



NATURE AS MUSE: ROMANTIC IDEALISM IN THE POETRY OF JOHN KEATS AND WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

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Abstract

This research examines the role of nature as a poetic muse in the selected works of William Wordsworth and John Keats, focusing on how each poet represents the natural world as a source of emotional, philosophical, and artistic inspiration. Through the application of Romantic Idealism, Affect Theory, and Ecocriticism, the study analyses four poems from each poet, exploring their thematic depth, stylistic choices, and underlying philosophical frameworks. Wordsworth portrays nature as a spiritual and moral teacher, emphasising memory, reflection, and transcendental insight. In contrast, Keats approaches nature as an aesthetic and sensual experience, celebrating its beauty and emotional intensity while acknowledging its fleeting and mortal aspects. The findings reveal that although both poets are grounded in Romantic tradition, they express fundamentally different relationships with nature. Wordsworth's poetry fosters a sense of ethical responsibility and ecological reverence, while Keats's work invites emotional immersion and imaginative escape. Together, their poems illustrate the Romantic ideal of nature as a dynamic, living presence that fuels poetic expression. This study contributes to literary scholarship by offering a comparative analysis that links Romantic poetics to broader environmental and affective discourses, reaffirming the enduring relevance of Romantic literature in understanding the human relationship with the natural world.

Keywords: Romanticism, Nature, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Romantic Idealism, Affect Theory, Ecocriticism, Nature as Muse

INTRODUCTION

The Romantic period, which emerged in the late eighteenth century in response to the Industrial Revolution and Enlightenment thinking, focused on emotion, imagination, beautiful nature, and the sublime (Abrams, 1953). Some of the most acknowledged poets, like William Wordsworth and John Keats, were famous for their profound reflections on nature. Both poets viewed nature not merely as a façade for poetry, but as the driving force that sparked visions, emotions, and spiritual insights (Bate, 1991). Although both poets appreciated nature, their depictions reveal differences that are the result of individual temperament and poetic ideologies.

Wordsworth, probably best known as the high priest of nature in English poetry, claimed the world of nature to be a moral and spiritual educator. He believed that contact with nature helps individuals grow, heal emotionally, and acquire profound insight into their role in the universe (Gill, 1989). Unlike Keats, who viewed nature with a more aesthetic and sensual gaze, Wordsworth found nature to be a source of emotional and artistic solace. Nature, to Keats, was less a teacher and more a conveyor of art, mortality, and the sublime.

In *The Romantics' View of Nature*, Greg Garrard argues that Romantic poets fundamentally challenged the prevailing Enlightenment dichotomy between humans and nature by asserting

a more integrated, relational vision of the natural world. He suggests that their perspective arose in direct response to the mechanistic and utilitarian orientation of industrial modernity, positioning nature not as an inert object to be mastered but as a living, dynamic presence with its agency and value (Garrard, 1998, as cited in Romanticism and Ecocriticism). Garrard highlights how poets such as Wordsworth and Keats cultivated a poetics of immersion, celebrating emotional resonance, imaginative openness, and ecological atonement, thereby resisting reductionist constructs of nature and reaffirming its spiritual and aesthetic significance. As he puts it, Romanticism offered a counterbalance to scientific rationalism by reanimating nature through creative sensibility, thereby recasting the human–natural relationship in terms of mutual respect and wonder.

Nature serves Wordsworth as a moral and spiritual compass, a nurturing muse that guides the soul toward truth and harmony. His poetry frequently depicts a deep connection with the natural world, indicating that loneliness in nature promotes philosophical profundity and emotional clarity (Bate, 1991). In his opinion, nature enlightens the heart and intellect by offering a kind of inner illumination. Keats, on the other hand, welcomes nature as an artistic inspiration that sharpens the senses, inspires beauty, and sparks the creative. Using the natural world as a canvas on which to investigate themes of transience, art, and death, his work revels in vivid sensory imagery and symbolic landscapes (Stillinger, 1982). For Keats, the muse lives in the brief perfection of natural shapes, in the way a nightingale's song or an autumn scene inspires a lyrical rapture that defies temporal (Motion, 1997).

With special focus on how their work embodies the idea of nature as muse in the chosen poems of John Keats and William Wordsworth, this study probes their writings. Romantic idealism is the conviction in the transforming capacity of fantasy, feeling, and the wonderful features of the natural environment (O'Neill, 1997). The paper underlines both the spiritual elevation in Wordsworth's poetry and the aesthetic intensity in Keats's poetry by studying the philosophical and stylistic subtleties of their treatments of nature. By so doing, the study seeks to better grasp how Romantic poets related to nature not just as a subject but also as a living force that drives artistic creation and embodies the values of their time.

Significance of the study

The study is significant particularly in the fields of Romantic poetry, ecocriticism, and comparative literary study. This study is very important within the general discipline of literary studies. The study enhances our knowledge of how Romantic idealism manifests itself via poetic interaction with the natural environment by looking at how John Keats and William Wordsworth conceive and aestheticise nature as a muse. Focusing on nature not just as a subject but also as an inspirational and inventive power lets one delicately investigate how the poets' minds were moulded by their emotional, intellectual, and sensory interactions with nature.

Moreover, the study helps to continue critical debates on the connection between literature and the surroundings. In an age characterised by ecological crisis and rising environmental consciousness, returning to Romantic perspectives on nature provides insightful alternative ways of relating to the natural world, ways that stress reverence, introspection, and interconnectedness. By highlighting Wordsworth's spiritual and moral view of nature next to Keats's aesthetic and imaginative reaction, the study foregrounds two different yet complementary Romantic approaches that continue to inspire modern environmental thought and literary aesthetics.

