Chapter Six: Women and Nature in Romantic Lyric Poetry

When the time came to the end of the eighteenth century a new revolutionary atmosphere appeared in political, social, and literary spheres in the Western world. Along with the turmoil of French Revolution and Industrial Revolution, in England, we see the dawn of a new kind of poetics, which was later named Romanticism. In this new poetics, nature becomes a key factor and compared with the prominent position nature occupies, poems about woman are interspersed in the bulk of Romantic lyrics. In this chapter, the main focus will be put on the idea of nature in the Romantic lyrics and before the detailed discussion of their love toward nature I will first discuss the woman image presented in the lyric poetry of this period. In my discussion of both woman and nature in Romantic lyrics, my focus will be put on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, who, I think, can represent the gist of the lyric poetry in this period.

In contrast to the innovative concept the Romantics have of nature, the woman image in their poems has no significant change. Actually the poem on woman or about woman basically follows the lyric tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and judging from their worship of Spencer, Sidney, Shakespeare and Milton, this tendency is quite understandable. There are many narrative poems concerning women, such as Wordsworth’s “The Female Vagrant,” “The Thorn,” “The Mad Mother,” “The Ruined Cottage,” “Ruth”; Coleridge’s “Christabel”; or Keats’s “Lamia” and so on. Since my interest is in the lyrics I will not include the discussion of those narrative poems.

The Romantics basically propagate the literary heritage of the English Renaissance, and their attitude toward women is also similar to that in the sonnets of that period. Woman, as usual, is beautiful but cold and aloof and the male poet’s
love usually gets no return. Natural objects are used figuratively to depict woman’s beauty, and this figurative usage, as mentioned in those previous chapters, is a deprivation of the subjectivity of both nature and woman, since this connection is only a projection of the male poet’s desire. Besides, woman’s inconstancy is always implied through the male poet’s suspicion, and through this degradation of woman, the male poet tries to show their chastity and therefore superiority to woman.

Woman is not an important element in Wordsworth’s poetry and whenever woman appears, most of the time she is silenced by the poet. For example, Dorothy, Wordsworth’s dear sister, as an important companion in both the poet’s real life and literary life, is always quiet in his poems. In “Home at Grasmere” Wordsworth shows his gratitude to Dorothy: “Where’er my footsteps turned, / Her voice was like a hidden Bird that sang; / The thought of her was like a flash of light / Or an unseen companionship, a breath / Of fragrance independent of the wind” (109-13). Dorothy seems to have no real physical existence to the poet; her voice is like that of the “hidden” bird and the thought of her is like the light or the fragrant smell, hence an “unseen” companionship. Consequently Dorothy seems a phantasmal figure in Wordsworth’s poetry. At the end of “Tintern Abbey” after the poet’s reminiscence of his past, he addresses to Dorothy, his companion there: “My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch / The language of my former heart, and read / My former pleasures in the shooting lights / Of thy wild eyes” (116-19). Being his dear friend, Dorothy, however, does not get autonomous identity in his poetry. Here, Wordsworth claims that he gets the language and pleasures of his former life in Dorothy’s voice and eyes and Dorothy is only the projection of the poet’s former self, “a kind of silent, supplementary support to the speaker’s imagination” (Day 190). Being such an important woman in Wordsworth’s life, Dorothy is still silenced. We cannot hear her voice, nor know her thought in the whole poem. Dorothy is just, As Mellor puts, “a
less conscious being whose function is to mirror and thus to guarantee the truth of the poet’s development and perceptions” (*Romanticism and Gender* 19). The only function of Dorothy’s existence is to be the hidden and unseen companion of Wordsworth.

In the Lucy poems, Lucy again never speaks and we can only know her through the poet’s words. In those poems, Lucy is not treated as a living sentient being but is depicted as natural objects, as flowers, animals, stars, or even rocks and stones. She is “[f]resh as a rose in June” (“Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known” 6); she is “[a] violet by a mossy stone” and “[f]air as a star” (“She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways” 5; 7); she is “sportive as the fawn” (“Three Years She Grew” 13); when she dies she “[r]olled . . . / with rocks, and stones, and trees” (“A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal” 7-8). Yet, she is never a living human being. The assimilation of Lucy to the natural objects “renders her a passive object of romantic contemplation; all the living feeling belongs to the poet” (Morris 25). If nature is female, woman is also identified with nature in Wordsworth’s poetry and those female figures are never presented as unique individuals with complex personalities. The identity of both nature and woman is blurred through the poet’s imposition of his own feelings. In “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal,” Lucy is even referred to as “a thing”. The poet says, “She seemed a thing that could not feel / The touch of earthly years” (3-4). As Morris has mentioned, “The feminine constructed as ‘a thing’ functions like a narcissistic mirror to reflect the fullness and feeling of a subjective masculine humanity. To be male is to be human, to be female is to be other—‘a thing that could not feel’” (26).

In Coleridge’s lyrics, the connection between nature and woman is also common, and as the natural objects women are silenced in Coleridge’s poems. In “Recollections of Love” Coleridge addresses the river Greta “maiden mild”, which
provides “Dear under-song in clamor’s hour” (30) to comfort the male poet. In “To the Evening Star” at first Coleridge praises the constant brightness of the star: “I hail, sweet star, thy chaste effulgent glow” (2). Then in the next two stanzas, while chanting his compliment of the star, the poet also questions the chastity of his loved lady: “O first and fairest of the starry choir, / O loveliest ’mid the daughters of the night, / Must not the maid I love like thee inspire / Pure joy and Calm Delight? / Must she not be, as is thy placid sphere / Serenely brilliant? (5-10). Coleridge wants the beloved lady as chaste and bright as the evening star and wishes that she will inspire pure joy and calm delight as the star. Here it is obvious that the metaphorical connection between the star and the woman just shows the projection of the poet’s desire. In “To An Unfortunate Woman at the Theater,” the maiden, who “Sitt’st behind those virgins gay, / Like a scorch’d and mildew’d bough, / Leafless ’mid the blooms of May!” (3-4), is lured and then forsaken by an untrue man. Then the poet provides a belated advice, saying that he has known originally that the man is not true and the poet definitely believes that the maiden will be wiser since “The strong plume in Wisdom’s pinion / Is the memory of past folly” (23-24). At the end, the maiden is compared to a mute and forlorn sky-lark and Coleridge believes “Soon with renovated wing / Shall she dare a loftier flight, / Upward to the Day-Star spring, / And embathe in heavenly light” (29-32). The forsaken maiden is silenced throughout the whole poem and we can only hear the poet’s unilateral thinking. In the very next poem “To An unfortunate Woman” the maid is a myrtle-leaf while the man is a partridge and this demonstrates the stereotyped images of passive woman and active man. When the partridge gets near, the myrtle-leaf loves “the dalliance of the gale” and then

Lightly didst thou, foolish thing!

Heave and flutter to his sighs,

While the flatterer, on his wing,
Woo’d and whisper’d thee to rise.

