

Romanticism and Primitivism: Literary Roots of Modern Ecocriticism

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Abstract

The relationship between literature and environmental consciousness has gained renewed scholarly attention with the advent of Eco criticism, a relatively new field of literary study. Romanticism and Primitivism, two closely connected literary and philosophical movements of the early 18th century, could foresee modern-day ecological concerns by advocating a return to the state of nature and critiquing industrialization. This paper explores how Romantic writers, including Wordsworth, Blake, Coleridge, and Clare, alongside Primitivism thinkers such as Rousseau, foreshadowed contemporary debates on environmental sustainability, conservation, and the ethical treatment of nature. Based on a qualitative methodology, the study will conduct a close textual analysis of key works by Romantic and primitivism writers. Analyzing significant Romantic and primitivism writings demonstrates how their paradigms of organic interconnectedness, profound reverence for the natural world, and critique of modernity can inform present-day ecological discourse. Moreover, the paper addresses both the celebration and criticism of Romantic ideals by modern scholars, offering a balanced perspective on their ecological legacy. It argues that Romanticism and Primitivism, though often idealized, provide crucial early articulations of environmental ethics, sustainability, and human-nature interdependence. By revisiting these movements, the research positions literature as a vital medium for ecological advocacy and calls for a renewed integration of literary insight into contemporary environmental debates.

Keywords: Eco Criticism, Environmental Consciousness, Industrialization, Primitivism and Romanticism.

Introduction

The writers of the English Romantic period were among the first ones to recognize the interconnectedness between human beings and the natural world. They also realized and foreshadowed the potential consequences of human activities on the environment. The eighteenth-century phenomenon called 'Primitivism' that preceded the Romantic period had a shared concern over preserving nature in its pristine form. The Romantic and Primitive movements emerged as reactions against the evils of industrialization, such as pollution, deforestation, and urbanization. In response to the rapid industrialization of England, primitivisms put forward the idea that returning to the primitive state of life would free mankind from the evils of industrialization. On the other hand, Romantics expressed their concerns about preserving their natural surroundings. Writers of both movements rejected the alienating effects of modernity, resonating with contemporary concerns about

unsustainable consumption and industrial practices. Romantics and Primitivisms had a deep appreciation for the natural world. Romantics, in particular, highlighted sublime nature, arousing a profound sense of awe and wonder. Moreover, nature appeared sacred and divine to their eyes, and they felt a deep spiritual connection. Such an entity had to be preserved with all its beauty, purity and sanctity. Romantics and Primitivisms frequently emphasized the importance of stewardship and reverence for the natural world in their works. By revisiting the ideas and themes of Romanticism and Primitivism, the relationship with the natural world could be understood better. These movements can offer valuable insights and perspectives relevant to modern-day environmental sustainability discourse called Eco criticism. The multidisciplinary field of Eco criticism examines the connection between literature and the environment. It investigates how literature portrays the natural world, the

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environment, and ecological issues, frequently demonstrating how literature mirrors, challenges, or influences the interactions between the humans and the non-humans in the natural world. Eco criticism emphasizes the role of literature in shaping environmental consciousness and promoting a closer bond between people and the environment by examining literary texts. The study aims to demonstrate Romantic concerns for preserving nature so that humans and non-humans can exist organically. With an in-depth textual and contextual analysis, the paper argues that almost all the writers belonging to the period known as Romantic Revival shared some critical observations regarding the preservation of their natural habitats, making them forerunners of Eco criticism.

Methodology

This study employs an archival research method with a strong emphasis on close textual analysis to explore how Romantic and Primitivism literature prefigures modern Eco critical concerns. The archival approach is particularly well-suited for examining historical texts and literary documents that reveal abstract concepts such as ecological consciousness, philosophical reflection, and literary aesthetics—elements that are not easily quantifiable through quantitative methods. The methodology is guided by Eco critical theory, as outlined by scholars like Laurence Buell, who argues that literature functions as an act of environmental imagination (1) and Jonathan Bate, who highlights the ecological value of Romantic poetry in Romantic Ecology (2). Primary texts by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Clare, and Rousseau will be critically analyzed to identify recurring themes of nature reverence, organic interconnectedness, and critiques of industrial modernity. These analyses will be enriched by theoretical perspectives from critics both supportive—such as Kevin Hutchings, McKusick, and Bate—and critical, including Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, and Alan Liu, who question the Romantics' sincerity and suggest political motivations behind their nature representations. This contrast ensures a balanced evaluation that neither romanticizes nor dismisses their ecological relevance. The methodology justifies its emphasis on interpretative depth over numerical breadth, as the study aims to uncover how specific literary expressions reflect and shape environmental