Furthermore, enhancing the academic conversation, this comparative study follows the stylistic and thematic differences between two core English Romanticism figures. It gives a more precise picture of how poetic philosophy and personal temperament affect the portrayal of

nature and creative inspiration. Therefore, in addition to improving literary appreciation of Keats and Wordsworth, the research widens the purview of Romantic studies by examining how the muse-like function of nature shapes the poetry, philosophy, and legacy of Romantic writing.

Research Objectives

1. To analyse how nature functions as a poetic muse in the selected works of John Keats and William Wordsworth, reflecting their approaches to Romantic idealism.
2. To compare the thematic, stylistic, and philosophical dimensions of Keats's and Wordsworth's portrayals of nature, highlighting the differences and similarities in their poetic vision.

Research Questions

1. How does nature function as a poetic muse in the selected poems of John Keats and William Wordsworth concerning Romantic idealism?
2. What are the thematic, stylistic, and philosophical differences and similarities in Keats's and Wordsworth's representations of nature?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bate's (1991), *Romantic Ecology* identifies William Wordsworth as one of the earliest ecological poets, asserting that his treatment of the natural world transcends conventional pastoral themes. Bate contends that Wordsworth's landscapes carry a moral and environmental significance, where nature functions as an ethical presence rather than passive scenery. His poetry embodies a vision of nature deeply entwined with human consciousness, anticipating ecological awareness long before environmentalism emerged as a modern movement.

Expanding on this ecological reading, *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics: Affect and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Ottum and Reno (2016), highlights the importance of affect bodily sensation and emotion in Wordsworth's environmental consciousness. Reno, in particular, points to Tintern Abbey and *The Prelude* as texts where emotional response to nature cultivates ecological insight. This affective engagement demonstrates how Wordsworth's work fosters not only philosophical reflection but also an embodied ecological awareness rooted in Romantic transcendentalism. Together, these studies illustrate how Wordsworth's vision of nature is not merely contemplative or spiritual but ecologically instructive, portraying nature as a muse that teaches through emotional resonance and moral insight.

While often perceived as a poet of imagination and beauty, John Keats's relationship with nature also carries deeper philosophical and ecological undertones. Henning (2018), in his study *Keats, Ecocriticism and the Poetics of Place*, challenges the notion of Keats as detached from ecological reality. Henning argues that Keats's sensory-rich descriptions and symbolic landscapes especially in *To Autumn* and *Ode to a Nightingale* reveal an embeddedness in place. Drawing on Heidegger's concept of dwelling, he asserts that Keats's imaginative excess is not escapist but a poetic form of ecological participation. Nature in Keats's work becomes a medium for exploring mortality, emotional depth, and human interconnection with the material world.

Magaw's (1965) essay, *Yeats and Keats: The Poetics of Romanticism*, further highlights Keats's capacity to infuse everyday natural imagery with mythic and emotional significance. Though the primary comparison is with Yeats, Magaw emphasises that Keats transforms both natural and artistic objects into sources of spiritual and aesthetic inspiration, aligning with the concept of nature as muse. Milnes (2010), in *The Truth about Romanticism: Pragmatism and*

Idealism in Keats, Shelley, and Coleridge, offers a more complex reading by rejecting the purely idealist interpretation of Keats. He reveals a pragmatic layer in Keats's poetics, suggesting that Keats combines aesthetic transcendence with communicative rationality. According to Milnes, Keats's representations of nature involve not only visionary beauty but also a thoughtful engagement with truth, language, and existence suggesting that his muse is both imaginative and intellectually responsive (Milnes, 2010).

Trivedi (2022) contributes a contemporary perspective in his article, *Actualising the Traits of Romanticism in the Poetic Expressions of John Keats*, portraying Keats as the embodiment of Romantic ideals. Trivedi argues that Keats's celebration of beauty as truth reflects an immersive and sensual engagement with the natural world. His poetry envisions nature as a transcendent and divine source of inspiration, detached from worldly struggles yet emotionally profound. Although considerable scholarship has explored Wordsworth's ecological vision and Keats's aesthetic idealism, there remains a significant gap in comparative studies that analyse how both poets conceptualise nature as an active muse one that is simultaneously spiritually transformative, emotionally affective, and aesthetically generative. While ecological criticism has unpacked the environmental consciousness in Wordsworth's works and more recent ecocritical perspectives have begun to re-evaluate Keats's engagement with place and materiality, few studies bridge the spiritual ecology of Wordsworth with the aesthetic ecology of Keats under the unifying theme of Romantic idealism. This research aims to address this gap by investigating how both poets imagine nature not merely as a backdrop, but as a creative and moral agent central to Romantic poetic identity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research uses a qualitative, comparative literary critique approach to investigate the role of nature as a muse in William Wordsworth's and John Keats' poetry. Rooted in Romantic literary criticism, ecocriticism, and affect theory, the study examines how these poets imagine nature as more than a setting but an agent, an inspiring force that guides their poetic vision and ethical sense.

Selection of Texts

Eight poems, four each from the two poets have been chosen intentionally for their richness of theme and expression of Romantic idealism, natural imagery, and poetic influence. The poems are:

William Wordsworth

1. *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*
2. *The Prelude (selected passages)*
3. *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*
4. *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*

John Keats

1. *To Autumn*
2. *Ode to a Nightingale*
3. *Ode on a Grecian Urn*
4. *Bright Star*

These poems were chosen for their interaction with the natural world, their philosophical depth, and emotional impact, all of which derive from nature's status as both muse and metaphysical mirror.