Gaily from thy mother-stalk

Wert thou danc’d and wafted high—

Soon on this unshelter’d walk

Flung to fade, to rot and die. (9-16)

Here the woman is silenced and defaced and we can only hear the poet’s description of the woman’s unfortunate experience metaphorically. In “Lewti” natural objects are shown as contrast to Lewti. Coleridge states at the beginning: “At midnight by the stream I roved, / To forget the form I loved. / Image of Lewti! from my mind / Depart; for Lewti is not kind” (1-4). Coleridge uses cloud, vapour in the sky to imply the treacherousness of Lewti. And then two white swans are used to depict Lewti’s white bosom and then at last Coleridge says: “I’d die indeed, if I might see / Her bosom heave, and heave for me! / Soothe, gentle image! Soothe my mind! / To-morrow Lewti may be kind” (80-83). Throughout the poem we hear only the male poet’s complaint of Lewti’s unkindness and treacherousness and the poet’s physical desire, and this seems the only function of woman.

In Coleridge’s opinion, true love dwells in the mind and he says in “Reason for Loves Blindness”:

I have heard of reasons manifold

Why Love must needs be blind,

But this the best of all I hold—

His eyes are in his mind.

What outward from and feature are

He guesseth but in part;
But that within is good and fair
He seeth with the heart. (1-8)

Women, in Coleridge’s poems, seem unable to recognize true love, either because they are too naïve to tell from true or false as those mentioned above, or they are vain and look for the outward wealth or handsome looking. In “Separation” Coleridge blames women because they value higher the outward form than the inward worth:
“The dazzling charm of outward form, / The power of gold, the pride of birth, / Have taken Woman’s heart by storm— / Usurp’d the place of inward worth” (5-8). For Coleridge true love is much valuable than the outward form, wealth, or proud ancestry, so he says: “O! Asra, Asra! could thou see / Into the bottom of my heart, / There’s such a mind of Love for thee, / As almost might supply desert!” (13-16). In “Farewell to Love” Coleridge accuses his love of blindness because she cannot see the truth of his heart: “While most were wooing wealth, or gaily swerving / To pleasure’s secret haunts, and some apart / Stood strong in pride, self-conscious of deserving, / To you I gave my whole weak wishing heart” (5-8). At the end, Coleridge, as a result of disappointment, says: “O grief!—but farewell, Love! I will go play me / With thoughts that please me less, and less betray me” (13-14). Here, the thoughts are actually the thoughts of his love because in the first stanza he says: “And as you shaped my thoughts I sighed or smiled” (4). So, he would rather say good-bye to his love since thoughts will never betray him while the woman will.

Women seem stigmatized in Coleridge’s poems since they are either too foolish or too vain to know what true love is; while the male poet knows and holds true love.

The most extraordinary one among Shelley’s poems concerning woman is “The Indian Girl’s Song” written in 1819, a dramatic lyric, which is sung by an imagined East Indian girl. In this poem a woman’s voice is heard. This imagined East Indian girl, different from those beautiful, aloof, treacherous, women common in English
poetry, is quite direct and passionate. After waking up from a dream of her beloved, she is led by a spirit to the boy’s chamber window. Then the natural scene reflects the girl’s mood and shows her willingness to die for her beloved: “The wandering airs they faint / On the dark silent stream— / The champak odours fail / Like sweet thoughts in a dream; / The nightingale’s complaint— / It dies upon her heart— / As I must die on thine / O beloved as thou art!” (9-16). Then in the last stanza the girl tells directly to her beloved that she will die for his love: “O lift me from the grass! / I die, I faint, I fail! / Let thy love in kisses rain / On my lips and eyelids pale, / My cheek is cold and white, alas! / My heart beats loud and fast. / Oh press it close to thine again / Where it will break at last” (17-24). This poem shows that woman can be true and ardent but this kind of passionate, strong love seems to be found only in the foreign woman. This poem is a contrast to “When Passion’s Trance Is Overpast” written in 1821, which reflects Shelley’s estrangement from Mary during their last years together. The poet says that when passion’s trance is overpast, then all wild feelings are in sleep and he can only imagine the love they once had from what is left behind:

When passion’s trance is overpast,
If tenderness and truth could last
Or live—what all wild feelings keep
Some mortal slumber, dark and deep—
I should not weep, I should not weep!

It were enough to feel, to see
Thy soft eyes gazing tenderly . . .
And dream the rest—and burn and be
The secret food of fires unseen,
Could thou but be what thou hast been!

After the slumber of the year
The woodland violets reappear;
All things revive in field or grove
And sky and sea, but two, which move
And form all other—life and love.— (1-15)

In another poem “When the Lamp Is Shattered” Shelley also mourns for the lost love. A the beginning the lost love is compared to the shattered lamp, the scattered cloud, and the broken lute: “When the lamp is shattered / The light in the dust lies dead— / When the cloud is scattered / The rainbow’s glory is shed— / When the lute is broken / Sweet tones are remembered not— / When the lips have spoken / Loved accents are soon forgot” (1-8). When love leaves, there are only sad dirges left in the heart: “The heart’s echoes render / No song when the spirit is mute— / No song—but sad dirges / Like the wind through a ruined cell / Or the mournful surges / That ring the dead seaman’s knell” (11-16). In Shelley’s opinion, after a couple falls in love, the stronger one will change first and then the weak one will suffer from the loss of love alone and Shelley deems that he is the weak one, and this is contradictory to the common idea of strong man: “When hearts have once mingled / Love first leaves the well-built nest— / The weak one is singled / To endure what it once possesst” (17-20). Here the weak one actually is the superior one since he is chaste while the strong woman is changeable. When love is left in the weak heart, the “frailest nest”, it will be rocked by passion and mocked by reason and then it will be left to laughter. It seems that the male poet is always the one who suffers from the woman’s inconsistency while woman is always changeable and untrue.

Shelley’s opinion of woman changes as he meets another woman. After his
The estrangement with Mary, Shelley once was very close to a couple, Edward and Jane Williams and his series of verse letters to Jane mark his special affection to Jane. And in these verses, Jane is always compared to beautiful natural objects. In “To Jane. The Invitation” Shelley addresses Jane “Best and brightest”, “Fairer far than this fair day” and “Radiant Sister of the day” and invites her “To the wild woods and the plains” (49). In “To Jane. The Recollection” at the beginning Jane is again compared to beautiful days: “Now the last day of many days, / All beautiful and bright as thou” (1-2) and in this poem Shelley reminiscences the beautiful natural scene he and Jane have enjoyed recently. While he depicts the beautiful landscape he says: “And still I felt the centre of / The magic circle there / Was one fair form that filled with love / The lifeless atmosphere” (49-52). The fair form undoubtedly is Jane. In “To Jane (The Keen Stars Were Twinkling)” Shelley compliments on Jane’s singing and while juxtaposing the keen stars, the fair moon and Jane’s singing, Shelley implies they are similar and at the end Shelley says: “Sing again, with your dear voice revealing / A tone / Of some world far from ours, / Where music and moonlight and feeling / Are one” (20-24). An unfinished lyric “Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici”, written about two or three weeks before Shelley’s sudden death, is believed to be inspired by Jane, and Jane this time is compared to the moon but in Shelley’s opinion, Jane is “far more true” than the moon. This connection between natural object and woman actually is a deprivation of the autonomy of both nature and woman. In this connection both woman and nature get no subjectivity and they just exist for the male, for the common element they share and the male desires.

