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Samuel Palmer’s The Young Angle (c. 1850) is reproduced on the cover courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

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EDITED BY JONATHAN BATE

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EARLY IN HIS BOOK WE HAVE NEVER BEEN MODERN, Bruno Latour reflects on the fact that 1989 was marked not only by the fall of the Berlin Wall, but also by the first international conferences (in Paris, Amsterdam and London) on the global state of the planet. The West began to crow that “we have won the Cold War.” But it also had to admit that “we have invented ecocides as well as large-scale famine”:

The perfect symmetry between the dismantling of the Wall of shame and the end of limitless Nature is invisible only to the rich Western democracies. The various manifestations of socialism destroyed both their peoples and their ecosystems, whereas the powers of the North and the West have been able to save their peoples and some of their countrysides by destroying the rest of the world and reducing its peoples to abject poverty. Hence a double tragedy: the former socialist societies think they can solve both their problems by imitating the West; the West thinks it is the sole possessor of the clever trick that will allow it to keep on winning indefinitely, whereas it has perhaps already lost everything.1

If there is such a thing as a Foucaultian rupture, a moment of epistemic change, then surely one occurred in 1989. What is the legacy of romanticism in the aftermath of this rupture? How shall we reread the romantic poets in the light of Latour’s bringing together of politics and ecocide?

Modern environmental consciousness is traditionally dated from the publication of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring in 1962. The title of that book is a reminder of ecology’s dependence on the romantic image: it is an allusion to the absence of birdsong imagined in Keats’s “La belle dame sans merci.” Post-1989, it has become increasingly clear that feminism and green politics, not any form of Marxism or Maoism, are what will survive from the intellectual ferment of the 1960s. The 1990s have witnessed a burgeoning of such new fields of knowledge as environmental ethics, ecofeminism, ecolinguistics and ecopsychology. Ecology comes in many guises and brings conflicting agendas, yet it is extraordinary how profoundly the romantics

seem to have thought so many of the problems which ecology thinks. For that reason, Green Romanticism will be at the center of any historically-informed ecocriticism.

This special issue of *Studies in Romanticism* does not constitute a manifesto. Different contributors take different views of both "romanticism" and "ecology." The essays are in the proper sense essays—assays or testings of "green" criticism. We have had many readings of romanticism supported by Derrida or Foucault; it is time to try out some readings supported by other thinkers—Aldo Leopold, say, Murray Bookchin, or Michel Serres.

We do not assume detailed prior knowledge of "green" thinking. The opening pages of the opening essay are introductory not just to that essay but to the project as a whole. The closing essay offers a critical review of most of the work so far undertaken in the field. We have deliberately concentrated on canonical texts, such as Wordsworth's "Nutting" (Pite), Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" (McKusick), Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Lussier), Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (Morton) and Keats's "To Autumn" (Bate). "Green" readings of little-known texts need to come after, not before, those of frequently-taught ones. We wish, nevertheless, to register two omissions that we regret: an explicitly ecofeminist approach (though two of the essays touch on ecofeminism) and a treatment of John Clare (though two of the contributors have published green readings of him elsewhere).

Jonathan Bate
Guest Editor

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**RALPH PITE**

How Green were the Romantics?

1. **Green Poetry**

Romantic poetry seems often to express an ecological point-of-view. Preferring what nature can teach to what man has taught, finding true and unalienated life in rural, pre-industrial communities: both of these seem equally characteristic of the Green movement and romantic poetry. Moreover, if environmental catastrophe has been produced by Western capitalism and Western capitalism is a product of the Enlightenment, then the romantic poets' hostility to Enlightenment dualism can be seen as an early version of ecological thinking. This has become a standard argument in histories of the ecological movement. But the Enlightenment is a complicated matter and hostility to Enlightenment dualism can take many forms.

Linking ecology and romanticism looks appropriate, then, but may easily oversimplify both. The comparisons often grow banal. Furthermore, because we can establish such a broad point of contact between the two, romantic poetry is invoked to support any number of different versions of ecology. And the supporting role played by the poetry may reduce it to a secondary status, illustrating ecological doctrine instead of contributing to or creating ecological ways of thought and feeling. Sometimes, in a habit

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of many different kinds. Any poem articulating a relation between man and nature will be, in a sense, ecological. Unfortunately, that definition does not exclude very much of the extant corpus. There are, similarly, many poems written in response to our present sense of ecological crisis. But that sense of crisis is so widespread and its implications so far-reaching that modern poetry in the European languages is almost universally "green," if only in its implicit concerns. On the other hand, there are some contemporary poets whose poetry arises directly out of a particular and explicit set of convictions about ecology. Gary Snyder is perhaps the most famous of these. His work is almost exclusively concerned with formulating and exploring a distinctive version of deep ecology.