Analytical Framework

The research approach focuses on close text analysis, informed by the following theoretical frameworks:

1. Romantic Idealism: To investigate the functions of imagination, emotion, and the sublime in shaping nature's poetic representation.
2. Ecocriticism: Especially in the case of Wordsworth, to examine how environmental awareness and moral consideration arise through representations of nature.
3. Affect Theory: Especially in the case of Keats, to investigate how sensory perception, feeling, and bodily sense are evoked by elements of nature.
4. Comparative Analysis: To establish interesting distinctions and similarities between the two poets' notions of nature as inspiration.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Primary data involves the original versions of the chosen poems. Secondary data entails peer-reviewed learned articles, critical monographs, as well as pertinent theoretical writings that give insight into the Romantic era, nature imagery, and poetic form. Interpretations place themselves in the larger context of Romantic thought and literary beauty.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey”

William Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” (1798) stands as one of the most profound meditations on nature in Romantic poetry. Composed during a walking tour with his sister Dorothy, the poem reflects a significant evolution in Wordsworth’s personal and poetic relationship with the natural world. Nature here is not only a scenic backdrop but a moral guide, a source of healing, and a wellspring of inspiration—fulfilling the Romantic conception of the muse.

Nature as Emotional and Spiritual Healer (Affect Theory)

Wordsworth opens the poem by recalling his past visits to the banks of the Wye River and the deep emotional impression left by the landscape. He writes:

“...felt in the blood, and felt along the heart; / And passing even into my purer mind, / With tranquil restoration”

(Wordsworth, 1798/2004, lines 27–29).

This passage shows the transformation of external sensory perception into internal emotional and mental peace. The poet experiences nature through a full spectrum of feeling bodily, emotional, and intellectual. According to Affect Theory, as proposed by theorists like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Brian Massumi, affect is a bodily and pre-cognitive experience that profoundly influences emotional response. Here, Wordsworth’s language evokes a bodily immersion in nature (“*felt in the blood*”) that leads to emotional clarity and “*tranquil restoration*.” His affective connection with nature becomes a form of healing and grounding. Moreover, the memory of nature’s presence sustains him even in urban or mentally distracted moments. He speaks of how nature provides “*abundant recompense*” (line 88), revealing a lasting emotional reservoir. This emotional and affective energy makes nature a muse not just in the moment of inspiration but in memory and imagination as well.

Nature as a Philosophical and Sublime Force (Romantic Idealism)

As the poem progresses, Wordsworth articulates a deeper philosophical vision of nature, one that transcends its visual beauty and reveals metaphysical insight. He writes:

“A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused...”

(Wordsworth, 1798/2004, lines 94–96).

This “*sense sublime*” represents a key moment of Romantic Idealism, in which nature is not merely perceived but understood as a metaphysical reality that connects all forms of existence. The poet suggests that nature is imbued with a spiritual essence—something “*deeply interfused*” that moves beyond materiality into the realm of eternal truth and unity. This echoes the Romantic belief, shared by Coleridge, Blake, and Shelley, that imagination allows the poet to perceive eternal truths within the temporal world. Wordsworth positions nature as a medium of divine or transcendent communication. The line “*A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things*” (lines 100–101) suggests a pantheistic vision where nature and spirit are one. Nature, then, is elevated to the role of muse not simply for its beauty, but for its capacity to awaken thought, ethics, and cosmic unity.

Nature and Environmental Consciousness (Ecocriticism)

From an ecocritical standpoint, Tintern Abbey anticipates many of the ecological values articulated in later environmental literature. The poem idealises rural landscapes over urban development, reflecting concern for industrial encroachment and ecological degradation. Wordsworth’s vision is rooted in sustainability, reverence for the land, and a critique of disconnection from nature.

For example, the poet writes:

“*Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her*”

(Wordsworth, 1798/2004, lines 122–123).

This declaration enshrines a reciprocal relationship between human and environment, a foundation of ecocritical ethics. The use of “*betray*” anthropomorphises nature as a conscious entity capable of moral loyalty an early Romantic step toward what Bate (1991) calls “*green Romanticism*.” Bate argues that Wordsworth is the first poet to express environmental thinking by emphasising emotional unity and moral obligation to the land. Thus, the poem supports an ecocritical reading where nature is more than symbolic it is a living, moral presence that commands preservation, respect, and ethical engagement.

Table 1

Thematic Analysis of “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” by William Wordsworth

Theoretical Lens	Analytical Focus	Textual Evidence	Interpretive Insight
Affect Theory	Nature as an emotional and spiritual healer	“...felt in the blood, and felt along the heart; / And passing even into my purer mind, / With tranquil restoration” (Wordsworth, 1798/2004, lines 27–29)	Nature stimulates bodily sensations and deep emotional clarity; affective memory sustains inspiration, making nature a muse of both the moment and the mind.
	Memory of nature as an enduring affective source	“Felt in the blood... With tranquil restoration” (lines 27–29); “abundant recompense” (line 88)	Emotional energy from nature outlasts physical presence, supporting the affective continuity of inspiration across time and distance.

Romantic Idealism	Nature as a sublime and metaphysical presence	“A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused...” (lines 94–96)	Nature offers access to spiritual and eternal truths; the imagination elevates the experience into a higher philosophical realm, making nature a divine source of poetic insight.
	Pantheistic vision of the natural world	“A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things” (lines 100–101)	Nature and spirit are one, reflecting Romantic beliefs in transcendence and unity through poetic meditation on the natural world.
Ecocriticism	Ethical relationship with nature; ecological awareness	“Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her” (lines 122–123)	Nature is seen as a moral entity worthy of respect and trust. The line suggests mutual loyalty between human and nature, anticipating modern ecological ethics.
	Critique of urban disconnection and industrialization	The entire poem privileges natural landscapes over city life	Wordsworth expresses concern for environmental preservation and a return to simplicity, positioning him as a precursor to green Romanticism (Bate, 1991).