In Keats’s poems, the woman image is quite similar to those sonneteers in Elizabethan Age. Woman is always depicted as beautiful but aloof and cold-hearted. In “Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain” Keats starts with a series of negative adjectives to describe woman and ensures his love to that kind of woman:
Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain,
Inconstant, childish, proud, and full of fancies;
Without that modest softening that enhances
The downcast eye, repentant of the pain
That its mild light creates to heal again:
E’en then, elate, my spirit leaps, and prances,
E’en then my soul with exultation dances
For that to love, so long, I’ve dormant lain. (1-8)

However, Keats still loves a mild woman better because he says: “But when I see thee meek, and kind, and tender, / Heavens! how desperately do I adore / Thy winning graces;—to be thy defender / I hotly burn—to be a Calidore—/ A very Red Cross Knight—a stout Leander—/ Might I be loved by thee like these of yore” (9-14).

Then in the next stanza, Keats seems to value intelligence more than beauty, and this seems somewhat similar to sonneteers’ high regard of virtue. He says that he can forget the lure of outward beauty “but when I mark / Such charms with mild intelligences shine, / My ear is open like a greedy shark, / To catch the tunings of a voice divine” (25-28). In the last stanza, the beautiful woman becomes a weak lamb, desiring man’s protection: “God! she is like a milk-white lamb that bleats / For man’s protection” (31-32); and she is even taken as a gift sent by God: “Surely the All-seeing, / Who joys to see us with his gifts agreeing” (32-33). And the poet also admits that “there is no freeing / One’s thoughts from such a beauty” (36-37). From this poem we can get the desired woman in Keats’s mind: a woman who is mild, beautiful, and intelligent and who needs the man’s protection. In another poem “To—” while chanting praise of a woman’s beauty, Keats again describes his inability to resist this kind of temptation. The poet first “was snared by the ungloving of” the lady’s hand and even after five years he still cannot forget that woman. “And yet I
never look on midnight sky, / But I behold thine eyes’ well memory’d light: / I cannot look upon the rose’s dye, / But to thy cheek my soul doth take its flight” (5-8). Since the love is not returned Keats complains: “Thou dost eclipse / Every delight with sweet remembering, / And grief unto my darling joys dost bring” (12-14). In his “Ode to Fanny” Keats seems not sure of Fanny’s love to him and his suspicion permeates the whole poem. In the third section Keats says: “But, pr’ythee, do not turn / The current of your heart from me so soon. / O! save, in charity, / The quickest pulse for me” (6-8). Afterwards, in section five, Keats stresses woman’s unchastity through the imagined question he puts in Fanny’s mouth: “Must not a woman be / A feather on the sea, / Sway’d to and fro by every wind and tide? / Of as uncertain speed / As blow-ball from the mead?” (4-8). Then in the next section, he begs Fanny: “Then, loveliest! keep me free / From torturing jealousy” (VI: 7-8). At last Keats pleads:

Ah! if you prize my subdued soul above

The poor, the fading, brief, pride of an hour;

Let none profane my Holy See of love,

Or with a rude hand break

The sacramental cake:

Let none else touch the just new-budded flower;

If not—may my eyes close,

Love! on their last repose. (VII 1-8)

It seems that Keats is always suspicious of Fanny’s chastity and is in fear of being betrayed. This reflects man’s innate fear of woman and the chthonian nature woman represents. Women in Romantic lyrics usually have no voice, no subjectivity and we can only find them through the poets’ figures of speech. Woman image in the lyrics does not improve much in the Romantic period.
As mentioned above, a significant one of those predominant ideas in the Romantic poetics is the poets’ attitude toward nature. The importance they attach to nature is conspicuous and extraordinary. Most of the great Romantic lyrics begin with the description of natural scenes or landscapes. Nature, instead of being just rhetorical artifice as in the sixteenth-century sonnets and the early seventeenth-century lyrics, often becomes the immediate subject and important inspiration in Romantic lyrics as Keats in “I Stood Tip-Toe . . .” claims, “For what has made the sage or poet write / But the fair paradise of Nature’s light?” (125-26). The Romantics also capture the sensuous nuance and describe natural phenomena with an accuracy of observation, which can find no match in the previous centuries.

Although the Romantics attach great importance to nature and regard nature as the most important inspiration for their poetry, yet “nature poetry”, once used to define Romantic Poetry, is a misnomer. Harold Bloom in The Visionary Company has questioned the idea that the Romantics are basically nature poets and Geoffrey Hartman in “A Poet’s Progress: Wordsworth and the Via Naturaliter Negativa,” through the analysis of The Prelude has agreed to the critics who have “pointed to the deeply paradoxical character of Wordsworth’s dealings with nature and suggested that what he calls imagination may be intrinsically opposed to nature” (33). As a matter of fact, imagination is another dominant requisite, in addition to nature, in the Romantic poetry; the Romantics believe that the primary power of imagination can give readers the sense of wonder, which is a major function of poetry. M. H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp has scrutinized this shift of aesthetics from mimesis to expressive theory. According to Abrams, from Plato to the eighteenth century, the purpose of art is to imitate nature, just like the mirror reflecting the outside world, and this is the so-called mimesis theory. In the Romantic period, the stress is “shifted more and more to the poet’s natural genius, creative imagination and emotional
spontaneity” (21), and this introduces a new orientation into the theory of art, that is, the expressive theory. Abrams in *The Correspondent Breeze* also suggests that the greater Romantic lyric usually follows the structure of description-meditation-description, in which the poets’ meditation is of more significance than the description of the landscape (77-79). It seems that the Romantic tradition must be made of imagination, not nature.

On account of the antithetic character between the two dominant elements, the external nature and the internal imagination, there seems always a tug-war between nature and mind in the Romantic poetry as Paul de Man in his essay on the Romantic image “Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image” has mentioned that the fundamental ambiguity that characterized the poetics of romanticism results from the theme of imagination linked closely to the theme of nature (24). In the following part, I would explore the Romantics’ dialectic love between nature and mind/imagination from the ecofeminist perspective. I will focus on Wordsworth’s poems since, as a leading character, his ideas take the lead and are quite influential to other poets and in the discussion of the rest poets, their difference from Wordsworth will be stressed.