Green poetry then becomes either too broad or too restrictive a category. Either everybody is implicitly ecological or only Gary Snyder (and others like him) are truly green. Accordingly, we can read romantic poets either as the forerunners of Gary Snyder or as symptomatic representatives of various man/nature relations. They are inevitably the latter and likely to be read as the former. Through this perspective, however, our relation to them tends to become appropriating and/or objectifying. They fit into our taxonomy of man/nature relations or they are censored into agreeing with us.

Our reading of the past is of course an ethical matter, and not only in what we choose to retrieve but also in the relation we create with what we retrieve. If that relation is one of appropriation alone then it seems, in some sense, uneccological. If ecological history, that is, appropriates voices from the past, it will silence them. Their wildness will be overcome. The silencing resembles the processes of environmental destruction: exploitation, then extinction, then the incarceration in museums of dead specimens. This contradiction suggests that some ecological history may be self-contradictory. It also suggests that in order to have an ecological literature we need to develop an ecological idea of reading both for history and for texts. For the romantics to be green, we will need to read them in a green way.

2. Environmental Ethics

It is difficult, nonetheless, to see what distinguishes a green way of reading from all the others. If ecological thinking and writing are no more than ordinary thinking and writing in the light of ecological knowledge, then they are not intrinsically different from other kinds of thinking or writing. Green poetry will then emerge not as a distinctive category, merely as nineties chic, and the same goes for ecocriticism. This will be true, however, only if thinking is a single and unvarying activity, whereas, in fact, new knowledge does bear on our understanding of thought and even on how we think. Analyzing ecosystems generates modes of analysis that suit those

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2. It is a weakness in Harrison, see Forests 29, and Ivo Mosley, ed., The Green Book of Poetry (Kirstead, Norfolk: Frontier, 1993).

3. See Jeffers, for example, "The Purring-Sense" and "Hurt Hawks"; by Wright, "Australia 1970."
systems. These new ways of thinking can then be brought to bear on
different subjects and throw up new perceptions, or be reflected back on
the habits of analysis which they have superseded. Ecology can help us
rethink the scientific method from which it derives, and consequently,
"thinking in the light of ecological knowledge" may bring about a shift in
moral perspective and in self-understanding.

Environmental ethics is the academic discipline that tries to discover
what (if anything) ecology teaches us, what particular lessons perhaps, and
what new ways of thinking about "lessons." This agenda is by nature
controversial because there is general agreement that nature cannot offer
us moral guidance. The orthodox Darwinian point of view creates a natural
world governed by a single rule. "It is an essential paradigm of nature that
what ultimately survives is that which is best fitted to its environment." According to this, all we will find when turning to nature for our principles
of behavior is the imperative to survive. It is unclear whether we improve
our degree of fitness by adapting ourselves to the environment or whether
fitness is a given; similarly there is no preference "in nature" for a species
that adapts itself to an environment over a species that adapts its environment
to fit its needs. Whatever works, works. If our present environmental
difficulties go critical, then they will prove only that humanity was an
unsuccessful species.

The amorality of nature extends to human nature which seems, when
viewed biologically, to be neither good nor evil. Andrew Brennan, in his
excellent study, Thinking About Nature, points out that:

> If we restrict the sense of 'natural' to those dispositions and characteristics that are simply biologically innate, then not all that is programmed into us is either beneficial or morally worthwhile.

The "relevant evidence from biology and anthropology," he goes on to
say, does not help to prove that

> the act of forming communities of value, or aspiring to be moral persons, or leading a life of virtue, is natural for us, while destructiveness, immorality and vice involve corruption or betrayal of our nature.\(^4\)

Perhaps, though, biology and anthropology are unhelpful guides because
their procedures derive from the alienated consciousness of Western man. Ecological thinking, in reflecting on its own scientific methods, could help
develop a new anthropology and a new biology.