ethics rather than measure their influence statistically. For instance, analysing how Wordsworth's Lake District settings evoke a sense of ecological belonging, or how Blake's mythic visions align with Deep Ecology principles, requires interpretative insight into language, symbolism, and historical context—dimensions that demand literary sensitivity over numerical data. Thus, the chosen methodology enables a nuanced and layered understanding of literature as a vehicle of early ecological thought. In order to develop the relationship between eighteenth century literary movements and modern-day Eco criticism, it is important to establish the conversation in contemporary theoretical discourse. This work claims that Eco criticism reopens Romantic canon. Most Romantic texts are now viewed from completely new perspective. For example, Jonathan Bate, James McKusick and Seth T. Reno adopt a new-historicist approach and attempt to deconstruct and challenge the traditional view that English Romantics' love for nature was a form of escapism. The idea is elaborated in the very next point of discussion. Next, there is a group of feminists who seek to denaturalize the traditional images of masculinity and femininity in the context of modern-day environmentalism. These Eco feminists appropriate and celebrate the idea of woman's closeness to the rhythms of mother earth. This is a line of work that began with Sherry Ortner's essay "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture" and best exemplified by Carolyn Merchant's book *The Death of Nature*. These works establish direct links between Enlightenment science, masculinity and technology on the one hand, the exploitation of women and the exploitation of the earth on the other. Since then, the androcentric behavior with nature in a male-dominated society has often been held responsible for the despoliation of the earth. For the same reason, Romantics way of feminizing nature has been appreciated as their caring attitude toward her. Jonathan Bate writes, "Keats's images of wise female passivity and responsiveness to nature are prototypically ecofeminism" (2). In this post-colonial era, the eighteenth-century movement Primitivism is looked upon with a new sense of appreciation. Romantics' affinity with their contemporary Primitivism could be attributed to their acquaintance with the colonized parts of the world

like Africa or Indian subcontinent. It was possible that their interest in Primitivism grew with their increasing knowledge of the orient. This, in turn, intensified their love for nature and their concern for its preservation since Primitivism glorifies life lived amidst nature. When the whole Europe took up colonial projects to establish dominance over the rest of the world, English Romantics proved themselves as exceptions because of their receptive nature and all-inclusive attitude.

For English Romantics, the 'Other' became an extension of the 'self'. Their individualism and subjective thinking made them look upon the "other" from a completely different perspective. They also felt a tendency towards Primitivism which was actually a process of othering by Europeans. Romantic primitivism upheld the idea of the 'noble savage' through its idealization of non-European or non-western 'uncivilized' men. While the general attitude of the Europeans towards the non-Europeans was mostly hatred, most English Romantic writers, on the other hand, demonstrated a favorable attitude towards the non-Europeans. They sympathized with them and even looked critically at the Western dominance over the East.

Romantics loved the East because of its natural richness and the people who were close to nature. For example, Coleridge glorify the "savage place" (l) in Mongolia where Kubla Khan ordered to build his pleasure dome. Blake imagined the Royal Bengal Tiger's "fearful symmetry" (l) roaming in the jungles of East Asia. And Lord Byron himself travelled to the Middle Eastern world and fell in love with the people and the grandeur of the place. Such experiences had an indirect but strong influence on the Romantics' thoughts of preservation. The non-Western life, culture and nature presented them with another form of Primitivism which they had already been acquainted with through Jean Jacques Rousseau. As they were able to overcome the distinction between the self and the other, they had the mind to learn from the strong and close bond which the Orientals had with nature. They were inspired by the pristine nature of those places that had not yet been corrupted by the invasion of industrialization and urbanization. The desire to see their own surroundings in that pristine form could have generated the idea of preservation in their mind. The relatively new field of literary and theoretical

discourse called Eco criticism recognizes that literature can add one more effective dimension to the modern-day environmental movement. Studies have been done to explore how literature can strengthen the bond between human beings and nature. The persistent environmental problems even after so many measures taken by the environmentalists have given rise to a new realisation regarding the value of literature; specially poetry.

Cheryll Glotfelty, in his book titled *The Ecocriticism Reader*, defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (3). The term was first coined by William Rueckert in 1978, in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". By "ecocriticism" he meant to apply ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature. While Rueckert's definition was concerned specifically with the science of ecology, Glotfelty's one was less restrictive and more applicable to literature. However, in both the cases, Eco criticism takes as its subject the interconnection between nature and culture. Here culture is, more specifically, the cultural artifacts of language and literature. About its function as a critical literary theory, Glotfelty writes, "As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman".

Critics have already recognized the importance of literary texts in bringing about a change in humans' attitude towards nature. For example, Laurence Buell opines that literary texts function as "acts of environmental imagination" that may "affect one's caring for the physical world," making that world "feel more or less precious or endangered or disposable" (1). Heidegger, on the other hand, comes down to poetry to show its close affinity with the earth. His words establish a deep connection between poetry and the earth. In Jonathan Bate's seminal book *Song of the Earth*, Heidegger is quoted as saying, "There is a special kind of writing called poetry which has the peculiar power to speak 'earth'. Poetry is the song of the earth" (2). This quote validates the importance of Romantic poetry in the field of ecocritical research as this genre is more about the natural world than anything else. Kevin Hutchings confirms this view, "Romanticism has provided much fertile ground for ecocritical theory and practice" (4).

There is a group of critics like Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, and Alan Liu who express doubts regarding Romantics' love for nature. Carlisle Huntington sums up their views, "the romantic idealization of nature serves primarily as a mode of displacement of the political failures of the French Revolution" (4). However, there is another school of critics like Jonathan Bate, James McKusik, Seth Reno who, according to Huntington, argue, "Romantic nature poetry is actually the first instance of western proto-ecological literature" (5). At individual levels, English Romantics have been appreciated for their ecocritical outlooks. For example, McKusick believes that Wordsworth had a "vital influence" on and "contributed to the fundamental ideas and core values of the modern environmental movement" (6). Jonathan Bate proves in *Romantic Ecology* that Wordsworth's interest in nature is a "conservative ideology" which is a quest for "a harmonious relationship with nature" (7). Samuel Taylor Coleridge was probably the second after Wordsworth to prioritize and explore the relationship between human beings and nature. It is the central theme in most of his poetry.

