



Coherence amid Contrasts and Contradictions in Nature: Busting the Anthropocentric View of Ecology in English Poetry

Dr. Kanak Kanti Bera

Associate Professor

Department of English

Panskura Banamali College (autonomous),

Panskura R.S., West Bengal, India.

&

Guest Lecturer

Department of Linguistics

University of Calcutta, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Email: kanakkbera@gmail.com

Abstract

Though Ecocriticism has emerged as a philosophical perspective only in the late 20th century and started being applied to literary study very recently, literary artists in great numbers have expressed their environmental concerns since the very beginning of literature itself. Lyric poetry is one of the oldest literary genres and is better known for its imaginative and musical qualities. But, besides its high amount of subjectivity, it can even reflect on the issues relating to Nature and the environment, as well as the growing complexity in the relationship between man and Nature. Poets have never failed to realize that material progress and ecological health can hardly have any permanent truce, that ecological integrity (Peterson, 2000; Pimental, 2000), which consists of both coherence and contradictions, is growingly endangered only with human interventions. Especially with the English romantic poets, the process of disseminating eco-consciousness got initiated in serious notes, and later on started gathering further momentum in the twentieth century beyond the geographical boundary. These poets formulated some original and innovative ways of understanding the world and its environment. Taking up a number of lyrics collected from across different cultures, and applying the ecocritical perspective to the textual analysis, this paper investigates the original and individualistic approaches adopted by the poets in viewing Nature and the environment. The article has examined the select lyrics that evince the potential for inspiring a deep 'ecological' understanding and formation of a modern ecological worldview in the Western and American intellectual traditions.

Keywords: English poetry, Nature, ecological integrity, Ecocriticism, anthropocentrism.



Received: 12.04.2026

Accepted: 02.06.2026

Published: 15.06.2026

CJHSSC, Volume: 2

Issue: 1, June 2026

Page: 44 - 61

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20667971>

Copyright: Author © 2026



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Published by: Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College,
Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Available at: www.ssjalangirlscollege.org.in/journal.php

Email: confluence.ssjgc@gmail.com

1. Introduction

This Nature and environment came into being on this planet much before humans. But very soon, with the arrival of the human species and with the gradual progress of their civilization, man started dominating not only the whole of the world, Nature, the environment, but also the other living creatures. Today, it has eventually brought the planet very close to its destruction because of this relentless exploitation by humans. Lynen (1960) deftly elaborated on this:

“Man’s physical needs, the dangers facing him, the realities of birth and death, the limits of his ability to know and to act are shown in stark outline by the indifference and inaccessibility of the physical world in which he must live.” (p. 150)

The question arose amidst all this: does the human have the exclusive right to this world, its Nature and environment? The natural answer is a big ‘NO’. There emerged a group of philosophers who started questioning human supremacy and their right to almost everything on this earth. Literary artists, the playwrights, poets, and prose writers often took up these philosophical assumptions to offer fresh insights into man’s relationship to Nature and environment. The present paper makes an analysis of a handful of lyric poems written in English to explore their ecocritical contents and ideas, as envisaged in some select poets across different countries.

2. Research problem

By virtue of its high degree of reflectivity and deep philosophical insights, poetry never fails to represent the quintessential bond between man and Nature. Lyric poetry is one of the oldest literary genres, and is better known for its imaginative and musical qualities. However, it can depict a comprehensive picture of the gradual evolution and growing complexity of this relationship.

While the older generation of nature poets mostly hinged upon the heyday of man’s tryst with Nature, later schools of poetry have often expressed concerns over the environmental crises, and over-exploitation of natural resources. With all seriousness, the English Romantic poets initiated a process of disseminating eco-consciousness. Later on, this poetic voice started gathering further momentum in the twentieth century, not only in England but beyond any geographical

boundary. In their original and innovative ways, the later generation of poets formulated some understanding of the world and its environment. This paper intends to investigate the original and individualistic approaches of these poets adopted to express their views on Nature and the environment. Making a selection of poetic pieces from across different cultures, the paper has examined these insightful lyrics that evince the potential for inspiring a deep 'ecological' understanding and formation of a modern ecological worldview in the Western and American intellectual traditions.

3. Scope, Objective, and Research Questions

The scope of the paper is confined to ten select lyrical poems written in English across different countries and cultures (q.v. the next section, §5. Methodology).

