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NATURE AS A MODE OF EXISTENCE: DUALISM, ESCAPISM, PANTHEISM, AND CO-AUTHORSHIP IN ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETRY

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Abstract: Romanticism is a movement in art in general encompassing in literature, particularly, various thematic concerns such as individual subjectivity, authorship, imaginative flight, art, dualism of existence, and the experience of rustic life as well as nature. Significantly, as it is revealed by various more recent studies, including those comprised under the umbrella term of "ecocriticism", the romantic nature is not yet seriously endangered as to raise ecological issues and receive an angry literary retort or require environmental protection. Therefore, the question of the ways in which physical environment is textualised to render the relationship between human being and nature as expressed in romantic literary works is much more complex than the above stated critical clichés, ranging from aspects such as pantheism, dualism of existence, and escapism to those of inspiration and co-authorship as well as nature as a mode of living and an alternative to culture, of which dualism, escapism, pantheism, and authorship are the four cornerstones of the romantic concern with nature. To concretize and strengthen this idea by disclosing the most important aspects of the thematic complexity of the nature poetry and ecopoetical discourse by English romantics Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, the true poets of nature, among others, represents the main purpose of our article.

Keywords: Romanticism, Nature, Nature Poetry, Ecopoetry, Dualism, Escapism, Pantheism, Authorship.

BİR VAROLUŞ BİÇİMİ OLARAK DOĞA: İNGİLİZ ROMANTİK ŞİİRİNDE İKİLİK, KAÇIŞ, PANTEİZM VE EŞ-YAZARLIK

Öz: Romantizm genel itibariyle sanatta, edebiyatta ise özellikle de bireysel öznellik, yazarlık, düşsellik, sanat, varlığın ikiliği ve doğa

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kadar kırsal yaşam deneyimi gibi çeşitli tematik unsurları da içine alan bir harekettir. Bu bağlamda, "ekoeleştiri" adlı çatı terim altında toplananları da içeren, çeşitli yakın dönem çalışmalarında da görüldüğü üzere, romantik doğa henüz ekolojik sorunları tartışmaya açıp sert bir edebi tepki alacak veya çevresel korumayı gerektirecek kadar önemli derecede tehlikede değildir. Bundan dolayı, romantik edebiyat eserlerinde dile getirilen insan ve doğa arasındaki ilişkiyi ifade etmek için fiziksel çevrenin metinleştirilmesinin yolları sorunu, panteizmden, varoluşun ikiliği ve ilham ve eş-yazarlığın yanı sıra bir yaşam biçimi ve kültüre bir alternatif olana kaçış gibi unsurlara uzanan sözü edilen eleştiri klişelerinden çok daha karmaşıktır, ki bunlardan ikilik, kaçış, panteizm ve yazarlık romantik bağlamın doğa ile olan dört temel taşını oluşturur. Bu çalışmanın ana amacını, doğanın gerçek şairleri olan İngiliz romantikler Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley ve diğer birçoğunun oluşturduğu doğa şiiri ve ekoşiirsel bağlamın tematik karmaşıklığının en önemli yönlerini meydana çıkarmak fikri oluşturur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Romantizm, Doğa, Doğa Şiiri, Ekoşiir, İkilik, Kaçış, Panteizm, Yazarlık.

Introduction

In English romantic poetry, nature is a major literary concern which is in its textualization thematically heterogeneous as well as different from earlier literary traditions. The typology of nature, as conceived by the romantic writers, calls attention to ecological issues and the human destructive effects on environment as a result of industrialization in a lesser degree than it exalts, praises and deifies a great variety of natural elements and phenomena representing diverse manifestations and effects on human existence. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats, among others, followed this path by expressing and exploring nature culturally and socially but above all subjectively and autobiographically, and studied the influence and effects of nature on man rather than vice-versa.

Nature is also a theoretical and critical concern among others such as the subject-matter of poetry, language of poetry, imagination and so on. Schiller's "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry", for example, now acclaimed as a prototype of ecocritical theory, claims that poets "will either *be* nature, or they will *seek* lost nature". Another famous statement from this essay, "Our feeling for nature is like the feeling of an invalid for health", implies that "having such an alienated, or "reflective", relation to nature is an ambiguous predicament,

because by it we gain in freedom and perspective what we lose in spontaneous immediacy and feeling"[1] (Garrard, 2012, 49).

The concern with nature in romanticism could be regarded as a consequence of various socio-cultural experiences such as industrialization and the rise of our modern mass-society, but it is equally important to name the growth of the experimental sciences as another aspect modulating the new attitudes towards and expressions of nature in literature. As an example, Shelley's odes, in particular *Ode to the West Wind*, show scientific exploration making "a particular radical impact on human perception by its implicit challenge to the whole Platonic tradition of idealism which rests on the hypothesis that art, i.e., the cultural outcome of the human mind, is superior to the crude products of nature".[2]

Also, with regard to the romantic rise of individualism, Fichte promotes subjective idealism according to which subject is "absolute, logically prior to the world or nonsubject, and the active agent in asserting a material world opposed to it".[3]

It is also of equal importance to explore the changes and opinions occurring in the literary presentation of nature, changes of thematic expression and new evolved concepts of the natural world which were provided by new scientific, aesthetic, cultural and social developments and expressed in romantic literature, and which the present study attempts to reveal and comment upon through a practical argumentation by focusing on several samples of the concern with nature in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats.