James C. McKusick believes that there has not been any "effective remedial action" to the "horrendous environmental problems" yet. The solution he offers is "not a quick technological fix, but a fundamental change in human consciousness" (8). He also believes that the study of literature can bring about this change in human consciousness as he quotes Jonathan Bate's argument, "The business of literature is to work upon consciousness" (2). However, McKusick narrows down the idea further and emphasises the importance of the study of poetry by saying, "The study of poetry can lead to the interrogation of fundamental ethical values" (8). He concludes that ecological literary criticism "may potentially transform, the persistently pragmatic and instrumental awareness of the terrestrial environment that has pervaded Western culture" (9). James C McKusick observes in his scholarly work "Coleridge and the Economy of Nature", that both Wordsworth and Coleridge are more than just "itinerant observer of scenic beauty" (8). He appreciates both these Romantics for choosing Lake Districts as their dwelling place and living in harmony with nature. Nicolous Roe observes this tendency of Romantics to be reflected in their poetry as well. In many Romantic

poems, the persona is often a speaker "whose voice is inflected by the local and personal history of the place he inhabits" and this perspective "may legitimately be termed an ecological perspective" (9). Reyhan Bal shares the interesting observation that Coleridge's ecocritical standpoint is more obvious in his poetry than in his prose:

Thus, in poetry, his innermost thoughts concerning the individual-nature relationship were able to emerge without the interference of the philosophic, personal, and religious dilemmas that confused his attempts to rationalise them in prose (10).

William Blake, unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge, is largely seen as anti-nature for his more anthropocentric views. Northrop Frye, in his seminal work, *Fearful Symmetry*, criticizes Blake for portraying a very unfavourable picture of nature in addition to his over-anthropocentric views. Frye is quoted as saying by Hutchings that, in Blake, "we see nothing outside of man worthy of respect. Nature is miserably cruel, wasteful, chaotic and half-dead" (4). However, Kevin Hutchings, Mark Lussier and Elizabeth Deatrck defend this. They explore Blake's deeply conflicting but surprisingly modern views about nature. Hutchings does not deny that Blake's poems center around humans; however, he also tries to establish that nature plays a crucial role that cannot be ignored. Lussier finds traces of "Deep Ecology" in Blake's writings as Elizabeth Deatrck summarises Lussier's view, "Blake's vision of nature is strikingly similar to a branch of ecological philosophy--specifically, deep ecology--that would not emerge until centuries after Blake's death" (11). Elizabeth Deatrck further observes that unlike Wordsworth or some other Romantics, Blake did not view nature "as [having] an untouchable connection to the distant divine" (11). Rather, in "Songs of Experience", the human characters do not only connect with nature, but they become a part of it. In Diatrck's words: Blake's understanding of nature, as revealed in "Experience", is, in some ways, closer to modern conceptions of ecology and conservation biology than to that of his Romantic contemporaries; he does not see nature as necessarily "other," but rather as a greater whole that humans should seek to be embraced by, and to be a part of one past study (11).

Among the second generation of Romantics, Percy Bysshe Shelley is ecologically important for modern-day researchers. Ecology activist Timothy Morton confirms this view in "Shelley's Green Desert", who writes, "An extraordinary number of figures in the writing of Percy and Mary Shelley deal with the economy of nature, human relationships with the natural world, and what we now think of as 'ecology'" (12). To prove his point, Timothy Morton refers to Shelley's Vegetarian Note 17 to *Queen Mab* (1813) where there is a passage telling the hazards of chemical exhalations from industries. Morton also notices how Shelley sympathises with the lamb and how that sympathy shifts from one specific animal (the lamb) to animals in general. He draws an example from *Queen Mab*'s vegetarian passage, "No longer now/ He slays the lamb that looks him in the face" (13) which is changed in *The Daemon of the World*, "No longer now/ He slays the beast that sports around his dwelling" (13). Morton's opinion, in this respect, is, "If 'ecology,' as the *logos* of the *oikos*, is thinking about dwelling, then this vegetarian image is profoundly ecological" (12). Thus, Shelley's desire to live in peaceful coexistence with nature's creatures and his concern for the preservation of the environment is reflected in Timothy Morton's work.

Finally, John Clare, one of the lesser-known writers of Romantic period, often confined his nature thoughts within the things surrounding him or to be closer to truth, which were absent from the familiar surroundings. Jonathan Bate writes in *The Song of the Earth*, "Clare's world-horizon was the horizon of the things - the stones, animals, plants, people - that he knew first and knew best. When he went beyond that horizon, he no longer knew what he knew" (2). Bate also shares the opinion that Clare's strong bond with nature is a reflection of the first principle of ecology, "the survival of both individuals and species depends on the survival of ecosystems" (2). Clare broke down when he had to leave his birthplace Helpston for Northborough. He experienced depression as his bond with Helpston was snapped. Referring to James McKusick's belief, "an organism has meaning and value only in its proper home, in symbiotic association with all the creatures that surround and nourish it" (2), Bate claims, "Clare foreshadows scientific ecology" (2). In conclusion, ecocritics have started to realize the contribution of the writers of English Romantic

period in the field of Ecocriticism. This study explores this issue further. Moreover, the paper provides a fresh perspective by exploring the crucial role Primitivism played in shaping Romantics' idea of nature and how these two contemporary movements interacted to bring about modern-day Ecocriticism.