As regards the theoretical perspective, the core ecocritical notions, such as, dialogue between man and Nature, dangers of human progress, presumptions of civilization posing a threat to ecology¹, the powers of Nature working for coherence, retrieval and regeneration in spite of the inherent contrasts and contradictions², as propagated by the theorists like Patrick D. Murphy (2009), William Rueckert (1996), Lawrence Buell (1995, 2005), Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996), David Mazel (2000) and others have been applied to our discussion and analysis.

The primary objective here is to examine how the British and American poets belonging to different generations have reacted in their poetry against the growing threats to our environment. The paper intends to throw some insightful light on the philosophy about the ecological aspects as reflected in these select pieces. The specific questions that have been addressed include:

- i. How do the poets' attitude to Nature and environment go beyond the circuit of simple nature study by virtue of the strong ethical aspect of it?
- ii. What is the poets' attitude to the inherent contradictions and coherences in Nature?
- iii. How do they reflect on man's relationship with the nonhuman world?
- iv. Does the ecocritical philosophy in poetry differ in any way cross-culturally?

4. Methodology

The following lyrics have been used as the primary study materials, and critically analysed from the ecocritical perspective:

I. British poetry

William Blake (1757-1827):	“London”
William Wordsworth (1770-1850):	“The World is too much with us” “The Reverie of Poor Susan”
John Keats (1795-1821):	“On Fame”
Thomas Hardy (1840-1928):	“The Darkling Thrush”
Louis MacNeice (1907-1963):	“Snow”

II. American poetry

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882):	“Water”
Robert Frost (1874-1963):	“The Road Not Taken” “Mending Wall”
Tupac Amaru Shakur (1971-1996):	“The rose that grew from concrete.”

4.1 Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism can be looked upon as an awareness of or protest against man’s anthropocentric sense of domination over the earth, the environment, and Nature. Ecocriticism is far more than nature study. It is unique in itself by virtue of its ethical commitment to the world of Nature and the nonhuman.

Among the eco-critics, there is a persistent realization of the fact that humans are never the most significant entity in the universe. The Nature, the environment, or the whole world should never be regarded or interpreted in terms of human values and experiences.

Though its roots can be found in the late 1970’s³, Ecocriticism as an academic discipline has its formal beginning in the 1990’s.

4.1.1 Ecocriticism and literary study

Literary artists in great numbers have expressed their environmental concerns since the very beginning of literature itself. However, ecological consciousness, with all its scientific and philosophical imports, got to have its momentum only in the late 20th century. As a natural development of the thought, the ecocritical perspective as a philosophical or analytical tool for the study of literature has started being adopted and applied to literary study very recently.

How does this theoretical framework work in literary study, and what exactly comes under its aegis? According to Rueckert², Ecocriticism applies ecology or ecological principles into the

study of literature. Lawrence Buell defines Ecocriticism “as a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalists’ praxis” (*The Environmental Imagination*, p. 430). Patrick D. Murphy thought, Ecocriticism “arises from and is oriented toward a concern with human and nonhuman interaction and interrelationship”. In Glotfelty and Fromm, Ecocriticism has been defined as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”. Ecocritical study of literature is, in fact, bound to be a distinct form of literary activism. David Mazel (2000) opined that it becomes Ecocriticism when, in some literary discourse and analysis, “nature mattered.” Ecocritical study makes a given literary treatise much larger than a mere exploration of the beauties of Nature; it can happen with a serious understanding of the man-environment bond, the possible dangers to it, and remedies.

5. Textual Analysis

The select British and American poets have expressed their prompt realization that material progress and ecological health can hardly have any permanent truce, that ecological integrity (Peterson, 2000; Pimental, 2000), consisting of both coherence and contradictions, is growingly endangered with human interventions.

As a theoretical tool applied to literary study, Ecocriticism primarily addresses the man-nature relationship. In expressing their love for Nature, the English Romantic poets have explored various shades of man-nature relations and problematic human interferences resulting in an increasing crisis in ecology. In fact, for the first time ever in English literature, urban ecology assumed a significant role in the field of Ecocriticism.

