

# Consuming Nature and Performing Environmentalism: Wordsworth's Ecological Resistance and the Cultural Politics of Climate Awareness in Urban India

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## Abstract

This study will examine William Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us" in relation to contemporary environmental discourse in urban India, connecting the Romantic tradition of ecological thought with contemporary Environmental Humanities and cultural studies. The study will re-examine Wordsworth's critique of materialism and its effects on alienation between humans and nature, contextualizing it with the backdrop of urbanization, consumerist models of sustainability, and the increasing visibility of climate awareness in urban India. The main argument will be that contemporary environmentalism takes symbolic and lifestyle-related forms, including green consumerism, eco-branding, and mediated forms of environmental activism, wherein concern with nature often takes a cultural form that is symbolic, rather than being grounded in actual lived experiences. In this context, this study will explore how the emphasis on emotional and ethical relations with nature, which was a hallmark of Romantic ecological thought, intersects with consumerist models of sustainability, including poetry as a form of environmental resistance against dominant discourses on development and consumption. The paper seeks to illustrate the continued relevance of the Romantic ecological tradition to the cultural politics of climate awareness and environmental alienation in twenty-first-century India.

**Keywords:** Wordsworth; Eco-criticism; Environmental Humanities; Climate Awareness; Urban Environmentalism.

## INTRODUCTION

The environmental crisis of the twenty-first century has led to increased interest in literary works that address the relationship between human progress and nature. In this context, William Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us" assumes particular importance in addressing issues related to materialism, along with the increased alienation between human beings and nature. Written in the early years of the Industrial Revolution, the poem reflects a foreboding attitude towards a world increasingly controlled by the principles of acquisition, productivity, and economic aspirations, rather than emotional or spiritual connection with nature. This concern has assumed a fresh significance in the current debates on climate change and environmental degradation.

Within the contemporary Indian context, there is an increased awareness and concern with issues related to sustainability, ecological balance, and environmental responsibility, especially with regard to the

impact of urbanization and development. Cities represent a microcosm of the dialects of development, which, on one hand, promotes technological advancements and development, while on the other, it also promotes pollution, a lack of green spaces, and ecological risks. There has been an increased awareness of issues related to environmental responsibility and sustainability, which, while promoted through media discourses, institutional initiatives, and consumerist approaches, also raises questions about the effectiveness of contemporary forms of environmental activism with regard to achieving actual ecological awareness, as opposed to symbolic representations of concern with environmental issues. This requires a re-evaluation of the attitude towards nature that is promoted by literature, which emphasizes an ethical engagement with nature that is not necessarily tied to its economic value.

The ecological philosophy of Wordsworth offers an important framework to understand this complexity. The poems of Wordsworth emphasize the importance of senses, emotions, and ethics as an essential part of human engagement with nature. While most people view nature as an object to be consumed or exploited, Wordsworth views it as an entity with the potential to shape human minds and bring balance to human psychology. This Romantic view of nature contradicts the basic assumptions of consumer culture today, where nature has become an object of consumption in tourism, landscape gardening, and environmental narratives. Re-reading of Wordsworth in the context of contemporary environmental discourses offers an important framework to understand the potential of literary imagination to intervene dominant developmental discourses.

The development of environmental humanities as a new field of study has increasingly enabled an increasing dialogue among literature, culture, and environmental discourses. There is an emerging view that environmental issues are not only scientific or technological issues but also cultural or moral issues that are shaped by narratives, values, and collective imagination. In this context, literature has become not only aesthetic but also critical, with the potential to reveal the underlying ideological foundations of environmental exploitation. The fight of Wordsworth against materialism can be viewed as an early expression of ecological concerns, which are important today in understanding alienation from nature.

Urban environmentalism in contemporary India offers a framework for understanding how ecological awareness is negotiated through social visibility, consumption, and identity. Sustainability is often enacted through symbolic expressions of concern, such as eco-products, green branding, and the internet-based dissemination of environmental activism. This framework indicates a growing awareness of environmental concerns but may also represent a tendency toward the reduction of ecological responsibility into symbolic actions that are disassociated from lived experiences of ecology. This phenomenon represents a cultural shift in which environmental awareness is inextricably linked with consumer identity and complicates the relationship between awareness, action, and cultural morality in relation to nature.

Through the combination of Wordsworth's poetic critique and contemporary realities in urban environmentalism in India, this research project locates the Romantic notion of ecology in contemporary discourse about climate awareness and cultural politics in India. The introduction establishes the conceptual foundation for understanding how literary works contribute to contemporary understanding of modern environmental problems, specifically in terms of the relationship between experiencing nature and consuming nature. In this regard, this paper attempts to argue how poetry may be used as a meaningful intellectual resource for understanding environmental awareness and the underlying assumptions about nature in contemporary culture.