William Wordsworth and *Tintern Abbey*

The concern with nature in romantic poetry receives a very complex thematic expression, which can be seen in William Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, a poem whose representation of natural world transforms the tradition of the topographical and locodescriptive genres, and is also quite different from modern ecological perspectives on physical nature. Wordsworth "is, on the whole, far more interested in the relationship of non-human nature to the human mind than he is in nature in and for itself. (…) Wordsworth spends

[1] Greg Garrard, Ecocriticism, Routledge, London, 2012, p. 49.

[2] Angela Esterhammer, Romantic Poetry, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Philadelphia, 2002, p. 12.

[3] R. C. Holub, Crossing Borders: Reception Theory, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1992, p. 90.

rather little time describing nature, and rather a lot reflecting upon his own and other people's response to it".[4]

Nature is here neither linked to an elegiac sense, nor alluded to classical values, nor personified, nor presented as "a token of the social values of order and prosperity", but "the presentation of nature is structured according to the inward motions and transitions of the observing consciousness".[5] Following an established critical tradition, *Tintern Abbey* is regarded as dealing with the theme of nature, memory and the growing human/poetic mind; it is accepted that the main theme and subject are the individual subjectivity, the poet's mind with all its range of thoughts and memories, and the nature is a token of all these abstract manifestations of the mind; but a more attentive consideration of the expression of nature in the poem along with Wordsworth's theory of the origin of poetry from his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* would provide alternative interpretations to the poem.

In the poem, nature is not just a token but becomes a source of feelings in youth ("sensations sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart"); a source of knowledge ("the burthen of the mystery" and "the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world" are "lightened") and at the same time of spiritual existence as a distinct version of romantic escapism or Descartes's dualist theory of the separation of body and spirit (when "the breath of this corporeal frame / And even the motion of our human blood" are "Almost suspended" and "we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul") as to be able to "see into the life of things". In childhood, the human being is a part of nature discovering the world through senses. Five years ago, in his youth, when the poet first visited the place, nature and all its elements, such as "the tall rock, / The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood, / Their colours and their forms", were then to him "An appetite; a feeling and a love". That time has passed; the poet is now – in the present of this poem's moment of composition – in his stage of maturity and realizes that all those feelings "are now no more", they can be only remembered or recollected, as the "picture of the mind revives again". But for this loss he neither faints, nor mourns nor murmurs, since other gifts have followed offering "Abundant recompense", namely the joy of "elevated thoughts", for he has learned "To look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth". The idea that in maturity the mind is "lord and power" responsible for the process of thinking

[4] Greg Garrard, Ecocriticism, Routledge, London, 2012, pp. 47-48.

[5] Aiden Day, Romanticism, Routledge, Florence, 1995, p. 60.

and nature is the source of elevated thoughts is emphasised a few lines later by the use of alliteration regarding the sound "th" alluding to "thought" and "thinking": "All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things".

For the reason of nature being the origin of so many "gifts", the lyrical I declares that he remains a lover of "the meadows and the woods", which is increased by the idea of nature being the source of moral improvement (nature is "The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being"), and ultimately a "worshiper of nature", where nature is now ranked to divinity as expression of pantheism. Spinoza coexists in Wordsworth's poem with Descartes, and, given the expression of the stages of human development through sense in childhood, feeling in youth, and thought in maturity, also with Locke.

Tintern Abbey refers explicitly to youth and maturity, whereas childhood is only mentioned in two lines ("The coarser pleasures of my boyish days, / And their glad animal movements all gone by") pointing to the idea that in childhood the human being is part of nature given the sensory experience which precedes emotional and rational responses that denote the often painful to the poet separation between man and nature. *The Prelude* dedicates its first two books to the happy season of childhood, recollections of which begin the tracing of the growth of a poet's mind from infantile phase through adolescence and youth to maturity. In his poetry, Wordsworth recurrently alludes to nature as "she", and nature's role "sounds like that of the pre-Oedipal phase called "primary narcissism", the first differentiation from the mother"[6] and "the effect and function of the topos of the sublime or the "analogy" between "the mind" and "nature" is to establish a coherent image of the mind or the self, one that can be invested in, loved".[7]

Keats truly calls Wordsworth's poetry "egotistical sublime", for he writes constantly himself into it and his apprehension of the universe is purely subjective, based on the assumption that "The Child is father of the Man", where a return through memory to childhood experience would link present and past, natural world and individual experience, keep the balance of the insight, and provide stability to the troubled process of maturation. Likewise, the anxious to be a part of nature lyrical I in *Ode to the West Wind* , apart from claiming escapism and immortality by entering the natural cycle, nostalgically

[6] Cynthia Chase, Romanticism, Longman, London, 1993, p. 9.

[7] Chase, 1993, p. 8.

wishes a return to childhood as a period of inseparability between man and nature: "If even / I were as in my boyhood, and could be / The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven".

The lyrical I in *Tintern Abbey* is a mature subject accompanied in his tour by his sister who is what he was five years ago, that is, a young person. The poet, as a worshiper of nature, prays nature to be his sister's friend, guide and supporter, as it has been his, in the turbulent process of maturation of the individual mind. As in *The Prelude*, here Wordsworth encompasses lyrically his individual experience but makes it representative for the human condition in general, offers to it universal resonance; moreover, both individual subjectivity and nature are "transcendentalized: they are attributed a spiritual dimension that is greater than the merely individual and the material".[8]

As poetically treated in the text of *Tintern Abbey*, nature is a formative principle in the process of growing of an individual's mind, but nature is also a creative principle in the process of becoming of a poet, because nature is also a source of tranquillity that represents a distinct poetic mood, a state necessary to the process of poetic creation. In this process, nature is a kind of co-author, since it is responsible for the two out of the three elements in Wordsworth's theory of the origin of poetry from the "Preface", namely "emotion recollected in tranquillity". Nature is the source of (1) the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", of emerging in youth emotion, and (2) of the tranquillity in which they are later recollected.