5.1 Blake

Blake’s “London” is a critique of modern civilization as opposed to Nature, and a critique of, in the words of Tallmadge (2004), “the consequent ugliness, impoverishment, and filth” of the modern European cities (p. 41). In the poem, Blake lamented the loss of the pristine beauties of Nature in the urban metropolis. The inevitable conflict between material progress and Nature not only leads to ecological imbalance but also human suffering and moral bankruptcy. On one hand, the image of “charter’d Thames” reflects the urbanity-induced loss of natural beauty; on the other hand, the images of weak “face”, crying “infants”, blackened “Chimney-sweepers”, sighing “soldiers,” and so on create a true picture of the “mind-forg’d manacles”. There is hardly any romance left in the affairs of “Marriage hearse” or any festivity over the arrival of

“new-born Infants”. The whole of the urban reality can be captured through the implications of the image of “youthful Harlots”.

Blake's presentation of the city of London is an example of “urban nature”; the epigram is to remind us that modern metropolitan cities are “governed by ecological relations extending in space and time, invisible in themselves yet revealed by the presence, persistence, and behavior of resident organisms” (Tallmadge 2004, pp. 36, 45).

5.2 Wordsworth

Apparently, “The world is too much with us” centres upon a civilization-induced contrast between the natural world and the urbanized human world characterized by industrialization and materialism. It seems to be a harsh critique of the industrial revolution that brought prosperity, but at the cost of man’s close relation to Nature. It is a poetic censure of the futility of material and scientific progress in the 19th century that, ironically, as the poet saw it, separated man from Nature and environment:

“Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!” (ll.3-4)

The poet desperately expressed his longing for the pagan days with Nature in its pristine glory:

“Great God! I’d rather be

A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn” (ll.9-10)

But the question is: does this pro-nature stance of Wordsworth make him essentially anti-urban?

While the anti-urban sentiment prevails all over Blake’s “London” that abounds in the sense of oppression and despair, Wordsworth is not stringent in his indictments of the metropole. Rather, the romantics like Wordsworth visualized the whole scheme of Nature in a way that goes beyond the straightforward urban-rural binarity, *i.e.*, life among the rural beauties ensures sustenance, whereas city life alienates. His “The world is too much with us” is more than about the paganism-modernism contrast, or “Reverie of Poor Susan” is more than about the city-village contrast. The contrast and conflicts are there essentially, but Wordsworth, with his deeper poetic vision, has uplifted the apparent reality into something mystical. In his nature poems, “Neither man nor nature are opposed. Nor are they one. Both are related to a fuller context that includes them”

(Danby 49). The supreme coherence that binds all together, ‘mountain’, ‘trees’, ‘river’, Susan, the village girl, and the city maid, the Thrush, its song, Lothbury and Wood Street in London, essentially discards any kind of polarization where one end is magnified at the cost of the other. The thrush regales her heart all the way, in the ‘vale of Cheapside’, on its ‘green pastures’, or in the London Street. At the supreme moment of realizing the coherence among all the physical contrasts, the London girl dissolves into an eternal reality of peace, serenity, and beauty. Susan is in London physically, but spiritually she is everywhere, in every beautiful aspect, getting dissolved into the wholeness of Nature’s coherence:

“She looks, and her heart is in heaven: but they fade,

The mist and the river, the hill and the shade:

The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,

And the colours have all passed away from her eyes!” (ll. 13-16)

Urbanity could not kill the spirit to perceive the beauty, rather it inspires the vision. That is why Kate Rigby (2004) talked about “endorsement of urbanity” (p. 253) by Wordsworth by virtue of an “urban topography of the sacred” (p. 256). Such dialogues between the human mind and the natural world that the poem “The Table Turned” talks about constitute this supreme coherence. When some ecocritics raised questions about Wordsworth’s ecological sensibilities, Hartman (1970) defended him on the grounds that his attitude to Nature has an ethical aspect to it. On one hand, Wordsworth, with his poetic vision, advocated a healthy coexistence of man and Nature. On the other hand, he accords equal rights to every living being or non-living object and busted the anthropocentric view of the universe.

5.3 Keats

In “On Fame”, Keats harshly criticized man’s sense of supremacy not only over Nature but also over fellow beings. Man exploited everything around in order to attain name and fame, commonly associated with the modern idea of progress. While Blake and Wordsworth showed man’s material prosperity alienating him from Nature, in Keats, it is the anthropocentric goals at the subjective level that trigger the rift.