Since nature is an important element, “Mother Nature” and “Mother Earth” are common expressions in Romantic poetry. According to ecofeminists, this metaphorical connection between nature and mother seems to emphasize and praise the maternal characteristics of natural environment, laying stress on the bountiful resources of the earth which seem never to be exhausted. This symbolic connection between nature and motherhood finally results in human exploitation and devastation of the natural environment. To the Romantics, what they get from nature is the spiritual nourishment, and the mother/child relation seems dominant in Romantic lyrics. The ecofeminists also fight against the value dualisms and value hierarchies
in Western tradition since value dualisms and value hierarchies result in a “logic of domination,” which justifies subordination on the grounds that superiority justifies subordination and the oppressive and patriarchal conceptual frameworks maintain and perpetuate the twin domination of women and nature (Warren *Ecological Feminist Philosophy* xii). Therefore, how to break down these value dualisms and give back autonomy to those which have been dominated becomes important challenge to ecofeminists.

In addition, Camille Paglia in *Sexual Personae* suggests that the connection of women with nature results from their similar procreative power, which is chthonian to the male.¹ In Paglia’s opinion, nature is chthonian and art represents human beings’ effort to give form and order to this daemonic nature. She also makes use of Nietzsche’s idea of the conflict between Apollo and Dionysus in Greek culture and views Dionysus as the ruler of the chthonian and as the potential subversive power against the rigid social norms, which can be represented by Apollo. She argues that “western personality and western achievement are, for better or worse, largely Apollonian. Apollo’s great opponent Dionysus is ruler of the chthonian whose law is procreative femaleness” (12). She further argues that “nineteenth-century aestheticism, a vision of a glittering crystalline world, is a flight from the chthonian swamp into which nature-loving Wordsworth inadvertently led Romanticism” (93). These ideas, I think, are quite insightful and provide a possible perspective for reading Romantic poetry.

In Wordsworth’s poetry nature is always considered to be female and he believes in the maternal love of nature. He uses the female pronoun “she” to depict nature and in “Expostulation and Reply” he uses “Mother Earth” to mean the natural

environment. Besides, in “The Immortality Ode” the concept that nature is the
mother to care for men is even more clearly presented:

Earth fills her lap with pleasure of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a Mother’s mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely Nurse doth all she can
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came. (77-84)

In Wordsworth’s opinion, there is a maternal bond between child and nature as he says
in The Prelude: “Among his infant veins are interfused / The gravitation and the filial
bond / Of nature that connect him with the world” (II. 242-44). Nature is like a
mother, feeding her child, the poet, with beautiful scenes. Wordsworth
acknowledges the mother-like nourishing power of nature and this connection
between mother and nature also results Wordsworth’s demanding attitude toward
nature as Alan Richardson puts, “The image of nursing recurs throughout Romantic
literature precisely because it graphically represents the male child’s absorption of his
mother’s sympathetic faculty even as his primary affective bond is established” (17).

In addition, Wordsworth also worships nature as the Supreme Being. As a
precursor of the Romantic poetry, Wordsworth begins the worship of nature. To
Wordsworth, nature sometimes seems to be the power that makes the world
meaningful, so he thus hails nature: “O Power Supreme! / Without whose care this
world would cease to breathe” (The Prelude X. 420-21). In “The Tables Turned”
Wordsworth emphasizes the dominant power of nature by saying:

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives. (25-32)

The poet denies the operation of human mind and thinks that our meddling intellect
would destroy the beauteous forms of nature. Wordsworth seems to suggest that we
should just watch and receive what nature shows us with no attempt to use art to
depict or science to dissect nature. This viewpoint somewhat corresponds with some
of the keynote ideas in ecofeminism, which argues against anthropocentric
domination of nature. Similarly, in “Expostulation and Reply” Wordsworth
promotes “wise passiveness”: “That we can feed this mind of ours / In a wise
passiveness” (23-24). Nature seems to be regarded as the great mentor and we can
enrich our mind through passive acceptance of nature. Besides, in “My Heart Leaps
Up” Wordsworth even worships nature with religious sentiment and wishes that his
days “to be / Bound each to each by natural piety” (7). It is often believed that in his
younger days he advocates the “religion of nature”. This reverence for nature seems
to distinguish Wordsworth from poets in the previous centuries. This attitude toward
nature also distinguishes the Romantic poets from those in the previous periods since
they show reverence to nature and even treat nature as something superior to human
beings and have faith in the power of nature.

Wordsworth also protests against brutal treatment of natural creatures. For
example, in “Hart-Leap Well” Wordsworth describes a race between a hart and a
knight and after being chased by the knight on the horseback (and this is the third horse that labors in the race) for a long time the hart exhausts his strength and before he dies he spares no effort to leap down a lofty brow to a fountain, which is believed to be his native place, and breathes his last there. The hart’s striving bravery is admired and glorified, but what is more important is Wordsworth’s comment at the very end of the poem: “One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide, / Taught both by what she [nature] shews, and what conceals, / Never to blend our pleasure or our pride / With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels” (177-180). Wordsworth may be somewhat human-centered in calling the hart “the meanest thing” but his idea here that we human beings should not build our pleasure on the sorrow of other creatures is quite praiseworthy. In “The Waterfall and the Eglantine” Wordsworth expresses his idea that all living creatures should live peacefully together. At the beginning of the poem, the briar-rose seems to be repressed by the waterfall: “The Flood was tyrannous and strong; / The patient Briar suffer’d long” (15-16). Then in order to change the situation, the briar tries to persuade the waterfall from destroying him. He emphasizes the happy life they once had and the pleasure the waterfall brought to him and he says: “Nor was it common gratitude / That did your cares repay” (29-30). Then the briar ensures the waterfall the repayment:

When Spring came on with bud and bell,
Among these rocks did I
Before you hang my wreath to tell
That gentle days were nigh!
And in the sultry summer hours
I shelter’d you with leaves and flowers’
And in my leaves now shed and gone
The linnet lodg’d and for us two
Chaunted his pretty songs, when you
Had little voice of none. (31-40)

Later, the eglantine keeps on begging for the favor:

But now proud thoughts are in your breast—
What grief is mind, you see.
Ah! would you think, ev’n yet how blest
Together we might be!
Together of both leaf and flower bereft
Some ornaments to me are left—
Rich store of scarlet hips is mine,
With which I in my humble way
Would deck you many a Winter’s day,
A happy Eglantine!” (21-50)

Though at the end the Eglantine seems unable to survive the flushing of the flood; yet, this idea of reciprocity between living creatures is really innovative and enlightening.