Mostly though, in response to this perceived amorality, environmental
ethics has, like the Green movement generally, divided into two types:
deep ecology and shallow (or light) ecology, which is sometimes known as
environmentalism. The shallow greens argue that ecological science helps
us see the impact of our behavior and offers reliable suggestions for how
we can best alter it. Its scientific method is taken to be reliable. Western
man's behavior, while it needs adjustment, needs nothing more radical for
ecological harmony to be restored. Shallow ecologists will draw on ideas
of stewardship (in which man's role is to look after the planet) and balance
(ostensibly between the competing demands of all organisms; frequently, a
balance between humanity's needs and those of the rest). Neither of these
principles derive from the science and their relation to "nature" is tenuous.

Deep ecologists claim to be in all respects more thorough-going than the
light greens. In their view, the ecological crisis derives from the western
understanding of man's place in the world. The exploitation of nature is
made possible by the false division of man from nature. The division creates
the world as outside the self, as less valuable than the self and as lower in
complexity. It legitimates the exploitation of a servile world and grounds
the scientific method. We cannot, therefore, hope to solve our present
discontents by adjusting the degree to which we exploit nature. So long
indeed as we continue to think of ourselves as separate from nature we
will continue to destroy both. Instead, we must rethink ourselves and perceive ourselves anew as indivisibly bound to the natural world. This
rethinking is an advance on our present barbarism and a return to the
wisdom of ancient peoples, variously represented as Eastern religions,\(^6\)
and/or the ethos of a hunter-gatherer.\(^7\)

Deep ecology is itself varied and contested. Yet, whether envisioning a
technological Utopia (like Murray Bookchin)\(^8\) or a version of Marx's

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5. Andrew Brennan, Thinking about Nature: An Investigation of Nature, Value and Ecology (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988) 90. Brennan argues, however, that human and animal symbiosis as a counter-example to predation in nature and uses it to suggest that nature may not be entirely ruled by competition. Brennan leaves his reader to work out the consequences of this to our view of what is natural. On symbiosis, compare Edward O. Wilson, The


7. See, for example, Gary Snyder, "Good, Wild, Sacred," The Practice of the Wild (San Francisco: North Point P, 1990) 78–96.

embraced the idea of a self-extinguishing identification of the self with all things. He is recognizably a deep ecologist where Wordsworth, the conservationist of the Lake District, can be vilified as nothing more than a shallow green. This is an unfair criticism because Wordsworth’s ecological thought is complicated and intelligent. He resists, I think, the opposition between shallow and deep ecology which modern ecologists have invented, such that although he is not a deep ecologist, neither can he be easily fitted into “the Environmental Tradition.” In what follows, I will try to draw out the sophistication and importance of Wordsworth’s ecological writing, partly through comparison with Shelley.

Shelley’s deep ecology is, in part, a consequence of his vegetarianism. Romantic vegetarians gave up eating meat because they saw meat-eating as the Fall. Because we eat meat we become indifferent to animals and, therefore, to the environment as a whole. By choosing to eat vegetables we will begin to recover a natural and healthy disposition. Joseph Ritson makes this an automatic consequence of the change in diet:

“the abstinence from that habit [the use of animal food] has an immediate tendency to soften the manners, and dispose the mind to receive uncommon satisfaction from the exercise of gentleness and humanity toward the minuteest [sic] objects of creation.”

The result is an “immediate tendency” to behave with “gentleness and humanity.” In John Frank Newton’s The Return to Nature, vegetarianism is again a panacea for human suffering and again it restores us to health, humanity and gentleness. His “return to nature” is, moreover, a redemption of the natural world that no longer contains predator or prey. Newton’s vegetarianism returns us and the natural world to the heavenly state of ethical certainty and mutual love.

Shelley read Ritson and Newton, and he repeated many of their arguments in his early essays, “A Vindication of Natural Diet” and “Essay on the Vegetable System of Diet.” When most under their influence, Shelley erases ethics in the same way, by creating and then relying on the law of nature. In “A Vindication of Natural Diet,” he announces that


we have taken action to purify them. The difficulty of deciding when they are pure is not discussed. In *Prometheus Unbound*, the turning-point of the play comes when Prometheus retracts his curse of Jupiter. This action begins to restore heaven on earth and the new, ideal state which the play describes contains, as in Newton, neither predator nor prey.