Analysis of *The Prelude* (Book I and Boat-Stealing Scene)

In *The Prelude*, particularly in Book I, William Wordsworth presents nature as an active force in shaping the poet's inner life and moral vision. Far from being a passive backdrop, nature is portrayed as both formative and transcendent, nurturing the poetic imagination while imposing spiritual discipline.

Nature as a Spiritual Force (Romantic Idealism)

Wordsworth writes:

“Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows / Like harmony in music”

(*The Prelude*, Book I, lines 340–341). This passage conveys Romantic Idealism through its claim that the soul, though embodied in mortal “dust”, grows into harmony through nature’s influence. Nature functions as a sublime teacher, cultivating the inner self and inspiring higher thought. According to Liu (1989), Wordsworth’s poetic development is deeply entwined with nature’s idealised role as a historical and spiritual guide. Nature, in this sense, becomes a composer of the soul, aligning individual development with a universal spiritual rhythm.

The Sublime and Emotional Transformation (Affect Theory)

The boat-stealing episode intensifies this theme of transformation through a sublime and emotionally charged experience:

“Huge and mighty forms, that do not live / Like living men, moved slowly through the mind / By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.”

(*The Prelude*, Book I, lines 399–401).

These “mighty forms” (likely cliffs or mountains) evoke a sense of awe, fear, and moral reckoning. Kroeber (1975) explains that Wordsworth uses narrative moments of emotional excess such as terror and guilt to mark psychological growth. This aligns with Affect Theory, where raw emotional response plays a central role in shaping identity. Nature, in this scene, is not benign but haunting, and its power to disturb the poet’s dreams underscores its affective weight.

The psychological consequence of the act of stealing the boat demonstrates how nature imposes a moral order, even without language. The sublime landscape becomes a silent teacher, instilling a deep sense of humility and moral consciousness through fear and wonder.

Ecocritical Insight: Human Smallness and Nature’s Autonomy

From an ecocritical perspective, the encounter underscores nature’s non-human agency. Wordsworth’s description of the cliffs and water as “forms... that do not live like living men” implies that the natural world follows its laws beyond human comprehension or control. McKusick (2000) argues that Wordsworth’s poetry “reclaims the autonomy of the natural world,” portraying it as a self-governing force that deserves reverence and restraint rather than domination.

The poet’s emotional reaction—shame, fear, awe—functions as a reminder that humanity occupies a small, ethically bound position within the ecological web. This scene, then, becomes a profound instance of green Romanticism, as nature disciplines the individual into moral and ecological awareness.

Table 2

Thematic Analysis of William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* (Book I) Through Romantic Idealism, Affect Theory, and Ecocriticism

Theoretical Lens	Analytical Focus	Textual Evidence	Interpretive Insight
Romantic Idealism	Nature as composer of the soul	“Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows / Like harmony in music” (lines 340–341)	Nature shapes the spiritual growth of the self, reflecting Romantic ideals of transcendence, harmony, and poetic transformation.
Affect Theory	Sublime fear as formative emotional experience	“Huge and mighty forms, that do not live / Like living men, moved slowly through the mind...” (lines 399–401)	The overwhelming presence of nature causes fear and guilt, marking a moment of emotional transformation—key to affective self-awareness.
Ecocriticism	Nature’s autonomy and humanity’s ecological humility	Natural forms “do not live / Like living men” (lines 399–400)	Nature is portrayed as non-anthropocentric and sovereign. The episode reflects the poet’s ecological awakening and promotes environmental respect.

Analysis of “*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*”

William Wordsworth’s “*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*” (1807), often known as The Daffodils, is a quintessential Romantic lyric celebrating the beauty, emotional resonance, and inspirational power of nature. Unlike the more sublime or moral portrayals of nature in Tintern Abbey or

The Prelude, this poem presents nature as a joyful companion—a muse that offers aesthetic delight and enduring psychological uplift.

Nature as Joyful Muse (Romantic Idealism)

The poem begins with the speaker wandering in solitude:

“I wandered lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o’er vales and hills” (lines 1–2)

Here, the simile compares the poet to a drifting cloud, reflecting a moment of emotional detachment or introspection. However, this loneliness is soon dispelled by an ecstatic encounter with a “crowd” of golden daffodils:

“A poet could not but be gay / In such a jocund company” (lines 15–16)

This moment captures the Romantic ideal that nature can uplift and spiritually rejuvenate the human soul. The daffodils become personified companions, dancing in the breeze—symbols of natural joy and vitality. Through Romantic Idealism, Wordsworth suggests that beauty in nature has transcendent emotional and moral power, turning isolation into delight and observation into inspiration.

Affective Memory and Imaginative Replay (Affect Theory)

One of the poem’s most powerful features is its evocation of memory and imagination:

“They flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude; / And then my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the daffodils.” (lines 21–24)

These closing lines show how the affective force of the experience lingers. The initial joy is not lost but stored within the “inward eye”, Wordsworth’s metaphor for imaginative memory. This emotional reservoir is a key element in Affect Theory, which emphasises the body’s role in remembering and re-experiencing feelings. Even when physically absent, the memory of the daffodils continues to nourish the speaker emotionally and creatively. This transformation of physical experience into emotional insight affirms that nature becomes a muse not only at the moment of contact but also through recollection and imaginative reanimation.