As a precursor in the British Romantic period Wordsworth, because of his love of both nature and imagination causes paradoxical attitudes among critics. In “Two Roads to Wordsworth” M. H. Abrams suggests that modern critics yield two Wordsworths, one is the simple Wordsworth, who is a simple, forthright, great poet of natural man and the world and affirmative poet of life, love, and joy; the other is the problematic Wordsworth, who is complex, paradoxical, self-divided, poet of chiaroscuro, or even darkness. The Wordsworth analyzed so far seems to be the simple Wordsworth, who affirms his love to nature. Jonathan Bate in Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition has applied ecological criticism to Wordsworth’s poetry and argued for Wordsworth’s nature poetry. Bate claims that Wordsworth’s poetry is what we need now in this time of ecological crisis
since Wordsworth enables his readers better to enjoy or to endure life by teaching them to look at and dwell in the natural world (4); that is, he can teach the readers “how to walk with nature” (8). Besides, Bate also puts emphasis on how readers may derive some fresh use or pleasure from Wordsworth’s nature poetry. In the first chapter “The Language That Is Ever Green” Bate affirms the importance of nature for Wordsworth and argues that Wordsworth’s language in his pastoral is ever green. In the third chapter “The Moral of Landscape” Bate argues that Wordsworth sacralizes nature and nature’s sanctity must be reaffirmed in our contemporary structure of values (62-84). It is true that Wordsworth’s nature poetry can help readers derive pleasure from nature and I have been attracted by his beautiful description of the natural scenes since the first time I got to know his poems. And it is also true that Wordsworth always worships nature as a religion and praises every beauteous form in it. Yet, is nature’s sanctity or the pleasure that nature can give is what we really need now, on the verge of ecological crisis? It seems that Bate is arguing for the simple Wordsworth but it is not the complete Wordsworth. According to Abrams, some critics think behind the manifold surface particularities of Romantic poems there is a single submerged plot: “the sustained struggle of the poet’s consciousness (operating in the mode often called ‘imagination’) to achieve ‘autonomy,’ or absolute independence from that adversary which is not itself—namely, ‘nature,’ the world of sensible objects” (86). I would like to scrutinize the problematic Wordsworth to see how he struggles in a dialectic love between nature and his mind and how he tries to make his imagination independent of nature.

In discussion of the complex Wordsworth, a fragment: “Nutting” is very important because it can represent a turning point in Wordsworth’s attitude toward nature. Different from the amiable and loving attitude toward nature, Wordsworth’s attitude in this poem is quite complex and paradoxical. In this poem, Wordsworth
talks about the experience of his nutting of the hazels. There are some opposite interpretations of this poem: some critics view it positively as the necessary step in the poet’s development of imagination and others view it as a typical enactment of male dominance. Inspired by some ideas mentioned in Janice Haney Peritz’s “Sexual Politics and the Subject of ‘Nutting’: Questions of Ideology, Rhetoric, and Fantasy” I will read this poem in terms of mother/child relationship in psychoanalysis. This fragment at first was intended to be one of the “spots of time” in The Prelude but subsequently it was taken out and was published in the 1800 edition of the Lyrical Ballads. This background knowledge assures us of the importance of the “Nutting” event in the growth of the poet’s mind. In the first half of the poem, with sexual terms Wordsworth shows the rude masculine domination of the natural scene.

. . . . O’er pathless rocks,
Through beds of matted fern, and tangled thickets,
Forcing my way², I came to one dear nook
Unvisited, where not a broken bough
Drooped with its withered leaves, ungracious sign
Of devastation; but the hazels rose
Tall and erect, with tempting clusters hung,
A virgin scene³! . . . (14-21)

Peritz suggests that this bower scene is pre-Oedipal and accordingly it represents the first stage of the three stages a child will experience after birth, which is related to Lacan’s idea of a child’s growth famous in psychoanalysis. In this first stage, according to Lacan, the child is born into the order of the real, which is the order preceding the ego. In this order the child experiences a pure plenitude or fullness

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² Italics mine.
³ Italics mine.
and the child feels one with the mother and there is no feeling of separation between self and other. Morris Dickstein uses Spencer’s Bower of Bliss to expound Wordsworth’s unvisited nook in this poem and suggests that the difference of Wordsworth’s bower is that it is deeply concerned with the idea of Bildung (32-33).

Hartman sees the boy’s destruction of the bower as a necessary step in the growth of the poet’s mind (Wordsworth’s Poetry 73-75). I agree this event is an important step in the growth of the poet’s mind because he starts to form the perception of self and sets up his ego and he starts to know the difference between (him)self and the (m)other, that is, nature. However, in my opinion, it is not the pre-Oedipal stage but a turning point from the first stage to the second one, the mirror stage. Here we can see the male poet’s merciless ravage and sullying of the virgin scene, which represents his forming of his subjectivity and his separation from the Mother Nature. Later Wordsworth seems to regret his rudeness and in the last part of the poem he thus puts it:

Ere from the mutilated bower I turned
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw 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. (50-56)

He finally realizes that “there is a spirit in the woods” and he seems to recognize the autonomy of nature. This event metaphorically begins his separation from nature and the development of the autonomy of his imagination. “It is a necessary initiation, and a sexual one, that brings the boy into contact with the vital spirit of nature” (Dickstein 34).
Actually Wordsworth has undergone a complex process in his interaction with nature and the role of nature changes in different phases of his life. In the eighth book of *The Prelude*, just as in “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth divides his own life into three stages. The first stage is in his boyhood when, as Wordsworth says, there are the “coarse pleasures of my boyish day, / And their glad animal movements” (“Tintern Abbey” 73-74). At that time animal activities and trivial pleasure are his main pursuit and little Wordsworth holds only the physical responsiveness to nature. This may be similar to the pre-Oedipal, the real stage of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Nature at that time fills his mind with beautiful and sublime forms to cause him to love them and Wordsworth does not feel the difference or separation between him and nature. As the poet says: “How nature by extrinsic passion first / Peopled the mind with forms sublime or fair, / And made me love them” (*The Prelude* I. 545-47). And this kind of experience nourishes his mind and helps him become a poet. In Wordsworth’s opinion, the presence of nature mysteriously fills the surface of the universal earth with symbols and feelings and therefore makes the earth abundant like a sea:

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
And on the earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
And Souls of lonely places! Can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
Such ministry, when ye through many a year
Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,

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4 See *The Prelude* (1850) “Book Eighth” ll. 340-364, and “Tintern Abbey” ll. 66-111. However, in “Tintern Abbey,” the second stage, when nature is “all in all” to Wordsworth, is subdivided into two periods of time. One is the time when his love of nature “had no need of a remoter charm, / By thought supplied, nor any interest / Unborrowed from the eye” (81-83). The other is the time when he adds thought to sense.
Impressed upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire; and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
Work like a sea? (*The Prelude* I. 464-75)

When he becomes older nature becomes the main concern to him as Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” recollects his first visit of that place:

. . . when like a roe
I bounded o’er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep river, and the lonely stream,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarse pleasures of my boyish day,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all. (67-75)

In his post-adolescent’s days nature is all in all to Wordsworth, but he seems to be driven to nature by something he dreads instead of by his love of nature.

Nevertheless, nature still fills his mind with love and feeling:

. . . . The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By though supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. (76-83)

Here comes the second stage of his life, when the “incidental charms” in his childhood grow weaker and nature, “intervenient till this time / And secondary, now at length was sought / For her own sake” (The Prelude II. 200-03). Now he enjoys nature as if to satisfy a physical appetite, without adding thought to the senses. During the five-year interim, however, Wordsworth has experienced the purifying power of “these beauteous forms” of nature and so he has owed to them “In hours of weariness, sensations sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart; / And passing even into my purer mind, / With tranquil restoration” (“Tintern Abbey” 27-30). This may be considered the mirror stage in the growth of the poet’s mind; that is, he begins his separation from the mother/nature and he realizes that mother/nature and himself are two different identities. “Nutting” should be a poem concerning this phase of his growth.