Prometheus changes the world by saying "I wish no living thing to suffer pain"—words which echo an ancient, Eastern prayer. 16 although *Prometheus Unbound* is far less idyllic than Shelley's early essays, it presents as an ideal the condition where ethical reflection, restraint and the exercise of judgment have been rendered unnecessary by the restoration of a prelapsarian nature. These activities are surpassed, but it is not clear from Shelley's lyric drama what role they play in leading Prometheus to the point where they begin to be surpassed. Rather, Prometheus has recovered a natural law, and its invocation sets in motion the restoration of nature.

The natural state Shelley envisions is fundamentally pastoral: like Newton's. Shelley's ideal world excludes both predation and human mastery. The restoration of this condition begins when Prometheus says the magic words. Changed desire and changed behavior seem to be coterminus, and Prometheus' speech has an "immediate tendency to soften the manners" of the Titan and of his world. From this moment on, progress towards perfection is inevitable and natural; as soon as the turning-point is reached, then "unsophisticated instinct is invariably unerring." It is not only right, it is so invariably right as to make judgment redundant.

4. The Land Ethic

Aldo Leopold, the great American conservationist, discusses the relation between ethics and instinct in an ecological context and, in my view, in a more ecological way.

An ethic may be regarded as a mode of guidance for meeting ecological situations so new or intricate, or involving such deferred reactions, that the path of social expediency is not discernible to the average individual. Animal instincts are modes of guidance for the individual in meeting such situations. Ethics are possibly a kind of community instinct in-the-making. 16


15. Schopenhauer quotes the same words when arguing that "Boundless compassion for all living beings is the farest and surest guarantee of pure moral conduct." See Tom Regan and Peter Singer, eds., *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1976) 125-26


"The Land Ethic" Leopold is trying to define here means, not that ethics should submit to instinct and be lost in our return to nature, nor that they are surpassed by the rediscovery of natural laws. Rather, ethics may be the way to create suitable instincts for the community in "new and intricate" circumstances. Ethics, the process and results of working out how best to behave, should be thought of as instincts "in-the-making." Conversely, our instincts, what seem like the laws of human nature, are really memorized ethics. They possess no transcendent authority or truth-telling power; instead of trying to recover them, we need to refashion them.

According to Leopold, the refashioning of our instincts and ethics must be conducted in the light of a vastly expanded frame of reference. Our actions must not be judged by their effects on other people alone. We must take into account the effects a particular course of action may have on what Leopold calls the "biotic community," that is, on the whole sphere of the living. By expanding our frame of reference we may be forced to reconsider our supposed superiority to the animal kingdom and to see ourselves as part of a community. But, this changed self-perception does not make us as instinctual as the animals, just as it does not strip us of our real (if destructive) ecological dominance. The ethical capacity is an extension of the instincts; it distinguishes man without separating him from nature. 17

Leopold's is a subtly different position from deep ecology but a no less radical one. His experience in land management and conservation convinced him that without changes in our point of view and our values, conservation was useless.

No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial. (225)

Religion, philosophy and literary criticism have all heard of conservation by now. Ecology is fashionable. There's no guarantee, however, that our discussion is helping to bring about "an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections and convictions." It may be achieving, and even be designed to achieve, the opposite.

To bring it about, Leopold recommends an ecological ethic in which man accommodates himself to the biotic community. He recommends as

intertwining of our passions with natural things suggests an interdependence between human beings and place, a web of interlacing connections between object and perceiving subject which support the existence of that subject. However, in this extract, “intertwining” is the source of purification, sanctification and discipline. An upbringing in the country is purer and tougher than growing up in town.

There are two sides, then, to what Wordsworth is saying here: his vocabulary sometimes suggests that people are bound into the world around them like animals adapted to a particular territory. The passions which form their souls have been intertwined with a set of familiar natural objects so deeply that these objects are part of their being. At the same time, though, Wordsworth uses a vocabulary of schooling and discipline, as if human nature could be improved by the quality of its surroundings. There is a tension here which persists in Wordsworth’s poetry, a tension between celebrating those people, like the “Old Man Travelling,” who seem to be completely “intertwined” with their surroundings, and, on the other hand, describing such dependence on place as morally improving.