Tintern Abbey materializes the idea of "emotion recollected in tranquillity" by expressing this instance of literary theory rather than nature, memory and the growing human/poetic mind as a major theme, and the poem emerges as a text that discloses or deconstructs its own process of composition. In the process of reading, the poem reveals, or rather represents in itself, the poetic activity in progress, and can be called a self-reflexive poem or a poem about writing a poem.

Five years ago, the poet visited for the first time the beautiful place near Tintern Abbey, where he experienced those powerful feelings because he was in his youth in which everything was to him "an appetite; a feeling and a love". Now, revisiting the place after five years, which is the moment of the composition of the poem, the poet is in his maturity in which "mind is lord and master" and he has lost the ability to experience powerful feelings but has acquired the one of thinking. At the present moment, governed by mind and

[8] Day, 1995, p. 60.

thoughts not emotions, and receiving from nature and countryside that special poetic state of tranquillity, the poet's "picture of the mind revives again" and the emotion experienced five years ago is now recollected, remembered, re-experienced, leading to the act of poetic creation, that is, to the actual composition of the poem during a tour in countryside. Memory serves as a bridge between the stages of maturation, is an agent of integration of past and present experiences, where a past emotion intensely remembered works for a present purpose.

Nature is for that reason and above all the poet's co-author, and the idea of co-authorship emerges from the poem materializing in literary practice the theory of the origin of poetry as developed by the author in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*. Its full title – *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798* – apart from its content, clearly points to the poem being a kind of metapoem, a self-reflexive text, a discourse disclosing its own process of composition, a type of writing about the ways in which it is being written. The truth in the poem and in Wordsworth's poetry in general "is not a truth about objects in nature but a truth about the self"[9], the self of an individual in the process of formation and acquiring of the authority of authorship, the process of self-discovery and self-knowledge through imagination, memory, and natural world. In this process, the individual is an isolated subject, despite being accompanied by his sister, as Wordsworth himself, "the most isolated figure among the great English poets", "can turn to no one in his desire to save nature for the human imagination".[10]

Percy Bysshe Shelley and *To a Skylark* and *Ode to the West Wind*

Nature as a particular concern represents the object of poetic expression in Percy Bysshe Shelley's *To a Skylark* and *Ode to the West Wind*, poems which are odes dedicated to nature. These two odes glorify not famous people or events, as in traditional ode, but nature, which is in the spirit of the newly emerged romantic sensibility, the former poem exalting the beauty of nature and the latter the strength of nature.

The two poems, dealing with nature more explicitly and in a more direct manner than *Tintern Abbey*, are thematically connected with respect to dualism of existence reified in the poetic expression and juxtaposition of two worlds, one of which is reality and another non-reality. In *To a Skylark*, the

[9] Paul De Man, "Time and History in Wordsworth", in Chase, p. 72.

[10] Geoffrey H. Hartman, "The Romance of Nature and the Negative Way", in Bloom, p. 305.

world of non-reality is the superior world of skylark's song, non-real and spiritual, since skylark itself has no material presence and is the creation of the poet's own imagination: "Hail to thee, blithe Spirit! / Bird thou never wert", "unbodied joy", "art unseen", "we hardly see – we feel that it is there", and so on.

Corporeality is rejected in accordance with Shelley's theory of poetic language from *A Defence of Poetry*, which is materialized in *To a Skylark* just like Wordsworth expresses his theory of the origin of poetry in *Tintern Abbey*. In Shelley's opinion, the language of poetry "is arbitrarily produced by imagination and has relations to thoughts alone", meaning that concept is arbitrarily related to word, idea to language, and the referent in reality is excluded from the linguistic sign. The bird in the poem does not exist in reality as to be imitated in the art of poetry; it is the creation of the poet's mind, the poet imagining such a creature "singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest" somewhere above him in the sky and the poet being able only to hear its music, its song representing "profuse strains of unpremeditated art", "a rain of melody", "music sweet as love".

The negation of corporeality confers to skylark a divine status, "from Heaven, or near it", "Like a star of Heaven", and "Heaven is overflowed" by skylark's song.

By these heavily ornamented poetic images in the poem, along with numerous other figures of speech, usually metaphors, similes and personification, the bird is represented in a sophisticated way, Shelley offering to nature a complex romantic representation ranging from its expression as pure spirit, perfect beauty and superior form of art to its consideration as the ultimate source of inspiration and even as divinity in the tradition of romantic pantheism.

Be whatever intricate and complex, these stylistic devices can be grouped under three main headings corresponding to three main aspects of the skylark: (1) superior artist and its song is a superior form of art, (2) spiritual essence of the skylark, and (3) skylark as divinity. An attempt to count the figures of speech calling attention to each of the three aspects would reveal the predominance of the first one, that is, the music produced by the skylark, and it is actually this aspect of the non-real and superior world of the bird's existence in opposition to which the real world is presented. The real world is the inferior world of human condition in which people "scorn / Hate, and pride, and fear", and are "things born / Not to shed a tear"; consequently, the human music is surpassed by skylark's song in comparison to which our songs "would be all / But an empty vaunt", since humans "look before and after, /

And pine for what is not", the human "sincerest laughter / With some pain is fraught", and the human "sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought".