Romanticism and the Critique of Industrialization

Romantic writers such as William Wordsworth, William Blake, John Clare, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Ruskin were among the first to critique the negative impacts of industrialisation on the environment. As true lovers of nature, Romantics were concerned about the threat looming large on nature because of the establishment of more and more industries. Their sympathy for the bruised nature only intensified their love for nature. It appeared to them that the modern industrial world was harsh and deadening to the senses and spirit. In the poetry of Wordsworth, Blake, and John Clare, it is frequently found that these writers reacted to industrial practices in the fashion of meditative but keen observers of surrounding nature. Sometimes, their reactions went so far as to criticise sharply even social evils caused by industrialisation, such as child labour and the materialistic tendency of man. Blake's two versions of 'The Chimney Sweeper' (one from 'Songs of Innocence' and the other from 'Songs of Experience') are a testament to both the cruel attitude of the industrialised society towards the poor children and child labour in its worst form. In 'The World Is Too Much with Us', William Wordsworth vents his frustration for society's excessive materialism. Rather than having a spiritual connection with nature, man treats the world as an instrument, as a route to economic end. While the poem does not directly address industrialisation, it epitomises a Romantic critique of the economic materialism and instrumental rationality that defined industrialisation. John Ruskin also shows his concern at the rise of industries while sharing his observations on the paintings of Joseph Mallord William Turner. Turner and Ruskin both observed and documented environmental changes. Ruskin used Turner's water-colour paintings to highlight how industrialisation threatens nature. He warns his readers about the unsustainable development. His main argument was about the damage done by burning fossil fuels. He foresaw the destruction

and wrote about it in apocalyptic terms: "blanched sun – blighted grass – blinded man" ("Ruskin's Warning to the Industrial World - Watercolour World"). Besides, in his famous lecture, "The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century", Ruskin blamed industrialisation as "the source of the 'Manchester devil's darkness'" and of the "dense manufacturing mist" (14).

On a similar note, Percy Bysshe Shelley, in his sonnet "Ozymandias" (1818) shows how civilisation and urbanisation can destroy nature. Shelley was probably aware of the abundance and especially, the agricultural fertility of the ancient Mediterranean world. Over many centuries, the dense forests were felled; the cedars of Lebanon were destroyed; the excessive irrigation of arable lands resulted in the toxic accumulation of salt in the soil. As a result of all these human activities, these beautiful landscapes turned into barren deserts. The statue of Ozymandias lies shattered in the midst of a desert. The surrounding landscape "The lone and level sands stretch far away" (15) presents the grim truth about the brief duration of the civilisation that he commanded. Any society that believes that it can dominate the natural world should take a lesson from the paradox presented in the poem:

Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare

The lone and level sands stretch far away (13).

The barren desert and the last remnant of a civilisation is a grim reminder for all those who believe that nature can be conquered and dominated. Civilisation continues to exist as long as there are environmentally sustainable practices and human beings maintain their connection with nature. English Romantics knew that this connection was gradually getting lost. Romantic literature often lamented the loss of connection with nature due to the rise of industrial society. This is more frequently found in the works of William Blake and John Clare. Blake found it frustrating that human beings had gone further away from nature and spirituality as they had been overcome by their materialistic desires. The sentiment is echoed in "Introduction" of "Songs of Experience" where the poet writes, "Calling the lapsed Soul/ And weeping in the evening dew" (16). Here, the "lapsed Soul" are those who have embraced materialism as a result of which they are

"weeping" or suffering. And "evening dew" is popularly accepted as a symbol of materialism. Blake calls these people to return, "O Earth O Earth return!/ Arise from out the dewy grass" (16), but also realises that the return will not be easy,

Turn away no more:

Why wilt thou turn away

The starry floor

The watry shore

Is giv'n thee till the break of day (16).

Human beings will have to struggle with the oppressive agents of Night such as "the starry floor" before they experience light ("the break of day").

John Clare's sense of loss is more strongly felt in his works. In fact, the loss of his natural surroundings and the resultant loss of connection with nature is the most dominant theme in almost all his poems. His more well-known poems are mostly protests against the implementation of Enclosure Acts that aimed at converting wilderness or the most natural places into cultivable lands. It was the change of marshlands, bushes, hills and other natural places into arable lands that made the poet write against the malpractice. In those days, his approach was that of an environmental activist who wrote out of his political consciousness against a political act affecting nature.

However, the fact that losing connection with nature can bring devastating consequences is also illustrated through "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Written in line with contemporary Gothic tradition, the poem is about killing an albatross and the consequences of this act. The smooth sailing of the ship as it was leaving the South Pole region with the albatross following it, shows how civilisation and nature can co-exist when man cares for God's creatures:

And a good south wind sprung up behind;

The albatross did follow,

And every day, for food or play

Came to the mariners' hollo! (17)

This symbiotic relationship is disrupted when the ancient mariner kills the bird without any provocation or any apparent reason. The ordeal that the ancient mariner in particular and other mariners in general (for supporting the act of killing the bird) go through reflects what may happen when human beings try to dominate and even overpower nature. But, more specifically, it talks about the inevitable consequence that results

from the loss of the link (in this case, the albatross) between human beings and nature.