When Wordsworth revisits the same place five years later, he realizes: “—That time is past, / And all its aching joys are now no more, / And all its dizzy raptures” (“Tintern Abbey 83-85). The joy and rapture brought by pure physical sensations are gone. Now nature to him is not only the external objects but something interacts with his inward mind, his soul. With the assistance of nature, Wordsworth sees the meaning of the external world and recognizes the wholeness behind the miscellaneous shapes. Therefore, all the external things mingle into one song. “One song they sang, and it was audible, / Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear, / O’ercome by humblest prelude of that strain, / Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed” (The Prelude II. 415-18). Steeped in nature, Wordsworth learns to feel the life of things by heart instead of by the bodily senses. Only when the bodily senses are no longer dominant, can the poet see the wholeness behind the sundry scenes. As Wordsworth says in “Tintern Abbey”:
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things. (43-49)

In Wordsworth’s opinion, the external forms, through the mutual influence between him and nature, are no longer objective because they can arouse reciprocal power in the poet’s mind. This is the third stage and this is the important stage for the building of Wordsworth’s imagination and Wordsworth the poet gradually develops the autonomy of his imagination.

In this phase of lifetime, Wordsworth thinks that he is both a receiver and creator in this kind of reciprocal relationship with nature. Nature presents beautiful scenes before him, and at the same time, man’s mind or imagination gives life to the outside world. He says: “For feeling has to him imparted power / That through the growing faculties of sense / Doth like an agent of the one great Mind / Create, creator and receiver both, / Working but in alliance with the works / Which it beholds . . . .” (The Prelude II. 255-60). According to Wordsworth, in this phase when nature becomes “all in all” to him, he still possesses his infantile creative sensibility, which sometimes is capricious and uncomfortable with the general rule. Yet, by subordination to nature, this creativity can be stabilized. The poet reports: “A plastic power / Abode with me; a forming hand, at times / Rebellious, acting in a devious mood; / A local spirit of his own, at war / With general tendency, but, for the most, / Subservient strictly to external things / With which it communed” (The Prelude II. 362-68). On the other hand, however, nature also must be subordinate to his creative sensibility
and then every outward shape to him is full of life. The poet remembers, “An auxiliary light / Came from my mind, which on the setting sun / Bestowed new splendour” (*The Prelude* II. 368-70). Under the influence of this light from his mind, the birds, the breezes, the fountains “obeyed / A like dominion” and “[h]ence my obeisance, my devotion hence, / And hence my transport” (*The Prelude* II. 376-77). Wordsworth always emphasizes the great influence of nature on his poetic spirit and he also reiterates the reciprocal relationship and the mutual interdependence between nature and him, the poet. He admires the power of nature but as a poet he also values his own imagination and this conflict between nature and his imagination becomes the main theme in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth’s autobiographical epic and his crowning achievement, also titled *Growth of a Poet’s Mind*.

In *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814*, Hartman has scrutinized the conflict between imagination and nature presented in *The Prelude*. Here I would stress on the climatic ascent of Mount Snowdon in the last book of *The Prelude* because I hold a different understanding from that of Hartman’s. Hartman thinks that the whole event represents “a true ‘mounting of the mind’; it is also a culmination evidence that imagination and the light of nature are one” (*Wordsworth’s Poetry* 60). Actually, in my opinion, the ascent of Snowdon represents Wordsworth’s idea that the higher mind of human beings is more powerful than the power of nature since only the mind can give life to the outside world.

In the beginning of the Fourteenth Book, the poet states that in order to see the sunrise from the summit of Snowdon, at couching time he starts to climb the mountain with a youthful friend and a guide. While ascending, the mist soon surrounds them. After a while, the poet chances to climb ahead of the others, and he consequently sees first the earth brightened by a light which shines on the ground like a flash. As he looks up, “The Moon hung naked in a firmament / Of azure without
cloud, and at my feet / Rested a silent sea of hoary mist” (*The Prelude* XIV. 40-42). Because of the stretching mist, the Atlantic is covered by the solid vapour. This mist is the symbol of the poet’s imagination, his creative power and “[this] creative energy can be blinding and bewildering” (Prickett 97), since the poet’s creativity can be a kind of usurpation of the natural surroundings. The poet thus describes: “Far, far beyond, the solid vapours stretched, / In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes, / Into the main Atlantic, that appeared / To dwindle, and give up his majesty, / Usurped upon far as the sight could reach” (*The Prelude* XIV. 45-49). Under the power of the poet’s imagination, even the big Atlantic gives up his majesty. Though the roar of the waters can be heard from a rift, yet no one can see the torrents. Opposite to the Atlantic, the sky, however, is clear without any encroachment, except “the clear presence of the full-orbed Moon, / Who, from her sovereign elevation, gazed / Upon the billowy ocean, as it lay / All meek and silent” (*The Prelude* XIV. 53-56). After the vision dissolves into the air, the poet himself reflects in tranquility, and regards the Moon as “the emblem of a mind

That feeds upon infinity, that broods

Over the dark abyss, intent to hear

Its voices issuing forth to silent light

In one continuous stream; a mind sustained

By recognitions of transcendent power,

In sense conduction to ideal form,

In soul of more than moral privilege. (*The Prelude* XIV. 70-77)

In Wordsworth’s opinion, a mind which is nourished by “the transcendent power” can convert sensory objects into ideal forms, and “the transcendent power” is imagination. Amid awful and sublime circumstances, nature can make the outward things endowed with “interchangeable supremacy,” so that even least sensitive men can see, hear,
perceive, and feel. The sea of mist, for example, has changed the scene of Snowdon and occupies the sovereignty of the real sea. Nature makes the interaction between the outside world and the mind possible. Yet, at the same time, nature is also subordinate to imagination, which, according to Wordsworth, can endow nature with life. Wordsworth thinks that only people with higher minds have imagination, the glorious faculty, and they always deal with the universe in this spirit. With this faculty, the minds can project “kindred mutations” to the outside world, and create a “like existence,” so that “they build up greatest things / From least suggestion” (*The Prelude* XIV. 101-02). These higher minds live in a world of life because they can give life to the outside world; they can transcend the bodily senses and communicate with the spiritual world; therefore, they can reach eternity. The poet explains:

Such minds are truly from the Deity,
For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss
That flesh can know is theirs—the consciousness
Of whom they are, habitually infused
Through every image and through every thought
And all affections, by communion raised
From earth to heaven, from human to divine. (*The Prelude* XIV. 112-18)

No doubt, Wordsworth cherishes nature and the role nature plays as his poetical inspiration; yet after a long dialectical struggle between nature and mind, he finally still holds human mind in a higher regard. *The Prelude* ends with the Restoration of Imagination:

... the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, ’mid all revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine. (XIV. 450-56)

For Wordsworth the mind is more magnificent than nature. Therefore, in his letter to Wrangham of January, 1816, Wordsworth himself writes:

Throughout, objects . . . derive their influence not from properties inherent in them, not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects. Thus the Poetry . . . proceeds whence it ought to do, from the soul of Man, communicating its creative energies to the images of the external world.