The question that emerges as being asked by lyrical I is "how thy joy we ever should come near"? If humans are the inferior counterpart in the dualism of existence, how can we have access to the superior world of skylark's song and grasp its music? The answer is romantically egocentric enough: the lyrical I declares his superiority towards humans (real world in the dualism of existence) and his inferiority to nature (non-real world), and assumes the task to unite the worlds, help us reach the superior world by means of poetry ("harmonious madness") that he should produce only by getting inspired from nature, namely by the skylark's song, and in way becoming an inspired poet to whom the "world should listen" as he is "listening now" to skylark. Shelley conceives of skylark and its song the substance of the realm of non-reality which stands above the reality of the human world, which is the world of the "mortals", inferior to the supreme world of the skylark's music. Both reality and non-reality, both human, mortal world and the spiritual world of nature are two distinct parts of the romantic dualism of existence. In its framework, the poet acknowledges his human part, as he learns only "half the gladness", and assumes through his lyrical I a place between the worlds, an intermediary position between the reality of humans and the non-reality of skylark. In this position, the existential perspective of the poet is twofold: he is at once an inspired bard, when skylark is viewed as an artist of superior status, and a prophet, when skylark is ranked to divinity:

> Teach me half the gladness
> That thy brain must know,
> Such harmonious madness
> From my lips would flow
> The world should listen then – as I am listening now.

To a Skylark differs from the traditional representation of the romantic dualism of existence in this absence of the desire of escapism and moves towards the idea from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in which the romantic hero must face the real world and work for the benefit of human community.

Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* offers a no less remarkable expression of the romantic concern with nature, and, although it traditionally links dualism and escapism which are mutually revelatory, the poem is likewise thematically complex and unique. Like the previous ode dedicated to skylark, *Ode to the*

West Wind presents dualism of existence as the juxtaposition of the spiritual and the material, of two worlds, one real and another non-real, the former as inferior and the latter as superior. Non-reality is again the world of nature, here the west wind whose action on three elements (earth, air, and water) suggests – by direct reference to leaves, clouds, and waves as representing these three elements of nature – the natural cycle of death and rebirth. Also like in the previous poem, the west wind, similar to skylark, is represented in three hypostases as (1) artist ("art moving everywhere" by driving away "leaves dead" in autumn and spreading "winged seeds" from which a new life emerges in spring); (2) divinity ("from the tangled boughs of Heaven"); and (3) of spiritual essence ("Wild Spirit", "unseen presence"). Unlike skylark, however, a distant and unseen musician, wind is a powerful force, its action upon nature is strong enough to make other natural elements "suddenly grow gray with fear, / And tremble and despoil themselves"; the wind is of rebellious essence, "wild", "tameless, and swift, and proud". And as in "To a Skylark", the real world is the inferior world of the humans, an "unawaken'd earth" in which a "heavy weight of hours" chains the individual.

Unlike in *To a Skylark*, however, in which the lyrical I assumes the task to connect the inferior humanity with the superior world of skylark's music, here the lyrical I expresses first the romantic claim of immortality by arduously desiring to enter the natural cycle of death and rebirth – "Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!" – which means actually the desire to be taken by the wind into its world; in other words, the expression of the claim of immortality is another expression of the romantic dualism of existence, another expression of the attempt at escapism, a moment of lyrical experience which is absent from the previous ode.

The escapism is impossible – a common romantic perspective – since in the succeeding line, the lyrical I declares: "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" The romantic persona is bound to reality, is a part of human condition, just as Byron's romantic character Childe Harold is, and in relation to whom a whole romantic typology of escapism is built. This hypostasis of the Byronic hero, in Canto III, assumes distance from men and indulges into wishful thinking that "he had mix'd / Again in fancied safety with his kind", but can a human being avoid being a human, the narrator rhetorically asks:

> But who can view the ripen'd rose, nor seek
> To wear it? who can curiously behold
> The smoothness and the sheen of beauty's cheek,
> Nor feel the heart can never all grow old?

> Who can contemplate Fame through clouds unfold
> The star which rises o'er her steep, nor climb?

Like Shelley's lyrical I, Byron's protagonist finds nature as the most congenial place for fulfilling the escapist wish: "Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends", "Where roll'd the ocean, thereon was his home", "Where a blue sky, and glowing clime, extends, / He had the passion and the power to roam", and "The desert, forest, cavern, breaker's foam, / Were unto him companionship" and with whom he spoke a mutual language. Solitary and unfit "to herd with Man", and apart from (1) nature (providing escapism) and (2) his pilgrimage (another form of escapism), Childe Harold, by means of his imaginative flight creates on stars (3) his own world of escapism, a non-reality "peopled" with "beings bright", and the result of this imaginative experience is an apparent fulfilment of escapism in that "earth, and earthborn jars, / And human frailties, were forgotten quite". But escapism is again impossible:

> Could he have kept his spirit to that flight
> He had been happy; but this clay will sink
> Its spark immortal, envying it the light
> To which it mounts, as if to break the link
> That keeps us from yon heaven which woos us to its brink.