### **William Wordsworth's Ecological Resistance and the Critique of Modernity**

William Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us" is a precursor to the poetic critique of the psychological and ethical effects of material progress. Written in an age when the expansion of industry was transforming the social and economic landscape of England, Wordsworth's poem expresses a deep-seated concern about the growing distance of humanity from nature. Wordsworth's critique is not simply environmental or physical in nature; it is, in the end, moral and experiential. The poem suggests that the obsessive focus on material gain leads to a degradation of the human capacity for wonder, emotional engagement, and spiritual reflection. Wordsworth's famous lament, "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers" (Wordsworth), captures the essence of a society that values consumption over engagement with nature.

From an eco-critical point of view, Wordsworth's poetry can be seen as a form of early resistance to anthropocentric modes of thinking. Eco-criticism, as a theoretical framework developed by scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty, centers on the relationship between literature and the natural world and explores the ways in which literary texts subvert anthropocentric models of progress. Wordsworth's focus on the emotional relationship with nature can be seen as foreshadowing this ecological attitude by positing nature as an active presence rather than a passive one. The poem's sense of loss—"Little we see in Nature that is ours" (Wordsworth), indicates a split between human consciousness and the natural world, suggesting that the experience of alienation is not a result of the absence of nature but rather a function of a shift in human perception.

This ecological vision of Romanticism takes on a new level of importance when viewed in the context of modern urban culture. In the rapidly growing urban environment, nature increasingly becomes an object of regulation, consumption, or display. Urban parks, eco-tourism, and environmental commodities often produce mediated experiences of nature that are removed from the experience of ecological awareness. Wordsworth's materialist critique thus takes on a new importance in the context of contemporary concerns over the commodification of ecological experience. The poetic resistance to materialism lies in Wordsworth's assertion that nature cannot be reduced to economic or instrumental value without diminishing human sensibility itself. As Jonathan Bate argues that romantic poetry repeatedly locates nature as a site of ethical reflection that challenges industrial conceptions of progress. (Bate).

At the same time, Wordsworth's use of mythic imagery, "I'd rather be / A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn" (Wordsworth), indicates a longing for a worldview in which nature is imbued with sacred meaning. This can be understood in the context of the restricted use of Romantic ideology, which aimed to respond to the Enlightenment's rationalism by reasserting the imagination and emotions as valid forms of knowledge. Wordsworth's use of pagan belief is not a rejection of modernity per se but a metaphorical expression of a longing for a cultural context in which the power of nature is recognized. This worldview corresponds to the current trends in environmental humanities, which argue that ecological disasters cannot be separated from cultural narratives that define human relationships with nature.

The relevance of this poetic resistance becomes clear in the contemporary discourse on climate change, in which environmental concern is often accompanied by consumption-oriented lifestyles. Cultural theorists have observed that environmental awareness in modern societies often manifests itself in symbolic practices that express concern without necessarily altering ecological relations. Wordsworth's poem resists this condition by prioritizing experience over display. His desire to "have glimpses that would make me less forlorn" (Wordsworth) highlights the restorative power of direct experience with

nature, which is in stark contrast to mediated or symbolic expressions of environmentalism. The poem thus provides not a solution to the environmental crisis but a critique of the cultural attitudes that make environmental crises possible.

From a literary perspective, Wordsworth's ecological resistance can also be understood in relation to the tension between culture and industrial modernity, as described by Raymond Williams. Williams suggests that industrial society is often characterized by a sense of loss in relation to uprooted rural and ecological values (Williams). Wordsworth's poetry is characterized by this tension between mourning and resistance, in which the poet acknowledges the necessity of social change while questioning its moral costs. The poet's voice thus becomes a site in which environmental awareness manifests itself as a critique of modern excess rather than a nostalgic gesture towards an idealized past.

Through the application of an eco-critical and cultural perspective to Wordsworth's poetic vision, this analysis reveals that "The World Is Too Much with Us" is a poem that foresees the present-day concerns about environmental alienation and the consumerist approach to nature. The relevance of "The World Is Too Much with Us" as a poem that continues to inspire today is based on its assertion that environmental problems are not only the result of environmental degradation but also of changed perceptions.