In “Prospectus to The Recluse” he consequently says “… the Mind of man—/ My haunt, and the main region of my song” (40-41). In the same poem Wordsworth also expresses his belief that Paradise can be regained by the marriage of the “intellect of Man” and “this goodly universe”:

How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:—and exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish:—this is our high argument. (63-71)

It should be noticed that nature here is not the nature of the universe in itself but the nature in its relation to man. Wordsworth wants to praise the glory of nature but he
also cannot forget the molding ability of his mind, or imagination. De Man mentions in “Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image” that there is a “fundamental ambiguity” or “tension” that “never cease to be problematic” in Romantics attempts to link the polarities of imagination and nature (24). Accordingly, in most of Wordsworth’s poems on nature and mind, we see the conflict, instead of marriage, between the two. As Geoffrey Hartman says:

One part of him said, leave nature and cleave to imagination. The other part, fearing that imagination could not be cleaved to, indeed that it would take him beyond human-heartedness even out of this world, answered, cleave to nature and leave vision and romance, those errors of the childhood of poetry. (Wordsworth’s Poetry)

Therefore, The Prelude, though deals chiefly with nature, is a study of the imagination, and how nature serves the need of the human spirit.

Besides, in “Prospectus to The Recluse” Wordsworth expresses his belief that the marriage between nature and mind can help man regain the lost paradise:

Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main—why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day. (47-55)

In The Visionary Company Bloom analyzes the inter-relationship between mind and nature in Wordsworth’s poems and suggests that imagination in Wordsworth’s works
is expected to be a bridge between the poet, the subject and nature, the object; that is, imagination should integrate nature and the poet. Therefore, in his career as a poet, Wordsworth tries to wed “the discerning intellect of Man” to “this goodly universe.” However Wordsworth’s attempt seems to be a failure, though his poems are great and beautiful. In my opinion, Wordsworth does not really wed the mind to “this goodly universe.” He just appropriates nature through his subjective thinking or imagination and his description of nature is based on the anthropocentric bias. In his poems the masculine imagination always speaks for the feminine nature.

The most conspicuous anthropocentric appropriation of nature can be seen in Wordsworth’s belief in “this goodly universe” and the opposition between human suffering and natural comfort presented in his poems. An obvious example is in “Intimation Ode” in which Wordsworth postulates the idea that we human beings come from the imperial palace of heaven and the process of growing is the process of forgetting. In Wordsworth’s opinion, “The Child is Father of the Man” (“My Heart Leaps Up” 6) because the child is closer to the glory and freshness of the pre-existence and growing up is a process of loss. In order to help human beings forget the glory of our pre-existence, the earth, or the nature, Wordsworth believes, tries her best to give us pleasure:

Earth fills her lap with pleasure of her own;

Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,

And, even with something of a Mother’s mind,

And no unworthy aim,

The homely Nurse doth all she can

To make her Forster-child, her Inmate Man,

Forget the glories he hath known,

And that imperial palace whence he came. (77-84)
The glory that is lost can never be found again but Wordsworth is not pessimistic; he thinks, “Though nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower; / We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind” (“The Intimation Ode” 177-80). Part of what remains behind in which he can find strength is “years that bring the philosophic mind” (“The Intimation Ode” 186). To Wordsworth, the philosophic mind, the discursive understanding, is one of the means that help the poet find the lost visionary gleam he once knew. Maybe because of this belief, Wordsworth makes every effort to exhibit the beauuteous nature.

Thus nature is always endowed with happiness and pleasure in Wordsworth’s poems. He intentionally ignores the wild, violent, uncontrollable side of nature. As Raymond Dexter Havens says:

... it seems strange that Wordsworth could have closed his eyes to the many aspects of the physical world which are unpleasant or which do not fit in with his preconceptions. We have seen that he ignored sudden, cataclysmic changes, such as floods, fires, and earthquakes, as well as the short life of most plans and animals, and dwelt upon the permanence, moderation, and regularity of nature. (114)

Havens, however, does not explain the reason that Wordsworth deliberately ignores the unpleasant aspects of the physical world. In my opinion, Wordsworth makes use of some aspects of natural scenes to create a preferable world, in which the mind, by means of imagination, builds a secluded natural nook inside him and help him evade “the sad music of humanity”. We can find quite a few examples in Wordsworth’s poems that play “the sad music of humanity”. In some of Wordsworth’s famous ballads, such as “Michael,” “The Ruined Cottage,” “The Female Vagrant,” “The Thorn,” “The Mad Mother,” “The Last of the Flock,” “Ruth,” human suffering and grief is depicted. The political and social upheaval, caused by French Revolution
and Industrial Revolution, at that time resulted in agitation and disquiet, which must have depressed Wordsworth a lot. Thanks to the nourishing and comforting nature, Wordsworth can find peace in his mind. In “To My Sister” Wordsworth asks his sister and brother to come out to the field to enjoy the greenness of spring:

Love, now an universal birth,

From heart to heart is stealing,

From earth to man, from man to earth,

--It is the hour of feeling.

One moment now may give us more

Than fifty years of reason;

Our minds shall drink at every pore

The spirit of the season. (21-28)

So, the mind should drink from “the spirit of the season” to get the nourishment that is “more than fifty years of reason” and this is the function of those beauteous natural objects. In “Lines Written near Richmond, upon the Thames at Evening” the contrast between the grief and pain in the human world and the gleam and peace in the natural scene is deliberately presented. While viewing the beautiful sunset upon the Thames in a summer, Wordsworth says:

Such views the youthful bard allure,

But, heedless of the following gloom,

He deems their colours shall endure

'Till peace go with him to the tomb.

--And let him nurse his fond deceit,

And what if he must die in sorrow!