The impossibility of escapism in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* renders the hero continuing his pilgrimage with no "hope left" and by assuming an ironic smile at having acquired the knowledge that there could be no change, everything is in vain, that "he lived in vain, / That all was over on this side the tomb". It also renders the "self-exiled" hero's tragic condition as bound to human world in which he is "a thing / Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome", symbolically presented as a "wild-born falcon with clipp'd wing" in a cage beating his "breast and beak against his wiry dome" as to escape into his home of "the boundless air".

The impossibility of escapism in *Ode to the West Wind* yet offers a choice, which is similar to that from *To a Skylark*, namely to assume a position between the worlds as an inspired poet and prophet: "Make me thy lyre", "Drive my dead thoughts over the universe", and "Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth / The trumpet of a prophecy!", as to finally ask rhetorically "O Wind, / If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" The end of the poem, in particular, reveals the function of this ode to be "apocalyptic, and the

controlled fury of his [Shelley's] spirit is felt throughout this perfectly modulated "trumpet of a prophecy"".[11]

In both odes, like in *Tintern Abbey*, the idea of co-authorship emerges from within the poetic treatment of the theme of nature. Nature is a kind of co-author, not as a source of feelings in youth and of thoughts and tranquillity in maturity, as in Wordsworth, but as a source of inspiration in its status as a perfect and superior form of art.

John Keats, William Blake, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Nature as a source of inspiration affirms authorship also in John Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, a poem in which the non-real world of the forest and another invisible bird, a nightingale, or rather its song, is contrasted to the real world of humans with all its negative features in which the poet's soul is in "pain" as if "of hemlock I had drunk". Like in *To a Skylark* and the romantic tradition of presenting dualism of existence and the desire for escapism in general, here lyrical I escapes into the superior, non-real of art world by means of poetry and poetic imagination and as taken from within reality by the song; when the song fades, however, the poet has to return, as in *Ode to the West Wind* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, to his "sole self", to come back to reality, but dualism of existence grounds to the poet the status of "in-between" and creates confusion: "Was it a vision, or a waking dream?" and "Do I wake or sleep?"

Nature as a chronotope of non-reality, as one of two worlds in the romantic dualism of existence, is expressed by William Blake in his *Chimney Sweeper* from the volume of *The Songs of Innocence* in a clearly paradisiac or edenic form. This poem, however limited in its concern with nature, is a remarkable expression of the romantic dualism of existence: in the non-reality of a dream, children live their childhood against the misery of their real existence, in which they suffer and must work, and for that reason are bereaved of childhood; in dream, however, they can accomplish the subconscious need for childhood and escapism based on their self-assumed, and at the same time imposed by the real and adult world, belief in an eventual reward after death for the whole of earthly suffering. And what would be the best "reward" for a child other than to be a child, to live his/her childhood.

This religious doctrine, Blake ironically implies, is the ideology used by the adults to subject children – socially the most vulnerable human beings – and use them as cheap labour force. As conceived by Blake, the pairs of poems

[11] Harold Bloom, Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 1970, p. 388.

from the sets of the songs of innocence and of experience bearing the same title or contrastive titles represent another version of the romantic dualism of existence – innocence of childhood versus experience of maturity – and are binary oppositions of which one element constitutes an aspect of innocence, which is contrasted to another one representing an aspect of experience: for example, infant joy versus infant sorrow, or the mercy of God as an aspect of innocence in *The Lamb* versus the wrath of God as an aspect of experience in *The Tyger*. Not all poems in the volume, however, can be grouped into pairs to reveal contrastive aspects, but even so, they contain each an aspect of either experience or innocence: personification, metaphors and symbols in the presentation of nature in *The Sick Rose*, for example, disclose the loss of virginity as an aspect of experience that would have no equivalent in the world of innocence.

The Chimney Sweeper from *Songs of Innocence* contains belief as the aspect representing innocence in this poem, since the child believes in the doctrine, because, having experienced the reward under the form of childhood in dream, "Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm". The child is pure and innocent, limited in comprehension, but an adult reader would easily sense the authorial ironic retort at the child's access to heaven and God being conditioned by suffering, and the question of whether the child has to suffer to be rewarded questions the goodness and humanism of the religious doctrine: "if all do their duty they need not fear harm" is the last line of the poem, which clarifies an earlier "the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy, / He'd have God for his father, and never want joy", where "to do your duty" and "be a good boy" mean, we understand from the very beginning of the poem, to sweep the chimneys, that is, to live a miserable life and to suffer. "So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep" – I clean your sins and dirt, and redeem you by my childhood innocence – states the child addressing the adult world, meaning that a child is by its nature innocent and pure and therefor the access to heaven is naturally granted. The second *The Chimney Sweeper*, from *Songs of Experience*, reveals "loss of belief" as the aspect representing experience, since the child no longer believes in the doctrine as a result of his acquiring of experience, which is the understanding that "God and his Priest and King" have invented the reward, "make up a heaven of our misery" in order to dominate and use children. The child retains yet innocence and purity, and he smiles, and is "happy and dance and sing", unlike the sinful adults who must go to church to pray in order to access divinity. It is interesting to notice that in the first poem, at the very beginning – "When my mother died I was very young / And my father sold me (…)" – the Oedipus complex is revealed

through the love towards mother and hate towards father of the child-speaker, who by "killing" his mother deliberately excludes her from the despicable and mean world of the adults, whereas by stating that his father sold him, the child makes him a true exponent of the evil and corrupted mature existence.