Romantic poets like Lord Byron and William Blake could also realize that loss of connection with nature could also bring about apocalyptic consequences. Before them, apocalypse had been seen as an inscrutable act of God. It was during the Romantic period when people understood that apocalyptic events could also happen as a result of environmentally unsustainable human activities. Two such poems with apocalypse as their theme are Byron's 'Darkness' and Blake's *Jerusalem* and anticipate the dire consequences of the human tendency to dominate nature. In these poems both the poets prophesy apocalyptic consequences if all those indiscreet human activities against nature go on in the name of development. Byron's 1816 poem "Darkness" is tinged with an apocalyptic dream-vision of a world that is utterly destroyed. It was the "year without summer". The ash cloud after the volcanic eruption in Mount Toba in Indonesia blocked the sun causing worldwide natural havoc. The temperature in Europe dropped significantly, and it rained indefinitely disrupting harvest. In this bleak narrative, the speaker describes a strange dream: "The bright sun was extinguished, and the stars/ Did wander darkling in the eternal space" (18). As the last light fades, and starving people battle over the Earth's remaining resources, the worst aspects of human nature are revealed. Finally, in this dismal scenario, all life is extinguished; the entire Earth is frozen into a solid mass; and darkness rules over the entire universe. The other poem, Blake's *Jerusalem*, also expresses the apocalyptic consequences of devastating environmental practices. In "Plate 18" of the poem there is a list of environmental damages presented. "Albion" is the giant personification of England. It has turned into a wasteland where the birds have died, "His birds are silent on his hills, flocks die beneath his branches" (19) and creatures are suffering in extreme weather, "His milk of Cows, and honey of Bees, and fruit of golden harvest,/ Is gather'd in the scorching heat, and in the driving rain:" (19) and the land has lost its perfection and glory, "His Giant beauty and perfection fallen into dust:" (19). To make matters worse, produces in nature are of no use anymore, "The corn is turn'd to thistles and the apples into poison:" (19). McKusick allegorises, "Albion, the giant personification of England, is

'self-exiled' by the devastation of his homeland; his children cry helplessly, and his Eon (or female companion) weeps as she beholds such terrible destruction" (6). In this way, the poem predicts an apocalyptic end of England by its own industrial activities.

Primitivism and the Idealization of Nature

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the Genevan philosopher and often regarded as the intellectual father of Primitivism, argued that civilization corrupts human morality and disrupts natural harmony. Some fifty years before the Romantics, Rousseau introduced this idea of interconnectedness. Analyses of Rousseau's philosophy and works may help to understand how deeply these influenced and almost shaped Romantics' beliefs regarding the organic connectivity between humans and non-humans. Although there are debates among critics regarding whether Rousseau was a Primitivist, he advocated a return to the state of nature for mankind and promoted the idea of "Noble Savage" in his writings.

Rousseau brought about a positive change in attitude towards nature. He moved nature into the foreground in his *Julie*, *Émile*, and *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*. Thus, he redefined human-nature relationships and showed new ways of looking at nature to a new generation of writers called 'Romantics'. In *Julie*, Rousseau connects the inner nature of individuals with their natural environment. In *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*, nature turns out to be a privileged site for the cultivation of self-knowledge. Only pastoral retreat provides the conditions necessary for self-discovery. Leaving amidst nature, the pleasure Rousseau finds in pastoral solitude makes him reflect on human's lack of appreciation for their environment, as evidenced by activities like mining. Thus, Rousseau discerned and expressed a sense of harmony between man and nature. Probably, he was the first to recognize nature's value to humanity, which prepared him to protect nature. In this way, Rousseau emerges as an early modern 'pre-environmentalist'. Gilbert F. LaFreniere calls Rousseau an "environmental-radical" because, according to Gilbert, Rousseau was "an environmentalist demanding not simple reform but the virtual reconstruction of society and of the economic, political, and ethical attitudes

and institutions which bear upon our relationship to the natural world" (20).

If Rousseau was a proponent of Primitivism, his connection with English Romanticism was even more profound. He was rightly called 'The Father of Romanticism' by Robert N Webb in his book *Jean Jacques Rousseau, the father of romanticism, (Immortals of literature)* (1970). Rousseau's influence on English Romantics cannot be overemphasized. Firstly, it was Rousseau who pioneered what is now called 'deistic nature worship' which formed a powerful current in the Romantic Movement. Most of the Romantics and William Wordsworth, in particular, dwelt on the human-nature relationship that Rousseau had established. Rousseau's thoughts were probably influential in changing attitude towards nature from what it was during 18th century Enlightenment. It was Rousseau who advocated a more personal and emotional connection with nature. It was a move away from the supposedly "mechanistic" conception of human-nature relationships as found during the Enlightenment. In books like *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* or *Les Reveries d u Promeneur Solitaire* (in French), Rousseau's subjective, emotional response to the beauties of nature contributed to establishing a new norm for aesthetically evaluating nature.