Nature’s Non-Utilitarian Value (Ecocriticism)

Although the poem doesn’t explicitly critique industrialisation, it subtly asserts the intrinsic worth of nature. The daffodils offer no material gain they are not harvested, owned, or controlled. Instead, they provide emotional fulfilment and artistic inspiration:

“Ten thousand saw I at a glance, / Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.” (lines 11–12)

By emphasising abundance, freedom, and vitality, Wordsworth elevates nature’s aesthetic and spiritual value over its economic utility. This aligns with ecocritical principles, which argue for the recognition of nature’s inherent worth beyond human exploitation. As McKusick (2000) explains, such poetry lays the groundwork for environmental consciousness by presenting non-instrumental relationships with the natural world.

Table 3

Thematic Analysis of William Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” Through Romantic Idealism, Affect Theory, and Ecocriticism

Theoretical Lens	Analytical Focus	Textual Evidence	Interpretive Insight
Romantic Idealism	Nature as a joyful and imaginative muse	“A poet could not but be gay, / In such a jocund company.” (lines 15–16)	Nature is portrayed as an uplifting companion that transforms emotional isolation into joy. The daffodils act as muses through beauty and spiritual presence.

Affect Theory	Enduring emotional impact through memory	“They flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude...” (lines 21–24)	The memory of the daffodils evokes emotional pleasure long after the encounter, demonstrating how affect and imaginative replay sustain inspiration.
Ecocriticism	Non-utilitarian value of nature	“Ten thousand saw I at a glance, / Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.” (lines 11–12)	Nature is celebrated for its intrinsic beauty rather than its material utility, affirming an early ecological appreciation and reverence for the natural world.

Analysis of “Ode: Intimations of Immortality”

William Wordsworth’s Ode: Intimations of Immortality (1807) is a deeply philosophical and emotional poem that reflects on the gradual loss of visionary perception experienced in childhood and its partial recovery through nature and memory. The poem explores how nature serves as a metaphysical muse, reconnecting the individual with eternal truths and the divine essence of being.

Romantic Idealism: Nature and the Soul’s Eternal Memory

The poet writes:

“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting: / The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star, / Hath had elsewhere its setting...” (lines 58–60)

This passage powerfully encapsulates Romantic Idealism by proposing that the soul pre-exists birth and retains a divine memory that fades as we mature. Nature, in this context, serves as a reminder of the soul’s celestial origin, bearing metaphysical truths hidden beneath the surface of ordinary experience. Through interaction with nature, the poet suggests we might reawaken these lost insights making nature both muse and guide toward transcendental understanding.

Affect Theory: Emotional Depth in Natural Simplicity

In the final stanza, Wordsworth reflects: “To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.” (lines 203–204)

These lines illustrate the profound affective power of nature. Even the humblest natural element can trigger deep, non-verbal emotion and philosophical introspection. Affect Theory helps us interpret this moment as one where emotional response precedes cognition, revealing how bodily sensations such as stillness, awe, or quiet joy lead to imaginative and spiritual insight. Nature becomes a muse through its ability to stir the subconscious, bypassing intellect to reach something ineffable.

Ecocriticism: Sacredness of Nature and Cultural Disconnection

The poem laments modernity’s loss of connection with the natural world, a theme captured in its nostalgic tone and reverence for pre-industrial life. The poet mourns the fading of the child’s sacred vision, now “*apparelled in celestial light*,” suggesting that contemporary adults have lost touch with nature’s spiritual dimension. From an ecocritical lens, the poem underscores the need to recover nature’s sacred value, not just as inspiration but as a living presence that deserves respect, communion, and emotional investment.

By positioning nature as a keeper of lost truths and a catalyst for self-realisation, the ode becomes a spiritual manifesto for ecological reawakening.

Table 4
Thematic Analysis of William Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” Through Romantic Idealism, Affect Theory, and Ecocriticism

Theoretical Lens	Analytical Focus	Textual Evidence	Interpretive Insight
Romantic Idealism	Nature as a vessel of eternal truth and divine memory	“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting: / The Soul that rises with us...” (lines 58–60)	Nature reconnects the soul with its metaphysical origin, suggesting a transcendental function that makes it a muse of spiritual memory and imagination.
Affect Theory	Emotional and philosophical resonance of small natural forms	“To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.” (lines 203–204)	Even the simplest element in nature evokes deep emotional insight, showing how affect precedes cognition and fosters creative and existential reflection.
Ecocriticism	Nature’s sacred value in contrast to modern detachment	The whole poem’s nostalgic tone and spiritual reverence for childhood and nature	The poem critiques cultural alienation from nature, encouraging re-immersion in the natural world as a path to moral and ecological healing.

Analysis of John Keats’s “To Autumn”

John Keats’s “To Autumn” (1819) is widely considered one of the most perfect examples of lyrical beauty in English Romantic poetry. Unlike Wordsworth’s emphasis on nature as a moral or spiritual guide, Keats focuses on aesthetic immersion, sensory richness, and emotional resonance, depicting autumn not just as a season, but as a sensuous muse.

Romantic Idealism: Transcendence Through Aesthetic Perfection

In this ode, Keats does not mourn the decline of summer but instead celebrates the maturity, fullness, and beauty of autumn:

“Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, / Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun” (lines 1–2)

These opening lines personify autumn as a companion of the sun, hinting at a harmonious and divine connection between human perception and natural processes. This personification aligns with Romantic Idealism, where nature is not just experienced but revered as imbued with spirit and artistic intent. Autumn becomes a muse of ripeness, embodying the idea that beauty reaches its peak just before decline, offering transcendence through acceptance of ephemerality.

“To bend with apples the moss’d cottage-trees, / And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core” (lines 5–6). Here, the emphasis on fullness and richness suggests a spiritual or cosmic harmony underlying physical abundance, inviting contemplation of nature’s cyclical perfection.