### **Urban Environmentalism, Consumer Culture, and the Performance of Climate Awareness in Contemporary India**

The environmental concerns expressed in Wordsworth's poetry take on a complex form when viewed through the lens of contemporary urban environmentalism in India. The growths of cities, technology, and consumer culture have altered the manner in which nature is experienced, engaged, and represented in urban spaces. Environmental awareness has undoubtedly risen in recent years through policy engagement, discursive education, and digital media. However, this awareness often takes place through the structures of consumption and visibility, where environmental concern is articulated through lifestyle and symbolic acts rather than ecological engagement. This is a moment when nature is no longer experienced as an ethical relationship but as a cultural signifier that is consumed.

From an eco-critical point of view, such trends pose questions about the changing definitions of environmental awareness. Lawrence Buell argues that environmental texts and practices must be analyzed in terms of the cultural and social contexts within which they are produced and received as a form of ecological perception (Buell). In modern urban India, environmental awareness is often produced through practices such as eco-friendly consumption, sustainable branding, and public campaigns with an environmental theme. While such practices are useful in raising awareness, they also have the potential to reduce environmental responsibility to market identity, where environmental awareness becomes a part of self-representation. Nature, in this case, is not completely absent but is filtered through market narratives that prioritize individual consumption as a means of environmental action.

This trend can be analyzed through a limited engagement with cultural theory, specifically the idea that modern consumer culture turns ethical values into consumable experiences. Green products, eco-tourism, and carefully designed urban green spaces often produce staged encounters with nature that prioritize comfort and aesthetic pleasure over ecological responsibility. Wordsworth's critique of material excess becomes particularly relevant in this context, where his poetry warns against the reduction of nature to utility or possession. The poem's claim that humanity has "given our hearts away, a sordid boon" (Wordsworth 4) is particularly relevant in the modern context, where environmental

awareness may coexist with practices of overconsumption and environmental degradation. The claim not only points to loss but also to complicity, suggesting that the alienation of nature is a product of conscious cultural choices rather than an inexorable process of progress.

Urban environmentalism in India is also mediated by media and digital culture, where the awareness of climate change is disseminated through imagery, campaigns, and online activism. Environmental engagement increasingly occurs through acts of sharing, liking, or showing environmental concern in public or online spaces. Environmental humanities scholars point out that such mediation can create a paradoxical distance between awareness and experience, where ecological engagement is mediated through representation rather than direct experience with natural environments. Wordsworth's desire for direct sensory engagement with nature is in contrast to this mediated relationship, prioritizing perception and affective engagement over symbolic engagement.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that contemporary environmental performance is not merely the result of bad faith but is also a function of the structural realities of urban life. Urban environments frequently limit direct engagement with nature, making mediated or consumerist forms of environmental engagement more readily available than experiential ones. This is indicative of what Raymond Williams has described as the cultural contradiction of modernity, where industrial and urban development both produces environmental awareness and environmental degradation (Williams).

Within this intellectual context, Wordsworth's ecological resistance assumes a new level of critical importance. Wordsworth's poetry is not only an idealization of nature but also a questioning of the cultural attitudes that alienate human existence from ecological consciousness. By emphasizing the importance of emotional sensitivity and ethical thinking, Wordsworth presents an alternative approach to environmental consciousness that resists the consumerist paradigm of sustainability. The difference between the Romantic approach to ecology and the contemporary urban approach to environmentalism highlights how environmental awareness, when situated within the context of consumer culture, may well sacrifice its transformative power.

Therefore, this section shows how the cultural politics of climate awareness in contemporary India cannot be understood within the confines of policy or scientific discourse. Literary studies, particularly Wordsworth's critique of material modernity, offer insights into the cultural and psychological aspects of environmental engagement. The conflict between consuming nature and experiencing nature continues to be a defining factor in the understanding of contemporary environmental consciousness, making the Romantic poem a fruitful site for exploring the complexities of urban environmentalism in the current moment.

### **Poetry as Environmental Resistance: Reclaiming Ecological Sensibility in Contemporary Climate Discourse**

The growing complexity of environmental issues in the contemporary world has led researchers in the environmental humanities to reconsider literature as a form of cultural intervention rather than purely aesthetic expression. In this context, poetry comes into its own as a form of resistance that can interrogate the dominant discourses of development, consumption, and progress. Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us" is exemplary of this form of resistance insofar as it expresses an alternative form of ecological consciousness based on emotional knowledge, ethical reflection, and responsiveness to nature. The poem does not express environmental activism in the contemporary political sense; instead, it subverts the cultural attitudes that make possible the neglect of nature, thus

offering a critical perspective on contemporary climate discourse.