Rousseau's works shaped Romantics' belief regarding the relationship between the human and the non-human. This close association with nature also led them to realize the potential consequences of human activities on the environment. Some poems reflect this realization. In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", this organic connectivity is disrupted when the ancient mariner whimsically kills the albatross. A kind of imbalance occurs in the realm of nature as symbolized by "The horned Moon, with one bright star" (17) accompanied by one star only. Only when he learns to love God's creatures unconditionally there appears one more star to restore that balance, "Softly she (the moon) was going up, / And a star or two beside" (17). This may allegorically represent the necessity of balance or harmony in nature. Besides, the havoc that nature wrought upon the mariners for killing the albatross may reflect the poet's realization that severing even a single link in an ecosystem may upset and ultimately destroy the whole system.

The Sublime and the Sacred: Spiritual Dimensions of Nature

The English Romantic Writers recognized and appreciated the organic connectivity between humans and nature. For example, Coleridge considers human beings not only as parts of the community of humanity but as parts of a greater community that makes up nature as a whole. This made the poet believe, "We are all One Life" (21). In fact, it was a common realization among the Romantics that nature was not just mere vegetation with some instrumental value only. The actual value of nature is, rather, inherent or intrinsic. There are instances of Romantics' belief in the inherent value of nature. In William Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (22) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (23), the central lesson to learn is- in the words of Blake as quoted in Hutchings, "everything that lives is Holy" (4) and William Wordsworth declares in "Nutting": "move along these shades / In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand / Touch – for there is a spirit in the woods" (24). In this way, both Wordsworth and Blake confirm that value is inherent or intrinsic. In the words of Hutchings, "value inheres, in other words, *in* each living being and not simply in the functions it performs in relation to other entities" (4).

Again, Romantics also concentrated on the aesthetic and spiritual appeals that nature affected, further strengthening the bond between them and their natural surroundings. They sincerely appreciated nature's sublime beauty, which gradually became a form of reverence. In their works, they celebrated nature for its sublime beauty and spiritual significance. Often the sublime landscapes presented in their poetry are imbued with spiritual glory. The general belief was that nature is endowed with a spirit that can bring spiritual nourishment to the soul. Nature is a manifestation of "the divine, a reflection of transcendent beauty and harmony of the universe. For example, William Wordsworth finds nature as divine when he observes in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" that "meadow, grove and stream" (25) were all "Apparelled in celestial light" (25). Nature that is illumined with "celestial light", becomes sacred to the eyes of the poet. Again, in "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey", the poet feels the presence of an all-pervading sublime "[a] motion and [a] spirit" (25)

in nature which is "A presence that disturbs me with the joy/ Of elevated thoughts" (25). Actually, "Tintern Abbey" is all about spiritual renewal. As the poet's persona can feel the presence of a divine spirit in nature, his love for nature turns into a kind of worship of nature and he finds his soul to be nourished with "elevated thoughts". The idea of preservation is there, too, as the poem turns intergenerational. Wordsworth passes all his thoughts and beliefs regarding nature to his younger sister so that she can carry them forward after the poet. Similarly, Samuel Taylor Coleridge learns that nature is a greater being where human beings form only a part and develops his "One Life" principle (26). Through such views, the pioneers of the Romantic Movement set the tone for other writers to carry on the belief. Sometimes, these writers express a sense of awe and wonder at the majestic beauty of nature while at some other times, they could experience a kind of spiritual connection with nature. This was true even for the painters of the Romantic Period like J.M.W. Turner and Caspar David Friedrich who portrayed nature with a sense of awe and reverence. Both the landscapes and seascapes in their paintings appear sublime and otherworldly. During the era of the industrial revolution and rapid urbanization, these writers and artists sought refuge from the chaos and materialism of urban life in nature and nature provided them with solace and inspiration. The writers of the English Romantic period responded to these experiences with nature by exploring the ethical dilemmas surrounding humanity's relationship with nature. Often, they portrayed nature as a source of moral guidance. For them, nature had the power to guide, inspire, nurture, and restore. Such an entity had to be preserved; it had to be in its pristine form. Therefore, sometimes explicitly and often implicitly, they emphasized the importance of stewardship and respect for the natural world in their works. In modern-day environmental ethics, stewardship, the careful and responsible management of the world's environment, and respect for nature are two central themes.

Romantic Resistance and Ecological Activism

Since nature, for Romantics, was a sacred entity, and they were concerned for its well-being, they wanted to preserve its purity and integrity. One significant attempt by William Wordsworth may

be cited here. He conducted a campaign in 1844 to keep the railways from entering and affecting the inner sanctum of the Lake District, a mile above Bowness along the shore of Windermere. The sonnet "On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway" by Wordsworth does not only record this event but also urges nature to raise its voice:

Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance Of nature; and, if human hearts be dead, Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong and constant voice, protest against the wrong (27).

Although the poet's campaign was unsuccessful, it was probably the first environmental protest and laid the foundation of later environmental campaigns; as Scott Hess writes, "Wordsworth's defense of landscape amenities against modern progress—arguably the world's first modern environmental protest—in these ways helped to establish the cultural politics and rhetoric of environmentalism" (28).

John Clare also engaged in a similar kind of ecological activism. Clare's poetry mourned the loss of common lands due to the Enclosure Acts, highlighting early concerns about land privatization and biodiversity loss. John Clare's sense of loss is more strongly felt in his works. In fact, the loss of his natural surroundings and the resultant loss of connection with nature is the most dominant theme in almost all his poems. His more well-known poems are mostly protests against the implementation of Enclosure Acts that aimed at converting wilderness or the most natural places into cultivable lands. It was the change of marshlands, bushes, hills and other natural places into arable lands that made the poet write against the malpractice. In those days, his approach was that of an environmental activist who wrote out of his political consciousness against a political act affecting nature.