Affect Theory: Sensory Immersion and Emotional Stillness

Keats saturates the poem with sensory detail, sight, smell, touch, and sound to evoke an affective experience that bypasses rational explanation. The second stanza imagines autumn as a figure at rest, suspended in golden light and drowsy air:

“Or on a half-reap’d furrow sound asleep, / Drows’d with the fume of poppies” (lines 17–18)

This dreamlike stillness is not inactive but emotionally rich. The slow, lingering tone draws the reader into a bodily response of calm and contemplation. Affect Theory explains how Keats’s lyrical imagery elicits a visceral and emotional engagement that the reader feels the weight of autumn’s abundance and quietude without needing to interpret it intellectually.

“Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours” (line 22). Time slows down in this line, and the physicality of “oozings” evokes a textural, sensory immersion, highlighting how Keats transforms mundane agricultural labour into aesthetic reverie.

Ecocriticism: Celebration of Natural Cycles

Though not explicitly environmentalist, *“To Autumn”* reflects ecological sensitivity by honouring natural cycles of growth, maturity, and decline. The third stanza asks: “Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?” (line 23). Instead of lamenting the loss, Keats answers with autumn’s music:

“Thou hast thy music too” (line 24)

Here, nature’s sonic details gnats, bleating lambs, crickets, robins, and swallows form a dying symphony, an elegiac yet affirming chorus that elevates seasonal change into spiritual insight. The poem’s acceptance of death within life and decline within fullness reflects an ecocritical ethic that embraces nature not as an idealised escape, but as a complete system of transformation, worthy of attention and reverence in all its stages.

Table 5

Thematic Analysis of John Keats’s *“To Autumn”* Through Romantic Idealism, Affect Theory, and Ecocriticism

Theoretical Lens	Analytical Focus	Textual Evidence	Interpretive Insight
Romantic Idealism	Autumn as an aesthetic and spiritual muse	“Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, / Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun” (lines 1–2)	Nature is celebrated for its harmonious ripeness, portraying beauty and artistic fullness even at the threshold of decay.
Affect Theory	Sensory stillness and immersive emotion	“Or on a half-reap’d furrow sound asleep, / Drows’d with the fume of poppies” (lines 17–18)	The poem evokes a bodily sense of calm and stasis, using sensory imagery to invite emotional engagement and meditative quietude.
Ecocriticism	Reverence for the natural cycles of maturity and decline	“Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours” (line 22); “Thou hast thy music too” (line 24)	The poem affirms the completeness of seasonal change, suggesting an ecological ethic that values every phase of nature’s cycle—not just growth or beauty.

Analysis of John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale"

John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819) captures the Romantic yearning to transcend the limitations of human suffering through the power of nature, imagination, and poetry. The poem's nightingale becomes both a literal bird and a mythic symbol of poetic immortality, triggering deep emotional reflection and aesthetic escape.

Romantic Idealism: Imagination, Immortality, and Transcendence

Keats's ode opens with an aching desire to escape the mortal world. The speaker is overwhelmed by the song of the nightingale, an "*immortal Bird*" whose music transcends time and death:

"Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird! / No hungry generations tread thee down" (lines 61–62)

This idealist vision elevates the bird's song to eternal art, defying the decay and change experienced by humans. Through imagination and poetic reverie, Keats seeks access to a timeless realm, what Romantic idealists envisioned as the eternal truths of beauty and spirit that outlive the material world. The poem culminates in a metaphysical dilemma: "*Was it a vision, or a waking dream?*" (line 79). This closing reflects Romantic uncertainty, a hallmark of idealism where reality and imagination blur, revealing the fragility of poetic transcendence.

Affect Theory: Intensity of Emotional and Sensory Experience

The poem's emotional force lies not only in abstract thought but in affective immersion, how sensations and moods evoke overwhelming responses. Early on, the speaker expresses physical pain at the beauty of the bird's song:

"My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense..." (lines 1–2). This physiological language evokes affective overflow—a feeling so intense it numbs. Later, Keats turns to images of wine, scent, and touch to heighten sensory experience:

"I cannot see what flowers are at my feet, Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs..." (lines 41–42). These descriptions situate the speaker within a dark, immersive environment where feeling overrides sight. Affect Theory explains how this non-cognitive engagement with the world (through scent, sound, and atmosphere) shapes poetic expression. "*Darkling I listen; and, for many a time / I have been half in love with easeful Death..."* (lines 51–52). The link between affect and mortality is clear: beauty stirs longing not just for escape, but for death as sublime release.

Ecocriticism: Nature as Myth, Muse, and Escape

While the natural world in this poem is less "green" than in *To Autumn*, "Ode to a Nightingale" still presents nature, specifically the nightingale, as a symbolic vehicle for escape and connection. The bird is embedded in its forest world, singing "*in some melodious plot Of beechen green*" (lines 7–8), a setting that evokes the untouched, idealised wild. Yet the poem also contrasts the eternal voice of nature with human decay:

"Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies..." (line 26).

This ecological tension between nature's timeless rhythm and human fragility invites a Romantic ecocritical reading. Nature offers transcendence not through didacticism, but through emotional and aesthetic sublimation.

Table 6
Thematic Analysis of John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" Through Romantic Idealism, Affect Theory, and Ecocriticism

Theoretical Lens	Analytical Focus	Textual Evidence	Interpretive Insight
Romantic Idealism	Nature as muse for transcendence	"Thou west not born for death, immortal Bird! / No hungry generations tread thee down" (lines 61–62)	The bird becomes a symbol of eternal artistic spirit, elevating poetry above mortality and revealing timeless truths through imagination.
Affect Theory	Sensory immersion and emotional saturation	"My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense..." (lines 1–2)	The speaker responds to beauty with overwhelming physical and emotional intensity, showing the affective power of poetic and sensory stimuli.
Ecocriticism	Nature as an aesthetic sanctuary and emotional retreat	"In some melodious plot / Of beechen green, and shadows numberless..." (lines 7–9)	Nature is a mythic refuge, not overtly ecological but deeply revered as an imaginative and emotional sanctuary from industrial and existential despair.