The contrast between the world of Nature and man’s world has been beautifully depicted by the core question:

“... the rose leaves herself upon the briar,
For winds to kiss and grateful bees to feed,
And the ripe plum still wears its dim attire,
The undisturbed lake has crystal space;
Why then should man, teasing the world for grace,
Spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed? (ll. 9-14)

5.4 Hardy

In Hardy’s “The Darkling Thrush,” the bird, “an aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small/ In blast-beruffled plume,” stands for Nature with all its apparent contradictions. Hardy carefully created the evening setting and put the bird there as an integral part of Nature. The images like ‘spectre gray’, ‘dregs’, ‘broken lyres’ convey the bleak reality about this world that is pessimistic and dark. Being plunged into his utmost sadness, like the thrush, the poet initially felt to be perfectly integrated into this lifeless nature’s shrunken, hard and dry’. This feeling might be a product of Hardy’s narcissistic faith in the notions of deep ecology⁴. He started feeling that, as he was down with his melancholy and sadness, so must Nature be; Nature is to serve only human purposes.

However, toward the end, when he was quite overwhelmed by the happy notes of the bird, the essential coherence in Nature, despite apparent contradiction, dawned upon him.

“....a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited.” (ll. 17-20)

The bird’s “a full-hearted” evening song “of joy unlimited” came as a huge contrast with the prevailing ambience and surprised the poet. On one hand, the bird provides a contrast to the Nature all around, on the other, the bird presents a contrast between his gaunt, blast-beruffled physique and full-hearted song. The song made the poet realize the hollowness of his anthropocentric view on Nature that (mis)guided him to be rhetorical through his deployment of pathetic fallacy. Nature’s course must be working in its own terms, irrespective of the dreams, desires, or purposes of man. The phrase ‘a full-hearted evensong’ indicates that the integration in spite of apparent contrasts is all spontaneous rather than imposed, redundant, or decorative. On

hearing the song, Hardy felt even more despondent over his sense of alienation, realizing his inability to integrate:

“there trembled through

His happy good-night air

Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew

And I was unaware.” (ll. 29-32)

The bird’s magical voice, “Of such ecstatic sound/ was written on terrestrial things,” reminded the poet who plays the role of an objective observer and commentator that man’s over-thinking or over-philosophising of rational Nature made him an alien to the core requirements of Nature. No matter whether man exists or not, he is present or absent in the ecological system—it absolutely makes no difference to Nature. Man himself has created this insignificant and valueless position for himself with his desire to be the dictator and arbiter of everything. The poet, though a knowledgeable man, though a seer and observer, cannot make any sense of the “blessed Hope”, because as a byproduct of his sense of superiority, he can decipher the meaning of “Hope” according to his own definitions only. He felt himself miserably alone, because one feels so when one fails to understand and value one's nonhuman relations, as Sharma (2017) has observed.

5.5 MacNeice

Based on the reality of inter-species contrast that is conducive for natural coherence, “Snow” reveals the opulence, abundance, and possibilities and impossibilities in Nature that make it ‘rich’ but mysterious. It is an ironic commentary on how man, preoccupied with his sensuous enjoyment of the apparent natural beauties and bliss all around, often fails to get integrated into the mysterious but harmonious world of Nature. Nature abounds in contrasts: Nature can destroy and can regenerate, can attract or repel, can regale or surprise you. All these contradictions and binaries make the coherence even more mysterious for man:

“World is suddener than we fancy it.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,

Incorrigibly plural.” (ll. 5-7)

The ‘Collateral’ existence of the ‘incompatible’ and contrasts (natural contrasts) is the reality that man often misses, since we lack the vision and insights. When the rest of Nature is mysteriously rich, and more than we feel it, man (who is a part of this Nature too), with all his limitations of knowledge, naiveties, and faltering, constitutes a further inter-species contrast.

5.6 Emerson

In his “Water,” Emerson took up the issue of intra-species contrast represented by the primeval natural element ‘water’ to remind us of the ambiguous force of Nature. The contrast is inherent in the natural forces water can exert, because it may be both benevolent and destructive to us. Nevertheless, this dual Nature is never arbitrary; rather, it depends on man’s attitude to it. Without any human intervention, water helps man in his struggle for survival and sustenance; it treats man “prettily” and “wittily”. But as soon as man starts manipulating the natural resource injudiciously and unethically, water must avenge this misdeed upon man, “it will destroy”:

“Well used, it decketh joy,

Adorneth, doubleth joy:

Ill used, it will destroy.” (ll. 7-9)

The irony man is confronted with in his relation to water (standing for Nature itself) is that, while man brags of his domination over Nature, actually, man is at the mercy of natural forces every time for his existence. The sooner we realize that Nature is more inclusive, the better for civilization. Probably man himself is ignorant of the way civilization can have its heyday, but

“The water understands

Civilization well.” (ll. 1-2)

When nature ‘wets’ and ‘chills’, it is actually a call for man to have a stronger bond and integration with Nature. But man either fails to learn the fact or ignores the lesson willfully, thereby courting his own misfortune.

