene-centric discourse has transformed the critical discourse on Romantic poetry and ecology. The Anthropocene makes a significant modification to the story of human control over nature, one that shows that humans and nature are mutually dependent and more complex than modernity envisioned.

There are several scholars who have suggested the Romantic poetry provides interesting materials for thinking about the Anthropocene. Denise Gigante (2020) has demonstrated that during the Romantic period there was a new awareness of the interconnections of all things that inhabit the earth. Alan Bewell (2022) has maintained that Romantic literature responded to the global aspects of environmental shifts, were an expression of the changing ecosystems of colonial expansion and industrialisation.

An ecocritical approach to Wordsworth and Coleridge from the perspective of the Anthropocene brings to light aspects of their ecological thinking that have been overlooked by the pastoral interpretations of previous studies. Wordsworth's depiction of enclosure of commons, focus on uprootedness of rural populations and awareness of landscape change for good or bad that cannot be undone all anticipate the modern issues of environmental justice. Wordsworth's description of the change in London is depicted in 'The Prelude' (Book VII):

What a hell for eyes and ears! what an eternal jar of noisy sounds! The heavy tramp of busy feet! The hum of wheels! The cry of vociferous sellers! (VII. 156-160)

This depiction of the noise and chaos of the city is a characterization of it as a place that threatens the senses, a place that is fundamentally antagonistic to the contemplation of nature that Wordsworth cherishes. The juxtaposition of this urban scene with the 'life of things' felt in the grass, is quite a stark reminder of the ecological damage of industrialisation.

Coleridge's philosophical reflections on mind vs. nature, his interest in the more recent advances in natural science, and his understanding of the limits of human knowledge about nature all align themselves with the current discussion concerning the epistemological problems of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is also an introduction to new questions regarding the politics of Romantic ecology. Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were conservative politically later in their lives, have been faulted for this; and their ecological ideas have been accused of being pastoralist, a nostalgic aspect of their thinking that often lacked a social and political dimension. Recently, this perspective has been questioned and alternatives to Romantic ecology have been proposed, which point to the possibility of a more radical environmental politics.

CONCLUSION

This comparative ecocritical analysis has shown that, despite their respective philosophical stance, Wordsworth and Coleridge have more than shared the view of nature as an active force that influences human awareness, moral judgment and spiritual experience. Both Wordsworth's embodied, sensual view of nature (his 'life of things' that is 'felt through' direct contact with it) and Coleridge's more formal and symbolic engagement with the natural world defy the mechanistic picture of nature that had been taken over from Enlightenment science, and look ahead to the ecological thought of the present day. The close readings in this paper have illustrated that both poets portray the natural world as having agency other than that of humans with whom it cannot be controlled or understood. Wordsworth's daffodils, 'toss their heads in sprightly dance,' his cliffs that 'impress / Thoughts of more deep seclusion,' and his rocks that 'stride after' the young poet are all examples of nature as an active, dynamic thing. Coleridge's slimy sea crawling with 'slimy things', his sacred river flowing through 'caverns measureless to man', and his frost doing its 'secret ministry, unhelpt by any wind' are all forms of nature that exist outside of human observation and control.

This research perspective on the agency of nature, as theorised in the poetry of both strikers, creates a linkage between Romantic ecology and current theories of new materialism, actor-network theory and the Anthropocene. This study has shown the relevance of Wordsworth and Coleridge in the light of these current paradigms and has helped to continue the rethinking of the Romantic heritage in the Anthropocene era. Both poets provide tools for contemplation of the complicated, interdependent dynamic between people and the natural world that has become so critical in our modern environment crisis. This comparative method could be further applied to other Romantic poets, such as John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and William Blake, whose ecological ideas have been little discussed by ecocritics. Nature as agency offers fruitful ground for the interdisciplinary work of Romantic ecology and current environmental humanities, rich possibilities for literary criticism, and rich possibilities for ecological philosophy.

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