Wordsworth's resistance is based on a shift in perception. The poem repeatedly emphasizes that the problem is not merely with the destruction of the environment but with humanity's failure to understand the importance of nature. The lines "The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon; / The winds that will be howling at all hours" (Wordsworth) emphasize the importance of nature as a living and dynamic entity, as opposed to the indifference of humanity, which is driven by material concerns. From an ecocritical standpoint, the poetic method used here upsets anthropocentric views by placing human beings as actors within, rather than masters of, the natural world. This method is very relevant to modern ecological thinking, which emphasizes the importance of relationality and interdependence as key concepts in environmental ethics.

In modern urban climate change debates, the communication of the environment is often based on scientific facts, policy speaks, and technological fixes. While these are critical approaches, they often fail to take into account the affective and cultural aspects of environmental engagement. Critics such as Timothy Morton argue that ecological awareness requires a shift in perception and imagination, as modern environmental crises challenge traditional boundaries between nature and culture (Morton). Wordsworth's poetry prefigures this idea by showing how emotional and imaginative engagement with nature can change human perception. Wordsworth's "glimpses that would make me less forlorn" (Wordsworth) indicate that ecological awareness is necessarily an emotional experience, thus placing poetry as a medium that can be used to promote ecological awareness.

In the Indian scenario, where awareness about climate and climate change is increasingly entwined with the urban experience, the resistant potential of poetry lies in its ability to slow down the process of perception and encourage reflective inquiry. Unlike the consumer-oriented environmental discourses that emphasize the need for speedy action, the discursive mode of poetry emphasizes the need for reflection and ethical inquiry. The Wordsworthian vision of ecology resists the idea that environmental stewardship can be achieved merely by making the right consumer choices or engaging in symbolic acts. Instead, it argues that environmental transformation must begin with a shift in the manner in which one perceives and values nature. This becomes especially pertinent in the urban setting, where engagement with nature is often mediated by representation.

At the same time, environmental resistance poetry does not mean a retreat from modernity. Rather, it is a critical response to modern life, which reveals the contradictions between economic development and environmental sustainability. Wordsworth's appeal to alternative belief systems—his desire to be "A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn" (Wordsworth), marks a symbolic effort to regain a mode of thought that acknowledges the sacred or intrinsic value of nature. In the contemporary environmental humanities, such moves are read not as a retrograde step but as a critique of purely utilitarian approaches to the environment. Poetry, in this sense, becomes a site for the articulation of alternative ecological visions that do not prescribe a solution.

In bringing Wordsworth's poem into the contemporary climate change debate, this analysis shows that literary texts continue to inform environmental knowledge by engaging with the cultural and emotional roots of environmental crisis. Environmental resistance poetry, in particular, marks a resistance to the reduction of environmental problems to purely technical issues, instead highlighting the issues of perception, value, and ethical responsibility. In this regard, Wordsworth's ecological vision offers a model for thinking about environmental consciousness in urban India, where the challenge is not only to remediate environmental degradation but also to regain a meaningful relationship between human life

and nature.

### **Re-reading Romantic Ecology in the Context of Contemporary Indian Environmental Awareness**

The continued salience of Wordsworth's ecological philosophy is particularly apparent when considering the context of contemporary Indian environmental awareness and re-reading Romantic ecology. Romantic poetry was produced at a moment in history that was marked by a rapid transformation of industry, and the ecological philosophy of Romantic poetry can be seen as a reaction to the mechanization of progress and the loss of harmony between human and natural existence. In the contemporary Indian context, such conflicts are generated by the rapidly increasing pace of urbanization, the growth of consumer economies, and models of development that often prioritize economic development over ecological harmony.

Romantic ecology, as Jonathan Bate argues, places primary importance on the idea that literature promotes an ethical imagination that is capable of refiguring human relationships with nature (Bate). Wordsworth's poetry does not promote a return to a pre-industrial past but instead aims to re-emphasize a sense of attentiveness and humility in human relationships with nature. The importance of perception and emotional engagement becomes all the more pressing in the modern Indian context, where debates on the environment are often caught up in a dialectic between developmental needs and the preservation of the environment. The problem, therefore, is not merely one of resource management but also of navigating competing cultural narratives that define progress, comfort, and modernity. Wordsworth's critique of material excess provides a lens through which these cultural narratives can be interrogated by revealing how economic ambition can lead to a lack of awareness of the environment.

Indian environmentalism is a complex phenomenon that operates through a variety of intellectual traditions, including philosophical and cultural approaches that highlight the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds. Although Wordsworth's Romanticism is rooted in a different historical and geographical context, the importance of reverence for nature is one that resonates with ecological approaches that privilege the intrinsic value of nature rather than its instrumental value. This allows for a reading that is comparative in nature, where the intersection of Romantic ecological thought and modern Indian environmentalism occurs at the level of ethical orientation rather than cultural equivalence. Wordsworth's poetry laments the fact that humanity is "out of tune" with nature (Wordsworth). This is a condition that continues to define the modern environmental experience, where technological development often leads to a psychological and ecological distance from nature.