John Clare was both a poet and a farmer who witnessed the changes in the land wrought by parliamentary enclosure and reacted to that through his writings. Until recently, John Clare had been seen no more than an impoverished 'peasant poet'. John Keats made an observation about Clare's work: "Images from Nature are too much introduced without being called for by a particular Sentiment" (29). Keats seems to criticise Clare's inability to illuminate an explicit feeling or idea in spite of his use of plenty of natural images. It may be argued that focusing only on Clare's rigorous

rendering of images will simply misread his work's essence. In fact, a thorough reading of his poetry shows that his representation of natural space is never just a poetic externalization of a particular sentiment as it is often the case with major Romantics, but a firsthand, experiential and concrete representation of a location, definite and actual, rather than imagined. His intimacy with his rural home of Helpston conveyed through his work was "genuine, and remained consistent until England's Enclosure Acts reached Clare's sequestered village and rent him from the land and lifestyle he so cherished" (30). His poem "Helpstone Green" published in 1821, mourns the loss of his familiar natural surroundings where he grew up and which he loved so intensely:

Ye injur'd fields, ye once were gay,
When nature's hand display'd
Long waving rows of willows grey,
And clumps of hawthorn shade;
But now, alas! your hawthorn bowers
All desolate we see,
The spoilers' axe their shade devours,
And cuts down every tree (31).

Although the sense of loss and hopelessness pervades the whole poem, Clare, like many other Romantics, offers himself as nature's agent to tell mankind how nature suffers at the hand of man for Government decisions like Enclosure Acts:

Farewel, thou favourite spot, farewell!
Since every effort's vain,
All I can do is still to tell
Of thy delightful plain; (31)

Thus, Clare's love for his immediate surroundings and his deep-rootedness in his pastoral locale make his poetry crucial for ecological studies. If we look Clare's poetry through the lens of ecocriticism, we may find important ecological insights which, according to Amanda Labriola, were "the signature of Clare's poetics" (30). Besides, Clare's role in the preservation of nature is no less significant than an environmental activist. His protest against the Enclosure Acts reflects his political consciousness which is reminiscent of modern-day environmental activism.

Results and Discussion

The emergence of ecocriticism in the late 20th century reaffirmed the significance of Romantic and Primitivist literature. Scholars such as Jonathan Bate, James McKusick and Karl Kroeber

recognize the crucial roles played by both Wordsworth and Coleridge in anticipating modern-day Ecocriticism and Environmentalism. For example, Li-Shu writes presents Karl Kroeber's declaration that Romantic poets were the first "proto-ecological" thinkers who tried to bridge the gaps between human beings and nature and reestablished the broken bond (32). James McKusick takes it one step further as he writes in *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (2000), "the English Romantics were the first full-fledged ecological writers in the Western literary tradition" (33). In his article titled "Ecology", McKusick gives credit to Wordsworth and Coleridge in particular, "the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge foreshadows the modern science of ecology in its holistic conception of the earth as a household, a dwelling place for an interdependent biological community" (6). In another place of the same article McKusick again writes, "In their composition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge shared a perception of the natural world as a dynamic ecosystem and a passionate commitment to the preservation of wild creatures and scenic areas" (6). Finally, Jonathan Bate in his seminal book titled *The Song of the Earth*, sums up Romantics' contribution to the emergence of modern-day Ecocriticism, "[Romantic poets] are often exceptionally lucid or provocative in their articulation of the relationship between internal and external worlds, between being and dwelling. Romanticism and its afterlife, I have been arguing throughout this book, may be thought of as the exploration of the relationship between the external environment and ecology of mind" (2). Primitivism may not have as direct a bearing on Eco criticism as Romanticism has, its inclusion is still important because Primitivism, to a large extent, shaped Romantics' views about nature. Their deistic beliefs, their love for pure and pristine nature, their love for the past, and their rejection for modern, mechanical and materialistic life- all had their roots in Primitivism. Jean Jaques Rousseau, who practiced and promoted various traits of Primitivism, was the source of inspiration for most Romantics. He was behind the deistic beliefs of English Romantics. Gilbert F. LaFreniere recognizes Rousseau's "contribution to the deistic nature worship which formed a powerful current in the Romantic Movement" (20). Romantics also learnt the value of the preservation of nature and

its connection with humanity from Rousseau, “he [Rousseau] is recognized as an important defender of nature for its value to humanity” (20). Finally, the exploration and celebration of human-nature relationship, so commonly found in Romantic canon also came from Rousseau as Sara Wellman writes in her doctoral thesis, “Even before the formal emergence of ecocriticism, studies of works like *Julie*, *Émile*, and *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* noted how these texts moved nature into the foreground in unprecedented ways, redefining the human-nature relationship” (34). About fifty years later, English Romantics picked these up. In most of their works, nature occupies the central position and the human-nature relationship receives new dimensions.

