

Subjugated Landscapes and Silenced Voices: An Ecofeminist Re-Reading of William Wordsworth's Selected Poetry

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Abstract

Ecofeminism provides an essential theoretical apparatus for dissecting the twin structures of oppression that link the subjugation of non-human nature with the marginalization of women within patriarchal systems. While literary historiography frequently canonizes William Wordsworth as the quintessential high priest of nature and the herald of ecological consciousness, this critical re-evaluation exposes the deeply entrenched androcentric and anthropocentric foundations governing his major lyrical works. Focusing on "*Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*" and the "*Lucy Poems*," this paper demonstrates how Wordsworth appropriates the natural world as an unpaid psychic caregiver and instrumentalizes female subjects as silent mirrors for masculine self-actualization. Ultimately, the study reveals that Wordsworthian romanticism, rather than modeling an egalitarian biocentrism, often reproduces the logic of domination that naturalizes the erasure of women and the exploitation of the earth.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Anthropocentrism, Androcentrism, Romanticism, Nature, Patriarchy, Gender and Environment.

1. Introduction and Theoretical Foundations

Ecofeminism materialized during the late twentieth century, drawing from foundational formulations introduced by Françoise d'Eaubonne in the 1970s, to bridge green ecological movements with feminist social critiques. Rather than viewing environmental devastation and gender oppression as discrete historical crises, ecofeminist theory posits that both phenomena stem directly from the ideological hierarchies of patriarchal society.

- **The Logic of Domination:** Karen J. Warren highlights that patriarchal frameworks rely on dualistic value hierarchies—such as culture/nature, mind/body, and reason/emotion—wherein the first term is systematically valorized as masculine while the subordinate term is denigrated as feminine, justifying exploitation.
- **The Interconnected Matrix of Oppression:** Tzeporah Berman and Susan Griffin assert that the social construction of women as inherently emotional, material, and care-oriented directly mirrors the ideological reduction of the earth to a limitless, extractable resource.
- **The Construction of the "Other":** Simone de Beauvoir's existential framework underscores that patriarchal culture casts both woman and nature as the fundamental "Other"—entities that man simultaneously exploits, fears, and depends upon to affirm his subjective sovereignty.

- **The Rejection of Patriarchal "Maldevelopment":** Vandana Shiva challenges the reductionist, masculine paradigms of conquest that silence the organic vitality of life-sustaining processes in favor of instrumental control.

When applied to Romantic literature, these theoretical paradigms disrupt standard green readings (such as those advanced by Jonathan Bate), shifting the focus toward the underlying gender politics and anthropocentric biases embedded within canonical representations of nature.

2. Instrumentalization and Androcentric Control in "Tintern Abbey"

In "*Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*," Wordsworth records the developmental trajectory of his consciousness across three distinct stages: unreflective juvenile delight, sensory rapture, and mature pantheistic contemplation. While traditional scholarship views this evolution as an emblem of transcendent harmony, an ecofeminist lens reveals a relationship built on unilateral consumption.

- **Nature as Uncompensated Caregiver:** Wordsworth approaches the landscape of the Wye Valley primarily as a restorative sanctuary that relieves the psychological exhaustion of urban life. The natural world is rendered as a maternal nourisher and moral stabilizer, whose purpose is to stimulate the male poet's creative faculties rather than exist with autonomous value.
- **Anthropocentric Appropriation:** The speaker's philosophical sublime subsumes the organic environment into a conceptual backdrop that reflects human consciousness, prioritizing human self-realization over the intrinsic worth of the ecosystem.
- **The Silencing of Dorothy Wordsworth:** In the closing verse paragraph, Dorothy is summoned not as an independent agent or intellectual equal, but as a passive reflection of the poet's own past self. Conflated with the landscape, Dorothy serves as an emotional vessel and "anchor" destined to validate her brother's spiritual authority, effectively barring her from active participation within the symbolic order.

3. Systematic Erasure and Objectification in the "Lucy Poems"

The five lyrics collectively known as the "*Lucy Poems*" concretize Wordsworth's ideological conflation of the feminine with the natural world. Throughout these lyrics, Lucy is denied individuality, voice, and vitality, functioning merely as a canvas upon which the male poet projects his philosophical musings.