This tension, which often appears as a jolt in register, is fundamental to Wordsworth’s intelligence. Both poles of the opposition are attractive: the “Old Man Travelling,” like the boy intertwined with life and nature, represent something of Newton’s “return to nature”: a state of being that is innocently and harmoniously interconnected with the environment in which it lives, and that has recovered the reciprocal dependence of a natural symbiosis. Yet the Old Man is observed by an interpreter who stands outside that state of nature just as the boy is remembered by the grown man. The virtues of the place, its benefits and moral advantages can be perceived only by somebody who is placed at one remove from it. For Wordsworth, that condition does not empty his judging mind of authority or value; it vindicates the adult state. Surprising worth is discovered by his poetry in boyhood games and in illiterate, barely conscious old men. Equally though, and perhaps surprisingly, the poetry endorses the judgments and the structures of judgment that constitute an adult’s perception.

If Wordsworth supported one or other of these alternatives, the nature-bound or the moralizing, he would become either a deep ecologist or a shallow one. The tension that remains between the two creates an ecological perspective close to Leopold’s: people are both the Old Man and his observer, the child and the father, because they are bound up in their environments and yet able to choose between courses of action. The poems

18. John Clare is praised for possessing this point of view by James C. McKusick in "A language that is ever green: The Ecological Vision of John Clare," University of Toronto Quarterly 65 (1991): 337: "Such a deep insight into the symbiotic harmony of all living things is unprecedented in the English-speaking world."
aim to re-establish the co-existence of these pairs without collapsing one into the other. Such a collapse would be a repetition of the problem not its cure. They aim, that is, to create the “Land Ethic”: an ethic governed equally by the environment and by our distinctive place within it, a place that has produced our ethical capacity.

These preoccupations are clearest perhaps in Wordsworth’s “Nutting” of 1800 and relate in that poem most explicitly to the project of his style. Wordsworth describes himself in “Nutting” as a boy heading out one morning to harvest hazelnuts. All his life Wordsworth seems to have been particularly aware of the protection that groves of hazels could lend to a place. The tenth sonnet in Part 2 of the “Miscellaneous Sonnets” begins, “Mark the concentred hazels that enclose / Yon old grey Stone, protected from the ray / Of noontide suns” and it concludes, “Solitary nature condescends / To mimic Time’s forlorn humanities.” The hazels gather round and enclose the spot, making the stone into “the pensive likeness” of a grave and themselves into natural mourners. They mimic human sympathy and Wordsworth feels this imitation not as a parody or cruel irony but as a sign of nature’s condescension to man. Solitary nature does not suffer itself; it is, however, generous enough to recognize how mankind suffers and to respond with kindness.

This is a curious idea and one that Wordsworth slips into the sonnet almost unnoticed. The complication of the relation between nature, time and humanity (meaning here “human behavior”) is presented so rapidly that it sounds like an enigma and, not quite understanding him perhaps, we are likely to pass on quickly to the next poem in the series. Wordsworth’s thinking is so strange because it reverses usual expectations. We would not be surprised to be told that churchyards were laid out like a natural feature, in this case like a grove of hazels, but Wordsworth says it is the other way round; that the hazels have grown in imitation of churchyards. They reveal the willingness of nature to go along with man’s “humanities,” with his impulses of sympathy. Wordsworth personifies nature as a regal figure, unmove yet sympathetic, which is literally benevolent because it desires our welfare even though our harm would do it no harm. Such regality “condescends” to our weaknesses, yet also mimics our acts of sympathy. Nature’s imitation of the graveyard looks, on the one hand, like a disinterested, supportive gesture and, on the other, like a spontaneous repetition.

Wordsworth first reverses our expected understanding of the relation between man and nature. He then unbalances the new relation he has set up. Nature is first our imitator (where usually we are its imitator), then our kindly ruler, and finally our mimic. Two points arise from the sonnet that bear on “Nutting” and ecology. Firstly, Wordsworth presents human behavior as appropriate when nature imitates it. Taken literally, this sounds mad. We cannot imagine hazel trees checking out the latest in churchyard design before deciding where to grow. Wordsworth wants, however, to say something of this kind in order to preserve the separateness and the co-existence of “humanities” and natural sympathies. Human behavior should not be judged appropriate when it is found in nature, nor should we think that the two spheres are convergent. Rather, the enterprise of “humanity” continues as best it can and suddenly finds itself reflected in nature in unexpected ways. According to Wordsworth, these reflections are not replications of human sympathy but likenesses to it. The hazels are like the owls hooting back when Wordsworth’s boy impersonates them. The natural world unthinkingly hoots or simply grows; it happens to imitate the calls we make.