In Blake's *Songs*, although childhood not nature is the main concern, nature is nevertheless indispensable for the treatment of this and, in romantic poetry in general, of various other themes and concerns such as dualism, escapism, pantheism, art and others. To continue the line of discussion on nature from *The Chimney Sweeper*, the natural elements building up a paradisiac and divine setting are employed by other romantic poets, including by Coleridge in his celebrated and much discussed *Kubla Khan*.

Nature as chronotope of non-reality is displayed in *Kubla Khan* as non-reality in non-reality, a vision in a dream, providing elements that make "pleasure dome" an entity of three hypostases created by Kubla Khan as a being also of three hypostases: (1) a beautiful palace of a solid, material, physical presence, built by Kubla Khan as military leader, successful conqueror, to celebrate his victories; (2) a paradise or a garden of Eden created in primordial time and place by Kubla Khan this time as divinity; and (3) a piece of art, again the creation of Kubla Khan, now the powerful artist, all-mighty producer of aesthetic values. His artistic work, the pleasure dome, however beautiful and strong in its enduring material manifestation, is the creation of a conqueror and murderer, and lacks the spiritual component. The pleasure dome is contrasted to the type of art generated by "a damsel with a dulcimer", which is music and therefore ephemeral, as well as volatile and frail given her status as a slave at the court of Kubla Khan whose task is to entertain the ruler. The girl is "Singing of Mount Abora", her homeland, and she is pure and innocent, and her music is of spiritual essence, but lacks the substance of a physical component. In the context of this opposition, the art of Kubla Khan emerges as incomplete and even false, a false paradise consisting of form without essence: "a sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice".

In his turn, the lyrical I, representing the third type of artist in the poem, discloses that the pleasure dome is the object of the poet's subconscious wish/obsession revealed in dream. He wishes to combine the components; he wishes the girl's music to be his source of inspiration as to create his own pleasure dome and through this he voices the claim of achieving perfection in art. A fragment (no one would have ever thought of *Kubla Khan* as a fragment, or a dream, if Coleridge had never written his "Preface"), and perhaps

intended so, the poem ends in a twofold perspective regarding the poet's success or failure of his artistic endeavours.

Coleridge deals with the theme of nature in some of his conversational poems, such as *Frost at Midnight*, but it is a poem from another group, namely *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which fits an ecopoetical discourse and which is one of the few romantic texts rendering the destructive human action on nature in ballad type of a lyric-narrative thematic framework in which one character is involved in one event both having universal and symbolical appeal and being representative for the human existence in general. Here crime and punishment, the act of murdering of the albatross and its consequences.

Ancient Mariner, a Cain figure, a romantic Ahasuerus, shot the bird, his brother in God's creation, is won by Life-in-Death, remains immortal, whereas all his fellow mariners die, and he must forever wander the world and tell the story of his sin. This thematic line is remarkably revealed through the narrative organization of the text with its abrupt beginning – "It is an ancient Mariner, / And he stoppeth one of three" – and open end. This strategy makes the poem a perfect sample of the famous romantic fragment that, according to Maurice Blanchot, (1) has a hidden centre in the text; (2) is a self-enclosed item separated from others; (3) is required to be short; and (4) "remains in fee to identity: not a formal unity, to be sure, but a supposedly higher, imaginative wholeness".[12] Indeed, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan* as romantic fragments promise a unity higher than that of the formal philosophers and do not satisfy the reader with a full meaning but invite the reader to create the meaning pointing that it would never be a definite and an ultimate one and therefore calling attention to the mystery of the infinite.

The apparently broken concentric narration of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* makes the text of the poem represent a particular moment in the *ad infinitum* line of recurrent similar moments linked by the hero's wandering, each moment consisting of feeling the inner necessity to tell the story, identification of the listener, telling of the story, feeling spiritual relief – a particular moment ends – but it is a short and fleeting spiritual liberation since it is followed again by the feeling of the need to tell the story, and the travelling recommences, and another moment begins, and so on till the end of times. The starting moment was the first telling of the story as an experience of confession to the Hermit, followed by an innumerable number of such

[12] Kevin Hart, Postmodernism: A Beginner's Guide, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2004, p. 72.

moments that will never end, and the reader is invited to witness such a moment and listen to the story of the autodiegetic narrator Ancient Mariner along with the narratee Wedding-Guest.

Coleridge's poem is a "lyrical ballad", but its intertextual alliance rests on epic tradition as well, in which divinity acts upon the hero (who differs in some respects from other humans, but often possesses no ego and is no character in its own right), who receives the existential aim to act in the interests of the citadel (*imago dei*), that is, society or human community, when the balance is broken and the harmony is thwarted. Likewise, in Coleridge's poem, divinity or whatever superior forces, represented by Christian God as well as wilderness and the Mariner's own subconscious, acts upon the protagonist making him commit a crime against nature. There are no actual psychological motivations for such an action, for the character himself does not say why, neither does he know why, he shot the bird; however, not the reasons for the act count but its consequences. Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, as the hero of the epic tradition, is supposed to act for the benefit of society: his sin becomes a universal example of what may happen to those who try to challenge the universal harmony of the natural system, or attempt to destroy nature, or, in general, perform an evil act regardless its degree of immorality and gravity.