The supreme harmony and coherence in the natural world, in spite of the apparent contrasts, contradictions, and ambiguities (*e.g.*, water can sustain as well as destroy), is a standing invitation for man, who is also an essential part of the whole, to integrate:

“It is not disconcerted,

It is not broken-hearted.” (ll. 5-6)

In this poem, Emerson emerges as a critic of materialism, and he tries to urge man to lead a simple life in harmony with Nature. He has truly established Nature as “the vehicle of thought”, which is, as Kern (1996) described, to say that Nature provides us with a medium, not only of word but of things, that gives us access to spirit or truth (p. 40).

Once man can discover the true meaning of Nature and man’s relation to it, he can find “self” in Nature, and can get united with it. In the words of Wyne (2010),

“A right relationship with Nature also means an understanding of the relation of the parts to the whole. It is the difference between seeing individual farms owned by individual men and seeing - the ‘landscape’. It is —the ‘poet’ who —can integrate all the parts” (p. 186)

5.7 Frost

Robert Frost busted the myth of an anthropocentric worldview in his treatment of Nature. He is a realist and environmentalist, who extensively depicted the New England rural pastoral scenery and wildlife expressed in his nature poetry. More importantly, his nature poetry beautifully expresses his philosophical realization that a healthy co-existence of man and ecology is the only way for both to sustain and thrive. Writing his poems set in the rural backdrop mainly, Frost pointed out the vehemence of natural forces, their domination over human enterprises, though man often thinks of it otherwise, being boastful of his civilization and its material progress. The poem, “Mending Wall,” starts with the same idea:

“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,

That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,

And spills the upper boulders in the sun.” (ll. 1-3)

Though man believed raising a wall to be beneficial, as “good fences” to “make good neighbors”, natural forces always resist this. In the whole scheme of things, intra-species contrast

represented by the trees (“He is all pine and I am apple orchard”) seems to be a natural separation between two neighbours, which promotes harmony in the long run.

Frost’s neighbour, who seems to be a stronger contingent of the material camp, could not understand the essential requirements of Nature. But the poet could realize that erecting a wall is but doing an offence to man as well as Nature:

“Before I built a wall I’d ask to know

What I was walling in or walling out,

And to whom I was like to give offense.” (ll. 32-34)

Thus, the neighbor repeating his father’s words, “Good fences make good neighbors,” is a faithful representative of the societal indifference to Nature that always puts human needs above ecology.

In his poem, “The Road Not Taken”, he talked about Nature’s opulence, if not contrast. That man must integrate himself into the scheme of Nature and ecology for a peaceful co-existence is not an imposition or obligation. Rather, Nature always offers a number of alternatives, out of which man is free to choose the best one for himself. The poet, confronted with the bifurcated roads in the wood, made his choice happily:

“Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear.” (ll. 6-8)

Nature has her offerings and resources everywhere in different forms, but Frost’s poem philosophizes that man must be judicious and moderate in using the resources to his optimal benefit:

“I kept the first for another day! . . .

I doubted if I should ever come back.” (ll. 13-14)

The final philosophical revelation about Frost's ecological consciousness here is that in the case of any ecological imbalances, it is only man who is responsible. Metaphorically, the poet pointed his finger against man's material greed and desire to dominate and 'possess':

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference." (ll. 18-20)

This is how, in Frost's nature poetry, an ever-present ecological consciousness may serve as an inspiration for our civilization.

5.8 Shakur

The ecological cohesion is a product of the collateral existence of contradictions as much as of coherence. Like MacNeice or Frost, Shakur, in his "*The Rose That Grew from Concrete*," has deftly touched upon this aspect of Nature with the images of concrete and rose that represent a contrast chiefly induced by modern civilization and material progress. While MacNeice's "Snow" dwells upon natural images that represent inherent binaries, Shakur's are images in contrast more radically, one drawn from the human world (that is, 'concrete') and the other from Nature (that is, 'rose').

"Proving Nature's law is wrong it

learned to walk without having feet.

Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams,

it learned to breathe fresh air.

Long live the rose that grew from concrete

when no one else ever cared. " (ll. 3-8)

Beauty proves to be more powerful than "nature's law", i.e., scientific rules of Nature or than the material human progress. Life is beautiful and, as long as it remains so, Nature promotes it, even going against its primordial laws about basic requirements like earth, air, and water. Human

enterprises have given birth to lifeless ‘concrete’ that can only threaten life and its beauty, but not annihilate it altogether.

The collateral existence of these contrastive objects implies the mighty forces of our ecology and environment working for reconstruction and regeneration despite the rampant human apathy.

6. Conclusion

This present study is an attempt to go beyond the oversimplified interpretation of nature poetry. For example, in Romantic poetry, the city is a locus of degeneration and corruption, as opposed to the rural and remote countryside. In Wordsworth’s “Michael”, city life is seen defiling Luke, who was originally a worshipper of idyllic Nature. However, the British romantics definitely did more than glorifying the idyllic rural beauties and denouncing cityscapes, as many critics working on the Romantic approach to ecology have made clear (Kroebar, 1994; Herford, 2003). The same kind of fallacy is there about the appreciation of American nature poetry. But, while criticizing the notions of Nature, wilderness, and modern man’s take on it in American culture, Tallmadge (2004) remarked that “Enshrining wilderness in distant places allows us to justify our abuse, neglect, or exploitation of local nature, which appears less worthy and so less heinous to victimize” (p. 41).

These fallacies arise largely from the shallow ecological perspective (it being essentially anthropocentric, putting man above everything) that prevailed over the practice of reading both British and American poetry. Only a deep ecological realization can recognize equal rights of every species, every organism, which can lead to a better understanding of Nature as well as nature poetry. This deep ecological perspective can lead to a better coherence and balance in the eco-system despite all apparent contrasts and contradictions. Man, as undoubtedly the most intelligent species on the earth, should have a better understanding of ecology. He must be responsible to himself, society, Nature and ecology. All the poets discussed above have conveyed in their own ways these very lessons. Understanding the ecology involves a deep understanding of the ecological contrasts and contradictions. Philosophically, the select poems have brushed over the facts that when the contrast is anthropocentric, where man is there to pose a threat to ecology, the problem is even more serious. In his “The End of Nature”, Bill Mackibben (1989) made a very significant comment on the danger (induced by man and his civilization) to Nature and ecology:

“Nature is not merely threatened by the possibility of apocalypse, but in some sense already beyond it, for if nature is inflected as wilderness, the very thought of human interference is enough decisively to contaminate its purity.”

(Mackibben, 1989, p. 106)

The regenerating and reproductive forces of ecology can very easily resolve the problems arising out of the inter-species or intra-species contrast (rather, they are the parts of the deeper coherence), but when it is not possible with the anthropocentric contrasts, the eco-system tries to ensure coherence and restore the balance, initially through resistance but finally through annihilation. For this restoration process, the inter-species or intra-species contrasts are the parts of the whole scheme: one aspect to exert the benevolent impact, but the other end to exert the malevolent force when necessary for restoration and regeneration (*e.g.*, Emerson’s water can both sustain and destroy, or MacNeice’s snow stands for death and rose for life and its beauty). Hardy, in his poem, fails to integrate into the apparent contrasts created by the ‘shrunk’ and ‘dry’ surroundings and the bird’s ‘full-throated even song’, because his anthropocentric ego misled him into the belief that such contrasts are incoherent. Boasting of his scientific knowledge and intelligence, man should not challenge the workings of nature but should work for a better ecological integrity (Peterson, 2000; Pimental, 2000). As Sharma (2017) rightly pointed out, man is never alone if he is aware of the nonhuman relationships that can integrate him into the deeper ecology.

The relevance of such a discussion on ecology and man’s role in the scheme can be felt much more if we compare and contrast our past and present. In the past, when men used to live in close contact with Nature, man’s eco-consciousness prevailed over the ego-consciousness. But presently, the tables have been turned with his ego, and the mad pursuit of possession and domination has brought the ecology as well as the whole world to the brink of destruction. In any form of environmental crisis, human culture and civilization have a vital role. The nature poets (and many others) have poetically conveyed to us the message that the ecosystem can function perfectly as long as our ethical system functions with sanity and judiciousness.