Secondly, though, the sonnet is dependent on something counter-intuitive, even mad, which if expressed directly would have to sound fanciful to be heard at all. The density and sudden complication of the sonnet’s last lines enclose the kernel of the poem as if it needed protection. They preserve an imaginative perception from being exposed as a mere fancy while, at the same time, they leave the attentive reader the chance to understand properly. And, for Wordsworth, this proper understanding is not confined by the normal categories of reason, nor is it entirely mystical. The imaginative perception is continuous with the exercise of mind that reading the poem demands.

In “Nutting” the hazel grove is not only seen but entered. Wordsworth forces his way, he says, “Among the woods, / And o’er the pathless rocks”


22. See Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974) 235, on “Universal Benevolence”: “We cannot form the idea of any innocent and sensible being, whose happiness we should not desire, or to whose misery, when distinctly brought home to the imagination, we should not have some degree of aversion.”

23. “There was a Boy,” Wordsworth, Poetical Works 145.

until he reaches "one dear nook / Unvisited." It is an idylic and, as they say, "unspoilt" place:

    a bower beneath whose leaves
    The violets of five seasons reappear
    And fade, unseen by any human eye

Wordsworth then and for no apparent reason, spoils it:

    I heard the murmur and the murmuring sound,
    In that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay
    Tribute to ease, and, of its joy secure.
    The heart luxuriates with indifferent things,
    Wasting is kindliness on stocks and stones,
    And on the vacant air.—Then up I rose,
    And dragg'd to earth both branch and bough, with crash
    And merciless ravage, and the shady nook
    Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
    Deform'd and sullied, patiently gave up
    Their quiet being; and unless I now
    Confound my present feelings with the past,
    Even then, when from the bower I turn'd away,
    Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings—
    I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
    The silent trees and the intruding sky.—

Then, dearest Maiden! move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
Touch,—for there is a Spirit in the woods.25

(12-15, 28-30, 36-54)

His ravaging of the place comes immediately after his delight in it. "Breathing with such suppression of the heart / As joy delights in" (20-21) luxuriates into ease. In the security of that joy, it seems, Wordsworth attributes feeling to "indifferent things," to stocks and stones and the vacant air. In the Bower of Bliss in Spenser's Faerie Queene (which "Nutting" alludes to in its plot and in its Spenserianisms, "Morley accountrement," "frugal Dame" and so on), Sir Guyon destroys the bower because its beauties are deceitful, its pleasures degrading.26 Wordsworth's bower is perfectly innocent. His destruction of it seems perverse, excessive and unmotivated. It is a "sweet mood" when the heart luxuriates in ease, yet it leads first to Wordsworth wasting his kindliness and second to his violence. Wordsworth remembers his action as being unprompted while at the same time he suggests a link we can develop between the fantasy of intimacy with nature and nature's ruthless despoliation. The one seems to lead to the other; the projection of self into inanimate things is followed by their destruction.27

Thereafter the poem seems to register its uncertainties as a reason for caution. The poem as a whole moves in register from the mock-heroic opening, to the sensuous, almost Keatsian, richness of its pastoral luxury, until it reaches the more restrained directness of the close. "[U]nless I now / Confound my present feelings with the past . . . I felt a sense of pain when I beheld / The silent trees and the intruding sky." The line-break pause between "now" and "Confound" sounds mimetic, as if the speaker is searching for the word which he finally settles on. The question is lent a degree of moral seriousness that Wordsworth's diction would otherwise disavow. The most mundane of conversational gambits ("Unless I'm imagining things, I felt at the time . . .") is taken seriously but because the diction remains so ordinary, conversation itself, the everyday forms of human experience, are lent surprising depth.

Wordsworth's valuing of the ordinary in language and through poetry (which, famously unsettles traditional genre hierarchies) is, moreover, an equivalent to the explicit moral and ecological lesson that he draws from the poem. "Then, dearest Maiden! move along these shades / In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand / Touch,—for there is a Spirit in the woods." Where the pastoral poet pretends that he may look and he need not touch, and where the young boy turns from such indolence to violence, the older man urges gentleness; a gentleness, however, that continues to touch. Similarly, while for a moment you may imagine that the maiden is herself a shade, Wordsworth insists that the spirit of place is exactly that, a spirit. The maiden he speaks to cannot become the natural spirit, she must learn to "Nutting," our own "sense of pain" and our considered remembering.