The point where Romanticism and Primitivism converge is love for nature. This thesis claims that English Romantics were deeply influenced by Primitivism. However, the nature of this influence was varied. For example, William Wordsworth embraced Primitivism in its literal sense. He took it from Rousseau. In fact, Rousseau had a general influence on all the English Romantics. But his influence on William Wordsworth, among all the Romantics, was probably the strongest. In *Romantic England*, Peter Quennell writes how Wordsworth, at the age of 21, followed Rousseau “Wordsworth was both an enthusiastic republican and an ardent follower of Jean-Jacques Rousseau” (35). About Rousseau’s influence on Wordsworth, he further adds:

Wordsworth, though he discarded his social doctrines once the French Revolution had released some of those doctrines in a peculiarly violent form, never quite outgrew the influence of Rousseau's poetic sensibility. It haunts the pages of *The Prelude* and all his finest youthful poems. He, too, had known the mysterious state of being experienced by Rousseau on the Isle of St. Pierre (35).

If Wordsworth followed Primitivism in a literal sense, Coleridge and Blake followed the ideals of Primitivism in metaphorical senses. For the civilized Europeans, primitives were the “Other”. So, Primitivism could be seen as a process of othering. In the case of these Romantics, it could be that their sympathy for the primitive “Other” was the reason behind their advocacy for the African “Other”. So, the two hundred dead bodies of

mariners lying on the deck in “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” can be a metaphorical presentation of the dead Africans brought as slaves to England. Or, the urge to be free from the white and black cloud in “The Little Black Boy” reflects Blake’s vision of a society free from evils like slavery and racism. Romantics also responded to the calls made in Primitivism to return to the state of nature. William Wordsworth practiced it in his own life by deciding to abandon city life and live at Grasmere in the Lake District for the rest of his life. Coleridge and Robert Southey planned to establish Pantisocracy, a small community to live in close affinity with nature, on the bank of the river Susquehanna. Keats’s desire to live the world with the nightingale or Shelley’s urge to the west wind to imbue him with a new life- all are in the same direction to be in close communion with nature. The lesser-known writers also preferred to have lived very close to nature. John Clare and Robert Bloomfield were both peasants. Gilbert White devoted his life as the reverend of a parish Church and Charlotte Smith lived an impoverished life and practiced what was a rare combination of literature and natural science.

Romantics were known for their great receptive attitude. The abundance of non-European elements in their works is a proof of their non-Eurocentric mentality. This might have been linked with Primitivism again. As a result of the English colonial projects in Asia and Africa, Romantics gathered direct or indirect experiences of Oriental life and people. For example, Lord Byron traveled to the East and had first-hand experience of Oriental life and culture. Other Romantics learnt about these naturally rich places from their readings of travelogues and the translations of Oriental literature. These provided them with another version of Primitivism which they appreciated, embraced and even glorified in their works. They were impressed not only by the natural richness of these places but also by their mystic beliefs centered on nature. Unlike most Europeans, Romantics sympathized with life, people and nature in all these places and this sympathy and appreciation found ways in their literature.

To sum up, Primitivism in its different manifestations continued to impress the writers of the Romantic period and deepen their love for the natural world. In their lives and in their works,

they celebrated its sublimity, its purity, its sacredness and above all, its influence on the mind and the soul.

Conclusion

Romanticism and Primitivism laid the intellectual groundwork for modern environmental thought, critiquing industrialization and celebrating nature's intrinsic value. Their insights continue to influence ecological activism and sustainability discourse, demonstrating the lasting power of literature in shaping environmental consciousness. Modern sustainability debates—such as rewilding, degrowth economics and climate activism—echo Romantic and Primitivist ideals. There have been several studies done to explore how historical environmental movements influence contemporary sustainability practices. These highlight the enduring relevance of Romantic and Primitivist thought in shaping modern ecological discourse. By revisiting these literary movements, we can better understand contemporary environmental challenges and advocate for holistic, ethically informed approaches to conservation. Recognizing literature as a vital tool in environmental advocacy, we must continue to explore how historical texts inform and inspire sustainable futures.

Abbreviations

EC: Eco criticism, PR: Primitivism, RE: Romantic Ecology, STC: Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

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Author Contributions

Zaheed Alam Munna: development of research idea, selection of primary texts, conduction the main literary analysis, wrote the core chapters, guided the direction and structure of the entire

manuscript, Mohammad Abu Nayeem: development of theoretical framework, provided additional literary analysis, helped shape the arguments about ecocriticism and environmental ethics, coordinate communication between the co-authors, managing the submission process, Nafisa Ahsan Nitu: collecting secondary sources, organizing references, proofreading, maintaining citation accuracy throughout the document, S. M. Razib Hassan: collecting secondary sources, organizing references, proofreading, maintaining citation accuracy throughout the document, Md. Mahadhi Hasan: critically reviewed the entire manuscript, strengthening the logical flow, coherence across the chapters, helped enhance the discussion by connecting it with broader environmental discourses, worked throughout the review process. All authors read and approved the final manuscript and agreed to submit the work to IRJMS.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests or conflicts of any kind—financial, academic, or personal—that could have influenced the development, analysis, or presentation of this paper.

Ethics Approval

This is a theoretical and literature-based study that did not involve human subjects, surveys, experiments, or animal testing. Therefore, no ethical approval was required. Moreover, Southeast University currently does not have a formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Ethics Committee for humanities-based research. The study was conducted with full academic integrity and in line with accepted ethical standards for literary scholarship.

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