In the Indian context, the current environmental awareness is characterized by contradictions that are inherent to it. Sustainability projects in urban areas, environmental activism, and climate awareness campaigns indicate an increasing awareness of the environmental crisis, but they are often embedded in consumerist ideologies that sustain consumption patterns. This contradiction indicates the point at which awareness, without further cultural change, is insufficient. Environmental humanities scholars argue that environmental crises continue to exist because cultural narratives about progress continue to be defined in terms of growth and consumption. Wordsworth's poetry challenges this notion by suggesting that satisfaction is not achieved through acquisition but through coexistence with nature. Therefore, Wordsworth's poetic imagination provides a critical commentary on developmental ideologies that have relegated ecological concerns to the periphery.

Further, a re-reading of the Romantic ecology in the Indian context highlights the role of cultural imagination in defining environmental futures. Literature plays a crucial role in environmental debates

by articulating values and emotions that are not possible through scientific language. Wordsworth's focus on sensory experience and reflection encourages a re-evaluation of environmental awareness as an ethical practice rather than a technological one. In the urban context, where nature is increasingly fragmented or mediated, this approach encourages a focus on everyday ecological relations and the ways in which cultural practices shape environmental practices.

Therefore, this section identifies the role of Romantic ecology as an ongoing intellectual resource for understanding the Indian environmental crisis. Wordsworth's ecological resistance is not prescriptive but enables a re-evaluation of the cultural assumptions that underlie the environmental crisis. By re-linking ecological awareness with imagination, emotion, and reflection, Romantic poetry enables a critical engagement with debates on sustainability and environmental responsibility. The intersection of Wordsworth's poetic imagination and the current Indian environmental awareness indicates that environmental transformation is not only possible through structural changes but also through a transformation of how nature is perceived, valued, and integrated into human life.

### Conclusion

The above analysis shows that William Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with Us" has continued relevance in comprehending the present-day consciousness of the environment, particularly in the context of the climate reality that exists in urban India. Wordsworth's poetic expression of his discontent with materialism and the alienation of humanity from nature express a foreboding of many cultural contradictions that exist in modern-day environmental discourse. Wordsworth's worry that humanity, lost in "getting and spending," has abandoned any serious engagement with nature expresses a reality that continues to exist in modern societies that are defined by consumerism, rapid urbanization, and technology-driven lifestyles.

In the modern urban setting, environmental awareness has increasingly become a part of public discourse through institutional efforts, media representation, and consumer-focused sustainability strategies. While such trends indicate a growing acknowledgment of the existence of environmental crises, they also indicate the limitations of awareness in relation to ecological responsibility when the latter becomes conflated with consumption and symbolic engagement. The commodification of nature as a consumable experience, through eco-tourism, commodified green spaces, or lifestyle-environmentalism, exemplifies the ways in which environmental concern can coexist with ecological exploitation. Wordsworth's ecological resistance offers a challenge to this paradox in favor of experience, perception, and ethical engagement over ownership and display. His poetic vision places emphasis on the need to re-establish emotional and moral ties with nature as the basis for genuine environmental awareness.

The research also highlights the importance of literary approaches to the field of environmental humanities, in which ecological crises are conceptualized not merely as scientific or technological issues but also as cultural and imaginative ones. Poetry, in this context, becomes a site for examining the prevailing discourses of progress and development that frequently position ecological concerns on the margins. Wordsworth's appeal to other ways of perceiving nature indicates that ecological transformation requires changes in cultural values as much as it does structural changes. His expression of a desire for a renewed harmony with nature reaffirms the assertion that ecological awareness is achieved through attentiveness and reflection rather than through consumption-based solutions.

In the Indian context, where environmental discourses are often entwined with development imperatives

and urbanization, Wordsworth's ecological sensibility provides a crucial tool for analyzing the cultural politics of climate knowledge. The dialectic between the experience of nature and its consumption continues to be at the heart of contemporary engagement with the environment. By placing the Romantic ecological tradition in dialogue with contemporary environmental realities, this research shows that literature remains a rich source of insights into the ethical and affective aspects of environmental crisis. Wordsworth's poetry ultimately shows that environmental sustainability is not merely dependent on technological innovation or policy measures but also on a shift in the perception and incorporation of nature into human life.

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