27. Wordsworth also leaves open the question whether nature is actually vacant or seen as such by the mind when it is luxuriating like this. "Stocks and stones" is a similarly ambiguous phrase since it can imply idolatry (see, for example, Milton, "When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones," Sonnet XV: On the late Massacre in Piedmont (4) in Complete Shorter Poems, ed. John Carey [London: Longman, 1968, 1971] 409). Or it recalls Orpheus: "the mountains moved to listen to his song. All nature seemed charmed and animated" (Lempriere's Classical Dictionary, third ed. [London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984] 430). The idyll in the poem may be idolatrous or the start of nature poetry, or both.
of that pain, give us insight into how we should behave with respect to a natural world that we cannot re-enter and can never leave. Indeed, Wordsworth’s “Touch” urges us to touch as strongly as it urges us to be gentle when we touch. Similarly, his sonnet opens (with a self-aware flourish), “Mark.” Both poems link together the extremes of disregard and identification; they work to overcome both by creating a gentle touch.

Wordsworth’s “Land Ethic” does not begin in a perception of community as Leopold’s does; it starts instead from sensing the limits of continuity. Even if the entire universe is animated, it remains for Wordsworth something other than him. For Wordsworth, it is unnatural to claim continuity with the universe or to claim that one identifies with “all life.” One remains different even if one succeeds in making this identification, since there’s no evidence that rocks and stones make an effort to identify with one. When continuity is impossible (because of language or self-consciousness), it is destructive to imagine it. So, in “Nutting” and elsewhere, Wordsworth seeks a relation to nature that like Leopold’s ethic will re-establish or preserve community.

Wordsworth follows through the argument implicit in “Nutting” in “I would not strike a flower,” written at the same time. Whoever, Wordsworth says, “repaits to Nature as to an unerring rule” will learn reverence for natural things and benevolence towards mankind.28 It is a thoughtful and eloquent poem but a less persuasive one than “Nutting.” Its interpretations of gentleness normalize the idea, intruding on the indefinable perception of what it involves in the same way that the sky intrudes on the ravaged hazel-grove. “Nutting” is more like the sonnet because it offers fewer recommendations or reasons. We are asked to “Mark” and “Touch” so that our thinking, like our feeling, can start to arise out of our relation to the world. What that feeling and thinking will be like, Wordsworth cannot confidently say. It would be counter-productive and contradictory if he did.29

6. Gentleness

Most of us all of the time and all of us most of the time are in a condition of denial when it comes to the environment. Conservationism and deep ecology are both symptoms of that denial. The first implies that by cherishing a few sanctuaries, preserves and National Parks, we can limit the damage our societies are infliction on the natural world. The movement encourages us to believe that the natural and the industrial can continue separately to co-exist. Deep ecology, on the other hand, argues that disaster can be forestalled by an act of mind. By “identification,” we are released from our enslavement to industrial society and restored to natural values and behaviors. Whether or not “identification” is possible or desirable, its political consequences are hard to find.

The disaster, however, will not go away. The challenge it sets us is to face up to it at all. Though Wordsworth did not confront our ecological problems, “Nutting” is an ecological poem because of the clarity and sympathetic intelligence with which it looks into the reasons why we destroy our environment. Wordsworth has learnt to understand some of the motives for his behavior, but his poem recognizes that knowing the reasons is not the same as either knowing the answers or solving the problem.

Leopold’s _Sand County Almanac_ ends by repeating Wordsworth’s final word “We shall hardly relinquish the shovel . . . but we are in need of gentler and more objective criteria for its successful use.”30 He points us in the same direction and knows, like Wordsworth, that it is up to us to find out the meaning of gentleness.

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30. Leopold 226; Edward O. Wilson concludes that “The ethical imperative should therefore be, first of all, prudence. We should judge every scrap of biodiversity as priceless,” _Diversity of Life_ 355. Compare Richard Jeffries, “From the tiniest insect upwards they are so ready to dwell in sympathy with us—only be tendle, quiet, considerate, in a word, gentlemanly, towards them and they will freely wander around,” “Nature and Eternity,” _The Hills and the Vale_ (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980) 303.