Coleridge's narrative poem is about human relation to nature, a sample of which is the mariner's relation to nature which represents a process, complex and assiduous, the result of which being the formation of a moral lesson that is beneficial for community. In Part IV, after killing the albatross and suffering alone, the process begins at the moment when the mariner reveals that (1) he is unable to die and (2) he is unable to pray, as his soul is dry, and, consequently, he hates the creatures of the sea because they are alive. From now on a romantic perspective opens in which a *solitary* figure, alone *facing* nature, realizes the *beauty* of nature leading to *love* for nature leading to unaware *blessing* nature leading to his being allowed to *pray*, were the question is whether it leads also to *salvation*. It might be so, the body of the albatross carried on his neck as a cross leaves him, but along with it comes the punishment to live forever, roam the world, eternally "pass, like night, from land to land", and tell the story of his sin. The initial condition of being unable to pray and unable to die turns into being able to pray and unable to die, as the punishment must be extended to eternity: "The man hath penance done, / And penance more will do". At the present moment of narration, the Mariner is ancient because eternal and not old or aged expecting death; also, his "eye is bright" and "beard with age is hoar", and he is still carrying, and he will always do, the burden of his crime as being trapped in an existential mode in which

"at an uncertain hour", "agony returns" and "till my ghastly tale is told, / This heart within me burns".

Intertextualism points here to Ishmael, the character of *Moby Dick*, whose narrative is another story of crime and punishment involving the relationship between man and nature. As in Melville's novel, in Coleridge's ballad punishment changes its semantic substance, and to be punished becomes to act in a twofold perspective: (1) as an artist, cursed by the inner ever-burning desire to express himself which is materialized in the narrative, and, since he *teaches* and not tells the story, (2) as an individual made sinful and determined to suffer in order to spread a tale resulting in the spreading of moral-didactic values among humans.

One may argue, however, that in this second aspect, besides the use of language, archaic spelling and metrical organization, Coleridge's ballad reveals its alliance to medieval literary tradition, since the Ancient Mariner could be taken not as an individual subject but as an "everyman", sinful and fallen in his human condition, whose experience supports a symbolic structure and is an allegory of sin, confession and redemption.

Coleridge's poem is indeed the closest among the texts in the volume of *Lyrical Ballads* to the notion of "lyrical ballad" and by this the closest to the intended by the title of the volume revival of the national cultural heritage, but the experience of the Mariner is reified and transmitted as a verbal discourse, a story, a narrative, and as such, narrating the story becomes an act of atonement in the line of the modern Ishmael from *Moby Dick* and the postmodern Briony Tallis from *Atonement*.

In this respect, the transfiguration of the Ancient Mariner in order to perform his role makes him into a character of no less spectacular qualities. First, he acquires the supernatural ability to identify potential sinners – "That moment that his face I see, / I know the man that must hear me: / To him my tale I teach" – and prevent the evil doing. The Wedding-Guest would have done something immoral or sinful at the wedding, and by his story, the Mariner thwarted the emergence of the evil in the world, for although there were three quests, the Mariner "stoppeth one of three", not all of them, but a particular, chosen one. Second, the Ancient Mariner possesses telepathic abilities revealed when the Wedding-Guest attempts to escape the story and insists that as relative to the bridegroom he must join the merry feast, but the Mariner apart from holding him "with his skinny hand", holds him "with his glittering eye" and the Wedding-Guest "stood still", "listens like a three years" child", and he "cannot choose but hear", because the "Mariner hath his will". Third,

the Ancient Mariner possesses narrative skills – "I have strange power of speech" – whose metamorphic effects emerge at the end of narration when the Mariner is gone and the Wedding-Guest meets the morning alone, as if he "that hath been stunned" and "is of sense forlorn". The outcome is beneficial for the community rather than entertaining, despite Coleridge's claim from *Biographia Literaria* that the purpose of poetry is solely "pleasure", as if confirming what the title of the Book Eight of "The Prelude" suggests: "Love of Nature [Leads] to Love of Mankind".

More precisely, the goal of the Mariner's recounting of the story is threefold: first of all *didactic* ("And to teach, by his own example, love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth"), then *formative* (when he departs from the Ancient Mariner, the Wedding-Guest is a "sadder and a wiser man" and he does not want to participate in the feast of the wedding anymore and turns away from the door, as compared to the beginning of the poem when he displayed anger at being stopped), and finally *ethical* with an intelligible moral and high religious allusions:

> Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
> To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
> He prayeth well, who loveth well
> Both man and bird and beast.
> He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.

Conclusion

As we can see in our study with direct reference to a number of romantic texts, nature in romanticism is thematically rendered as a mode of living encompassing the typically romantic concerns with the dualism of existence, escapism, pantheism and authorship, which reveals a great shift occurring in romanticism with regard to the ways in which nature is viewed and expressed by author of literary works.

In earlier periods, nature was a presence in literary works as well, which was more in relation to primitivism, or mournfully reflective poetry, or the pastoral: "By emphasizing 'nature' over 'culture', primitivism downplayed the over-educated middle and upper classes in favour of people and objects that were deemed unspoilt and unsophisticated. Key primitivist figures

included rural workers, children, the illiterate, non-western subjects (including the enslaved), and women".[13]

The changes in thematising nature in romanticism, as compared to eighteenth century and earlier periods – whose writers' opinions and methods, then correct and credible, are now, in romanticism, no longer adequate – are numerous and irreversible aiming at eradicating from literary discourse the "conventional elegiac topos of the invocation to nature"[14] and the poet's wish to enjoy landscape for its picturesque qualities, to contemplate nature in order to meditate on human nature, to explore and wonder at its grace, to proclaim its corporeality and immobility, and, in order to assert its inferiority, to beautify and order nature as well as to tame and impose control on it.