POEM TITLE	CORE ECOFEMINIST ARGUMENT	TEXTUAL EVIDENCE
"THREE YEARS SHE GREW IN SUN AND SHOWER"	Nature is ventriloquized through an authoritative masculine persona that claims absolute ownership and pedagogical control over the young female body.	"The child I to myself will take; / She shall be mine, and I will make / A Lady of my own"
"A SLUMBER DID MY SPIRIT SEAL"	The poet neutralizes the female subject by reducing her to inanimate physical matter, celebrating her complete loss of sensory consciousness.	"She seemed a thing that could not feel / The touch of earthly years... / Rolled round in earth's diurnal course, / With rocks, and stones, and trees"
"SHE DWELT AMONG THE"	Lucy's profound social isolation and lack of human recognition are poeticized,	"A violet by a mossy stone / Half hidden from the eye! / Fair as a

UNTRODDEN WAYS"	equating her existence to a modest, hidden botanical specimen.	<i>star, when only one / Is shining in the sky"</i>
"STRANGE FITS OF PASSION HAVE I KNOWN"	The speaker's erratic psychological impulses link Lucy's bodily mortality directly to the descent of the moon, subordinating her life to the narrator's emotional shifts.	<i>"When down behind the cottage roof, / At once, the bright moon dropped... / 'O mercy!' to myself I cried, / 'If Lucy should be dead!'"</i>
"I TRAVELLED AMONG UNKNOWN MEN"	The female figure is commodified as a patriotic relic embedded in the English landscape, valued solely for reinforcing the traveler's nationalistic sentiment.	<i>"Nor will I quit thy shore / A second time; for still I seem / To love thee more and more... / Where Lucy deigned to play"</i>

Across this lyrical sequence, Lucy's agency is systematically dismantled. Whether portrayed as an obscure recluse or an assimilated component of the geological landscape, her value is actualized only through her subjugation and physical death.

4. Critical Synthesis: Dismantling the Myth of Romantic Egalitarianism

The intersectional reading of *"Tintern Abbey"* and the *"Lucy Poems"* highlights the structural limitations of Wordsworthian romanticism. By framing both women and the earth as passive, nurturing substrates designed to serve the sovereign male consciousness, Wordsworth's verse mirrors the patriarchal ideology that ecofeminists explicitly challenge.

- **The Illusion of Symbiosis:** Although Wordsworth depicts deep emotional immersion within natural environments, this engagement rarely translates into genuine biocentric reciprocity; instead, it centers on how nature can best nourish the human ego.
- **Displaced Patriarchal Hegemony:** By clothing masculine dominance in the language of cosmic order and organic benevolence, the poetry naturalizes unequal power dynamics under the guise of pastoral idealism.
- **Implications for Contemporary Environmentalism:** Recovering an authentic ecological ethics requires moving beyond romanticized appropriation and actively dismantling the patriarchal dualisms that justify the subordination of both nature and marginalized human voices.

Conclusion:

Applying an ecofeminist framework to William Wordsworth's *"Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"* and the *"Lucy Poems"* destabilizes the traditional view of the poet as an unreserved champion of ecological harmony. Rather than establishing a reciprocal and egalitarian relationship with the non-human realm, Wordsworth's verse frequently engages in anthropocentric appropriation and reinforces patriarchal hegemony. In *"Tintern Abbey,"* the natural environment and Dorothy Wordsworth are both reduced to uncompensated caregivers whose primary function is to restore the male speaker's imaginative and moral faculties while remaining passive and voiceless. Similarly, across the *"Lucy Poems,"* the female subject is systematically objectified, denied social agency, and absorbed into the landscape only in death, reflecting a patriarchal ideology that silences women and extracts utility from nature. In an era of profound environmental and social crisis, moving beyond the idealized myth of Romantic egalitarianism is essential to recover a truly biocentric consciousness—one that rejects the

interconnected dominations of gender and the earth in favor of genuine mutuality, shared power, and sustainability.

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