Analysis of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by John Keats

"Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1819) is one of John Keats's most philosophically rich poems, contemplating the relationship between art, nature, time, and truth. The Grecian urn, with its immortalised scenes of nature and human experience, becomes a poetic symbol of eternal beauty and frozen vitality, engaging deeply with Romantic concerns about transience, permanence, and the limits of human perception.

Romantic Idealism: Beauty, Permanence, and Truth

At the heart of Romantic Idealism is the pursuit of eternal truths through imagination, beauty, and emotional reflection. The urn is described as:

"Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (lines 1–2)

This image portrays the urn as timeless and untouched, resisting the decay of human experience. Keats elevates art and nature into a realm where passion, love, and vitality are preserved forever:

"Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss... / For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!" (lines 17–20)

Here, the ideal of beauty is immortal, unspoiled by change or fulfilment. While human passion fades, the figures on the urn remain in a state of perpetual anticipation, symbolising the Romantic longing for permanence in an impermanent world. The final lines encapsulate Romantic Idealism: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye

need to know.” (lines 49–50). Keats suggests that aesthetic experience can access the deepest truths, aligning beauty with philosophical and emotional meaning.

Affect Theory: Emotional and Sensory Suspension

Affect Theory is visible in the poem’s suspension of emotional resolution. The scenes depicted—of love, music, sacrifice—are frozen in time, yet brimming with unresolved feeling. The lovers can never kiss, the music can never cease, and the town is forever empty.

“Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter” (lines 11–12)

This famous line emphasises the affective potential of imagination over sensory reality. The imagined song (“ditties of no tone”) resonates more deeply with the soul than physical sound. This engages the emotional undercurrents of anticipation, longing, and unfulfilled desire. Keats portrays a paradoxical emotional intensity—where unresolved gestures are more poignant than consummated ones. The affective charge lies not in satisfaction, but in the perpetual motion of feeling preserved by art.

Ecocriticism: Nature in Art and the Aestheticisation of Landscape

Though the poem focuses on a work of art, the urn itself is filled with natural imagery: trees, flowers, riverbanks, a sacrificial heifer, and a quiet town. The Grecian landscape is idealised and aestheticised, capturing nature in a timeless tableau:

“Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed / Your leaves...” (lines 21–22)

In this way, nature is seen as preserved through art, unsubject to seasonal decay. However, the ecocritical lens also questions this detachment: in freezing nature for beauty’s sake, the urn removes it from lived reality, highlighting a disconnection from the ecological cycle of growth and decay. While *To Autumn* celebrates the ripening and dying of nature, *Ode on a Grecian Urn* memorialises a nature that never changes, prompting reflection on the limits of artistic representation in capturing real ecological experience.

Table 7

Thematic Analysis of John Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” Through Romantic Idealism, Affect Theory, and Ecocriticism

Theoretical Lens	Analytical Focus	Textual Evidence	Interpretive Insight
Romantic Idealism	Eternal beauty, philosophical truth	“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth...” (lines 49–50)	Beauty is elevated as the path to transcendental truth, suggesting the Romantic belief in art and imagination as vehicles for metaphysical insight.
Affect Theory	Emotional intensity through frozen action	“Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss...” (line 17)	The unfulfilled longing within the artwork evokes deep emotional engagement, revealing how affect is preserved through imaginative potential rather than action.
Ecocriticism	Idealisation and stasis of natural imagery	“Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed / Your leaves...” (lines 21–22)	Nature is aesthetically preserved in art, separated from ecological cycles. The poem invites reflection on the tension between ecological truth and artistic idealisation.

Detailed Analysis of “Bright Star” by John Keats

John Keats’s sonnet “*Bright Star*, would I were steadfast as thou art” (written circa 1819) presents a powerful fusion of emotional longing, metaphysical reflection, and nature symbolism. The poem explores the poet’s desire for eternal constancy inspired by the star while simultaneously affirming the sensual, temporal experience of human love. The poem becomes a contemplation on the tension between permanence and change, which lies at the heart of Romantic thought.

Romantic Idealism: Yearning for Eternity in Transient Love

Keats begins by invoking the image of the star: “*Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night...*” (lines 1–2). Here, the star represents eternal stillness and isolation, suspended in sublime constancy. The speaker both admires and resists this immortality. He does not wish to emulate the star’s isolation (“Not in lone splendour”) but desires its steadfastness in emotional intimacy. In contrast, his ideal of constancy is placed not in cosmic detachment, but in sensual human love: “*Pillow’d upon my fair love’s ripening breast... / Awake forever in a sweet unrest...*” (lines 10–12). This Romantic vision merges the eternal and the earthly, suggesting that love can access something like permanence through heightened experience and imaginative engagement. The paradox of “*sweet unrest*” reflects the Romantic fascination with emotional intensity even in unresolved states.

Affect Theory: Desire, Sensory Immersion, and Restless Devotion

Keats’s language in the second half of the poem is deeply affective, immersing the reader in physical sensation and emotional longing. The imagery of breathing (“*tender-taken breath*”), touch (“*soft fall and swell*”), and endless awareness (“awake forever”) evokes a visceral emotional response.

“*Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath, / And so live ever—or else swoon to death.*” (lines 13–14)

These lines exemplify the affective threshold between ecstasy and obliteration. The poet wishes to exist forever in a moment of intimate sensation, revealing how love and mortality are entwined. The idea of “swooning to death” underscores the emotional extremity associated with affective overload.