On the contrary, nature is now in romanticism of spiritual not material essence and does not refer to a particular and concrete topos, and though a poem such as *Tintern Abbey* may offer a semblance of a real natural setting, or an equivalent in reality as in *Ode to the West Wind*, more often natural elements and beings, such as Shelley's skylark and Keats's nightingale, are signifiers with no referents in reality, not physical entities but imagined beings, products of the poet's pure imagination. Nature exists in the poet's mind as concept and is beyond any particular location, receiving its textual representation in various poems such as odes and pastoral lyrics. The way in which pantheism is literary treated by the romantics helps clarify this matter. Divinity is in nature, as God is everywhere, pantheism would claim, the world is God's body, and God stands in relation to the world as humans do to their own bodies, and because God and the world are "spatially coextensive", "God meets the necessary condition for perception without being limited by any particular location".[15]

Nature is divine and the poet regards it as the substance of a superior, pantheistic dimension of a world which is non-real and above and superior to the world of humans which is inferior, real and concrete. In romantic expression of the dualism of existence, nature is the substance of non-reality as a superior form of existence, often a world of escapism rather than the expression of rebelliousness. In relation to the two worlds of existence (the mediocre reality of human condition and the superior non-reality of poetically

[13] Vincent Quinn, Pre-Romantic Poetry, Northcote House Publishers, Tavistock, 2012, p. 76.

[14] J. Kneale, Romantic Aversions: Aftermaths of Classicism in Wordsworth and Coleridge, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1998, p. 35.

[15] Michael P. Levine, Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 10.

rendered world of nature), the lyrical I is placed between them, inferior to non-reality but superior to human world, either as an inspired poet or a prophet, or both of them. In relation to the two worlds of the dualism of existence, nature provides particular types of escapism, either as a more earthly, congenial background for being in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* or as a dream, and likewise congenial, paradisiac setting in *The Chimney Sweeper* and *Kubla Khan*. As a major source of escapism, nature accepts the poet as its constituent part similar to his experience in childhood (*The Prelude*, *Tintern Abbey* and *Ode to the West Wind*), offers a promise of immortality to the poet as an element in its cycle (*Ode to the West Wind*), and is a spiritual healer in *Ode to a Nightingale*.

A strong relation is thus established between individual and nature, where, concerning the relation between the creative individual and nature, the conviction is that creativity is driven by the relation between nature and individual and that "we can only truly know nature through articulating our inner nature', a conviction which 'gives rise to the expressive subject, that is, to the modern idea of expression as self-shaping and self-creation, i.e. the idea of self-development".[16]

Nature is loved for its consistency, endurance and vastness, but nature is above all beautiful and represents for the romantics a perfect work of art; a natural object, or element, or phenomenon, is a supreme manifestation of art, the product of divinity or of nature itself, like a bird's song, where nature is both art and artist. Nature as art or the art of nature is superior as it is more beautiful and meaningful than the art of the humans, like skylark's melody that surpasses all the other music in the world. Nature as artist creates a superior form of art which is contrasted to human artistic endeavours and is the substance of a superior world of existence which is opposed to human condition. The best human art results from painful experience, such as the death of a beautiful woman in Poe, but what is the source of the perfect art by nature is a question that remains rhetorical. The human being tends to "come near" the perfection, but to access it is impossible unless the romantic persona intervenes as a mediator or linking principle. Shelley's ode to skylark is again revelatory: asserting his individualism, superiority and egocentrism, the lyrical I, another artist, seeks inspiration ("teach me") and assumes the task to unite the superior form of art belonging to skylark with the human condition

[16] Peter Murphy and David Roberts, Dialectic of Romanticism: A Critique of Modernism, Continuum International Publishing, London, 2005, p. 43.

by being inspired by nature and producing in turn art/poetry ("harmonious madness").

As an artistic object, nature is the source of inspiration for the poet, and, as an artist, nature is the poet's co-author in his lyrical efforts. Apart from being the source of inspiration and avoiding the traps of personification and pathetic fallacy, to the romantic poet nature is also a source of genuine feelings and elevated thoughts, and a source of knowledge, where the poet acquires new views, opinions, conceptions, and attitudes based on a blend of experience and subjective response to nature rather than nature being attributed with consciousness and knowledge to be shared with the humans.

Be it a perfect and superior piece of art, nature is by no means a static and stable universe, a visual experience statically and panoramically recorded, an inert and "mechanically functioning mass", in short, an external object, but a dynamic internalized dimension where "the vibrant life of lakes, forests, swamps, and oceans revealed an animate universe in a continuous state of movement".[17] To this, we should add that nature receives a structure which is both mobile and transcendental; nature is a substance composed of both fleeting and enduring elements; nature is a vast world, attractive and inspiring, for artistic quest; there is partnership and a dialogue established between nature and humanity, but more often nature receives supremacy and control in its relation to humans, and offers transient but joyful moments of escapism in the experience of the dualism of existence.

The way in which Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats conceive of dualism, escapism, pantheism, and authorship, these four cornerstones of the romantic concern with nature account for abstractness in place of lifeness, excludes *eros* in favour of *logos*, the act of articulation, as it has been called, a deed eminently and essentially creative, producing by means of imagination something that was not present and in this way reifying the freedom of spiritual flight and the freedom of artistic expression, and achieving simultaneously authorial identity and artistic unity.

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[17] Esterhammer, 2002, p. 12.

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