

# Lyrical ballads essay



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Nature and the Romantics have a close, intertwining relationship. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth writes, “ the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature”, that “ the mind of man [acts as] the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature” and this reflects his feelings on the subject; nature and men are tied together with a force that cannot be broken. Wordsworth argues, “ Poetry is the image of man and nature”, this suggests that in his eyes a close relationship with nature is essential to writing poetry. Also *Lyrical Ballads* was written at a time of great Industrial change, when England was at war with France, nature was at risk at the hands of agricultural and industrial revolution.

As the Romantics stressed upon the importance of nature, it is no surprise that Coleridge and Wordsworth drew greatly upon nature within *Lyrical Ballads*, as nature is used to reflect upon more philosophical ideas, such as the very existence of life. Nature is shown to give pleasure to those who experience and are in constant harmony with it. In *Lines written at small distance*..

. ‘ each minute [is] sweeter than before’ presenting an everlasting happiness and also shows the intensity with which Wordsworth appreciates nature, minute by minute. Wordsworth’s repetition in the use of ‘ sweet’ when describing nature in most of his poems clearly illustrates the beauty and delights that nature seems to radiate. Also in *Lines written in Early Spring* The description of the birds hopping and playing through ‘ thrill of pleasure’ presents this visual image of a joyful and energetic nature and by watching these birds Wordsworth says ‘ That there was pleasure there.

Giving the impression that nature seems to share its pleasure and joy with those that are in harmony with it, that experience it. Nature is also contrasted to human activity, it is seen as a representation of the freedom that society has lost through the demanding modern lifestyle. Wordsworth regards to the Gregorian calendar as '[a] joyless form' in *Lines written at a small distance*, it 'regulates' our lives, taking us away from nature and its joyful attributes. There is also evidence within the poems to suggest the poets believe nature has the sufficient power to be a teacher.

Wordsworth says in *Tables Turned*, to "let nature be your teacher" and in *Tintern Abbey* he makes it clear nature has been his teacher. He declares nature has been "the guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul" which suggests he attributes everything about his personality, his very being, to the power of nature. Nature has cared for and raised his soul and heart, and as a man of no religious belief, this poem makes it easier to understand why Wordsworth turned to nature in such a way, why he believed it had such a power. Wordsworth also capitalises the "N" on "Nature" which gives it a power similar to that of God. Furthermore, in *Tables Turned*, he states that "one impulse from a vernal wood" would "teach" more about "man", "moral evil and good" than "all the sages can" - which echoes a belief found in *Lines Written A Short Distance From My House* where he says "one moment now may give us more than fifty years of reason". Wordsworth's strong belief about the teaching power of nature is apparent throughout 'Lyrical Ballads'.

In many of his poems, Wordsworth refers to 'Nature' in a way that equates it with a kind of god, and so could be viewed as 'sacred'. In 'Tables Turned',

Wordsworth claims that nature is ‘no mean preacher’ and advises his reader to ‘Come forth into the light of things’. The word ‘mean’ contrasts the holiness and goodness of nature to the restrictive, dominating force of organised religion, as Wordsworth sees it. ‘Light’ is a traditional symbol of God’s grace, and Wordsworth invites his reader to let nature be their ‘preacher’ rather than God. The words ‘preacher’ and ‘light’ with its connotations equate nature with God in Wordsworth’s eyes. In Tintern Abbey, Wordsworth also names himself a ‘worshipper of Nature’.

The capitalisation in particular is effective in allowing a reader to realise his views of nature as his religion, because it is usual to see ‘God’ capitalised in this way. This shows that Wordsworth certainly considers nature to be very sacred, as sacred to him as God. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge emphasises the importance for respect of nature through its supernatural qualities and at times, connections to the divine. The albatross that the mariner comes across is described as ‘a Christian soul ..

ailed in God’s name’ and the bird is given mythical qualities, heralded as ‘the Bird ...

That made the Breeze to blow’ and ‘the Bird ... That brought the Fog and Mist’.

Its death leads only to misery for the mariner; ‘no sweet Bird did follow’ afterwards. Coleridge’s use of capitals, heavily reflects his reverence for nature since almost all nouns associated with nature – for example ‘Bird’, ‘Sea’, ‘Sky’, ‘Star’ – are capitalised and turned into proper nouns, giving them a stronger emphasis and greater importance in the poem. The

Marinere's story revolves around the regretful action of shooting down an albatross. The albatross is known as a religious icon, 'a Christian soul', wanting to help man should he be in trouble. Although Coleridge was exaggerating when writing the Ancient Mariner, he was trying to convey the message that nature and all sentient life should be cherished, and to be regarded with respect.

However, there is also a cautionary element about nature in Lyrical Ballads where excessive amounts of Nature and solitude can result in harming oneself. This is clearly illustrated in Lines left upon a yew tree in which a man within the depths of nature, is described to enjoy a 'morbid pleasure' he seems to enjoy focusing on his own death and sighs in thinking that 'others felt what he must never feel' the sense of losing a part of life is created; even though society is shown corrupt it is also shown to be essential in life. Coleridge clearly advocates a modest state of mind, the reader is encouraged not to be contemptuous or egotistic to others. Recognising the importance of both nature itself and the idea of man's closeness with nature are essential to understanding the intentions of the Romantics and Lyrical Ballads. Romanticism and Nature are as overtly linked, as the poets believe Man and Nature should be, and perhaps this is where lays the real success of the poems. This obsession with nature stems from a number of places: pantheism, political idealism and a reaction to the ever-expansive Industrial Revolution, and both Wordsworth and Coleridge are certainly devout 'worshippers of Nature'.