Notes:

¹ Etymologically, ‘ecology’ means ‘discourse on this earth’. ‘eco’, Gk *oikos*, means ‘earth + ‘logy’, Gk *logos* that means ‘logical discourse’.

² Contrasts and contradictions have been classified into 3 different types in this article:

- (i) Intra-species contrast (given that poetic imagination conceives of every nonhuman natural object or phenomenon as a part of a living system of ecology): When one particular nonhuman natural element has the contrastive qualities in itself, *e.g.*, ‘water’ that can nourish as well as destroy life;
- (ii) Inter-species contrast (given that poetic imagination conceives of every nonhuman natural object or phenomenon as a part of a living system of ecology): When two different natural elements will represent the contrastive forces/qualities, *e.g.*, ‘water’ that can nourish as well as destroy life;
- (iii) Anthropocentric contrast: When human society/civilization or man as a part of it would stand against the natural force out of a sheer sense of supremacy over the universe. As it is hinted, this contrast may be in the form of (a) individual-nature contrast or (b) civilization-nature contrast. The latter, *i.e.*, civilization-induced contrast, is seen when two worlds, ecology and human society/civilization, would be at war against each other.

³ In 1978, William Rueckert first coined the term ‘ecocriticism’ in his essay “Literature and Ecology:

An Experiment in Ecocriticism”).

⁴ ‘Deep ecology’ (Næss 1989) refuses to accept the domination of humans over Nature. Rather, every living being and natural object has an equal right to Nature. Everything under the sky has a right to live and flourish. Nature’s values are to be judged irrespective of its services to humanity. Deep ecology hardly welcomes climate change because it will adversely affect the living organisms and their well-being.

Standing against ecocentrism and biocentrism, ‘shallow ecology’ claims that the anthropocentric worldview is all justified, as man is superior in many respects. The value of Nature is only instrumental, to be judged in terms of how it serves human purposes. Climate change is not good, as humans may suffer the consequences of such changes.

Reference

Buell, Lawrence (1995). *The environmental imagination: Thoreau, Nature writing and the formation of American culture*. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press.

- Buell, Lawrence (2005). *The future of environmental criticism: Environmental crisis and literary imagination*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Danby, John F. (2000). William Wordsworth: Poetry, Chemistry, Nature. In Laurence Coupe (Ed.), *The green studies reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 44-49.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll & Fromm, Harold (1996). *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. The University of Georgia Press.
- Hartman, Geoffrey (1970). The Romance of Nature and the Negative Way. In Harold Bloom (Ed.), *Romanticism and consciousness*. New York: Norton, pp. 287-305.
- Herford, C. H. (2003). *The age of Wordsworth*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors.
- Kern, Robert (1996). *Orientalism, modernism and the American poem*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kroeber, Karl (1994). *Ecological literary criticism: Romantic imagining and the biology of the mind*. New York: Columbia UP.
- Lynen, John F. (1960). *The pastoral art of Robert Frost*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Mackibben, Bill (1989). *The end of Nature*. Random House.
- Mazel, David (2000). *American literary environmentalism*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Mishra, Sandip Kumar (2016). Ecocriticism: A Study of Environmental Issues in Literature.” *BRICS Journal of Educational Research*, 6(4), pp. 168-170.
- Murphy, Patrick D. (2009). *Ecocritical explorations in literary and cultural studies: Fences, boundaries, and fields*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Næss, Arne (1989). *Ecology, community and lifestyle: outline of an ecosophy*. Translated by D. Rothenberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.166-187.
- Peterson, G. (2000). Political ecology and ecological resilience: An integration of human and ecological dynamics. *Ecological Economics*, 35, pp. 323–336.
- Pimental, D., Westra, L., & Noss, R.F. (2000). *Ecological integrity: Integrating environment, conservation and health*. Washington DC: Island Press.

- Rigby, Kate (2004). *Topographies of the sacred: The Poetics of place in European Romanticism*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia P.
- Rueckert, William (1996). Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism. In Glotfelty and Fromm (Ed.), *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. The University of Georgia Press, pp.105-123.
- Sharma, Vipin K. (2017). Thoreau's Ecocriticism: An Improved Means to Unimproved Ends. *American Journal of Arts and Design*, 2(1), pp. 24-29.
- Tallmadge, John (2004). *The Cincinnati arch: Learning from Nature in the city*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Wyne, Tiffany K. (2010). *Critical companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson: A literary reference to his life and works*. USA: Facts On File Inc.