Keats’s vision is not about escape from the body, but about remaining in its fullness, feeling, hearing, breathing until it consumes the self.

Ecocriticism: The Sublime and Symbolic Nature

Although not ecocritical in the activist sense, the poem draws on natural imagery to elevate emotional experience. The star is not merely a celestial body, but a symbol of nature’s sublime and impersonal permanence:

“*Like nature’s patient, sleepless Eremite, / The moving waters at their priestlike task / Of pure ablution...*” (lines 4–6)

These lines personify nature in spiritual terms. The waters, like monks, cleanse the earth, suggesting a ritualistic, sacred role of the natural world. This contributes to an ecocritical reading in which nature is not an inert backdrop, but an active moral and symbolic force.

The poem celebrates natural rhythms—breathing, waves, seasons—while simultaneously acknowledging the poet’s human fragility within those patterns.

Table 8
Thematic Analysis of John Keats's "*Bright Star*" Through Romantic Idealism, Affect Theory, and Ecocriticism

Theoretical Lens	Analytical Focus	Textual Evidence	Interpretive Insight
Romantic Idealism	Eternal constancy vs. temporal love	"Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art..." (line 1)	The poet idealises permanence but rejects spiritual detachment, seeking eternity in emotional and sensual human love.
Affect Theory	Sensory immersion and emotional intensity	"Awake for ever in a sweet unrest" (line 12)	The paradox of "sweet unrest" reflects the Romantic ideal of emotional ecstasy even in unresolved desire—anchoring affect in sensual experience.
Ecocriticism	Nature as a sublime, symbolic presence	"The moving waters at their priestlike task / Of pure ablution..." (lines 5–6)	Natural elements are spiritualized, showing nature as an active, almost religious force—a moral mirror to human longing and constancy.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The research findings uncover that William Wordsworth and John Keats both view nature not as a static background but as a dynamic, living muse that determines the poet's emotional, philosophical, and imaginative response. Wordsworth's handling of nature is grounded in Romantic Idealism, depicting the natural world as a moral and spiritual mentor. In poems like *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude*, nature is a source of transcendence and moral clarity. The poet's relation to landscape is reflective and contemplative, characterised by a sense of spiritual awareness and inner transformation. By his allusions to the "*sense sublime*" and to nature's power of healing the "*purser mind*," Wordsworth brings natural experience to metaphysical awareness, a belief in close accord with the Romantic faith in nature as a portal to superior truth.

By contrast, John Keats's interaction with nature is largely aesthetic and sensuous, filled with affective intensity and imaginative extension. In such poems as *To Autumn*, *Ode to a Nightingale*, and *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, Keats turns nature into a symbolic and emotional world, filled with beauty, death, and artistic timelessness. His probing of nature's forms, misty orchards, singing birds, and ancient urns was meant to evoke a deep emotional response and philosophical inquiry. Whereas Wordsworth seeks divinity in the persistence of nature and memory, Keats celebrates momentary sensory experience, transforming it into timeless experiences through imaginative poetry. This affective and sensory excess, theorised through Affect Theory, locates nature as a realm of delight, loss, and deep contemplation, where beauty is found in tandem with decay and mortality.

From an ecocritical standpoint, both poets are making significant contributions to environmental thought, though differently so. Wordsworth's poetry provides an early ecological conscience, with a call for harmony with nature and a denunciation of industrial intrusions. His ideal of nature entails humility, conservation, and the return of things to simplicity, values which are now reiterated in environmental ethics. Keats's ecocritical value resides in his

understated deference to the processes and cycles of nature, as in the unobtrusive plenitude of *To Autumn*, in which the change of season is honoured without sentiment or intervention. Less explicit in environmental commentary, Keats's poetic eye nonetheless reasserts the dignity and self-sufficiency of the natural world.

The comparison discloses an identical Romantic impulse to see nature as trans figurative, but each poet realises this differently. Wordsworth prioritises emotional restoration and spiritual understanding through memory and contemplation, whereas Keats favours immediacy of beauty and the sublime feelings it gives rise to. Both poets demonstrate the Romantic ideal of nature as muse, whether it is a guide to morals or a source of ecstatic wonder. Each of their accounts attests that nature was not merely a poem topic but a living and active force that informed their deepest thoughts. In this context, the research identifies how both poets, though divergent stylistically and ideologically, helped to deepen a cultural and philosophical comprehension of nature, imagination, and the human condition.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the concept of nature as a source of poetic inspiration in the selected poems of William Wordsworth and John Keats, drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Romantic Idealism, Affect Theory, and Ecocriticism. Through close textual analysis, it was found that both poets have a close interaction with nature, albeit in different ways. Wordsworth's poetry illustrates a philosophical and spiritual relationship with nature as a moral instructor and source of inner development. His poems imply that exposure to nature results in awareness of self, emotional restoration, and transnational perception. Keats's poetry, on the other hand, dwells on the sensual, aesthetic, and emotional aspects of nature. His poems abound with sensory detail and emotional immediacy, showing nature to be a source of imaginative enjoyment, aesthetic reflection, and existential insight.

The research identifies that Wordsworth and Keats vary in tone, style, and philosophical outlook, they converge on their Romantic conception of nature as a fundamental source of poetic inspiration. This research adds to Romantic literary criticism by providing a comparative approach that brings together thematic, stylistic, and theoretical examination. It also underscores the ongoing nature of Romantic poetry to modern debates on human emotion, ecological consciousness, and creative expression. Future studies can extend this comparative framework by considering other Romantic poets or examining how nature as inspiration is reimaged in contemporary and postmodern works. In conclusion, this research proves once again that Romantic poetry provides an effective lens through which to observe the changing relationship between man, emotion, and nature.

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