Who would not cherish dreams so sweet,
Though grief and pain may come to-morrow? (9-16)

After viewing such a beautiful, dream-like natural scene, the youthful bard, “heedless of the following gloom”, is lured to believe that he can have this peace even after his death. To Wordsworth the natural world has the immortality that man lacks but forever pursuits and only through the purgation of the natural scene can man possibly get close to that immortality, which comforts him and soothes his sorrow. Therefore Wordsworth invokes the Thames:

Glide gently, thus for ever glide,
O Thames! That other bards may see,
As lovely visions by thy side
As now, fair river! Come to me.
Oh glide, fair stream! For ever so;
Thy quiet soul on all bestowing,
’Till all our minds for ever flow,
As thy deep waters now are flowing. (17-24)

Wordsworth, the subject, addresses the river, the object and asks its favor to enrich the human mind and make it flow forever. The gap between the subject and the object is quite common in Wordsworth’s poetry and he has never really succeeds in bridging the gap. Sometimes the beauty and peace in the natural world reminds Wordsworth of the sorrowful human world, which is a sharp contrast to the comfort nature can bring. In “Lines Written in Early Spring” Wordsworth says:

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.
To her fair works did nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it griev’d my heart to think
What man has made of man. (1-8)

And in the next four stanzas of this poem, in order to stress the distinction between nature and the human world, Wordsworth says:

Through primrose-tufts, in that sweet bower,
The periwinkle trail’d its wreathes;
And ’tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopp’d and play’d:
Their thoughts I cannot measure,
But the least motion which they made,
It seem’d a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

If I these thought may not prevent,
If such be of my creed the plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man? (9-24)

Wordsworth supposes that the flowers, the birds, and the budding twigs present a
picture of pleasure and enjoyment. Through the interaction between his mind and nature he finds an immanent presence, which exists in the elements of the external world. In Wordsworth's poetry, this immanent presence, this sense of life in natural objects, instead of a metaphor for rhetoric, is regarded almost as literal truth. Yet, how does he know the feeling of those natural objects? Actually Wordsworth projects his own pleasure caused by the landscape onto those flowers, birds and twigs. Wordsworth intentionally personifies those natural objects to create a beautiful and peaceful nook in his mind to evade the sorrow in the human world. Maybe as Havens suggests, “At times Wordsworth’s personification of external nature merges with, or is expressed in a way that suggests, belief in Mother Earth . . .” (74). However, in ecofeminist point of view, the personification of natural objects represents a kind of human domination over nature since we impose on the natural world the human standard of value. Undoubtedly Wordsworth has a great regard for nature’s surpassing power and deliberately juxtaposes the comforting nature with the suffering human world, but through imagination, his mind chooses, cuts, and reorganizes the natural scene to create a secluded and secure spot in him to soothe his grief and sorrow felt in this human world. As Val Plumwood says, when criticizing pantheism, “Nature is treated as fully sentient and as having, through its possession of spirit, human qualities. In this case there is no recognition of difference. Nature is anthropomorphized in fact or fancy, and the human is taken as the basic model. Such a position does not succeed in genuinely escaping a dualistic model” (Feminism and the Mastery of Nature 127). This is obviously his subjective appropriation of nature.

Wordsworth’s anthropocentric appropriation of nature can also be seen in the subjective wording he uses in depicting natural scenes. For example in the first stanza of “Resolution and Independence” Wordsworth thus describes the scene:
There was a roaring in the wind all night;
The rain came heavily and fell in floods,
But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
The birds are singing in the distant woods;
Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters. (1-7)

The wind and the rain are depicted quite objectively, but how is the sun calm, how
does the Stock-dove brood, and why is the noise of water pleasant? Of course, it is
because the poet feels so. No doubt, all literary works are somewhat subjective and
this subjective depiction does not prevent Wordsworth from being a great poet.
What I am trying to stress is that when the poet imposes his subjective judgment on
the natural world, it implies that he still holds a human-centered attitude in facing
nature. Wordsworth seldom depicts nature objectively in his poems and he also
seldom describes his immediate response to a landscape as he believes that good
poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is
contemplated till, by a species of reason, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an
emotion . . . is gradually produced and does itself actually exist in the mind.”
Therefore his poetry is often the consequence of his contemplation of an emotion and
a natural scene becomes meaningful only after his contemplation. This process is
depicted in the famous “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”. At first Wordsworth
personifies the daffodils so he saw “a crowd” “a host” of golden daffodils, “dancing in
the breeze” (6), “Tossing their heads in sprightly dance” (12), and they “Outdid the
sparkling waves in glee” (14). This personification is actually the subordination of
nature since all these descriptions are just the poet’s projection of his own mood onto
the external world. As Frederick A. Pottle in “The Eye and the Object in the Poetry
of Wordsworth” says, in Wordsworth’s poems “The subject is a mental image and the eye is that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude” (76). Besides, Dorothy Wordsworth’s *The Grasmere Journals* on April 15, 1802, shows us a quite different scene from what Wordsworth depicts two years later in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”: “The Bays were stormy, and we heard the waves at different distances and in the middle of the water like the sea. Rain came on—we were wet when we reached Luff’s but we called in. Luckily all was cheerless and gloomy so we faced the storm—.” The weather was somewhat stormy and the waves were billowy. So, what inspires Wordsworth is not his immediate experience but his contemplation later. Besides, Wordsworth depicts the daffodils in the first three stanzas yet the most important part is the last one, which displays the poet’s thought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;

And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils. (19-24)

When he saw them the poet writes: “I gazed—and gazed—but little thought / What wealth the show to me had brought” (17-18). At that moment, he could not fully understand the meaning of the daffodils. Only when they flash in his inward eye later in reminiscence can his heart fill with pleasure.

In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth has mentioned that the purpose of the poet is a particular purpose of “giving pleasure”, and his poems, his description of beautiful, glorious nature really give the reader pleasure. Besides, the dialectic love between nature and mind becomes the subject of many his great poems; this kind of conflict, instead of being obstacle, actually becomes the source of his inspiration.
What I want to argue against is the subjective appropriation and human-centered depiction of nature. Bate thinks that Wordsworth’s poetry gives us pleasure derived from nature so it can teach us “how to walk with nature”. However, is the nature in Wordsworth’s poetry the real nature or his beautification of nature? What if we find that the real nature is not so beautiful, so pleasant? There are violent storms, fierce beasts in nature. If we just want to get pleasure from nature we sure will be disappointed. In ecofeminist viewpoint, we should consider nature as an autonomous being and respect its right of existence. When we choose what can please us from nature and delude ourselves with the false hope that nature will always be pleasant, we are still human-centered and we still hold the human being superior to the natural world. In “The Moral of Landscape” Bate mentions many times that Wordsworth’s landscapes reflect his own spiritual state and in Wordsworth’s poetry, nature is subordinated to the poet’s self and yet at the end he still thinks that Wordsworth sacralizes nature. We should not debase nature but we also do not have to worship nature. We should take nature just as what it really is and respect its existence and live peacefully with all the natural forms on the earth.

Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats also share a similar attitude toward nature. Basically, they worship nature and believe that natural objects and landscapes can always bring pleasure. They also have faith in the power of imagination and believe that good poetry is the result of the interaction between nature and imagination. Yet, their application of imagination and their understanding of nature are, in some way or other, different from Wordsworth’s and that makes the difference and this difference will be the main concern of the following part.

Coleridge, assigned to supernatural poetry in *Lyrical Ballads* and famous for *Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan*, the poems of mystery and demonism, seems not so attached to nature as Wordsworth; and because of his
engrossment in metaphysical studies Coleridge seems less concerned with the natural world. However, Coleridge actually has written quite a few poems on or about nature and he has assured his love of nature in a letter:

I love fields & woods & mounta[ins] with almost a visionary fondness—and because I have found benevolence & quietness growing within me as that fondness [has] increased, therefore I should wish to be the means of implanting it in others--& to destroy the bad passions not by combating them, but by keeping them in inaction. (Collected Letters of Samuel Coleridge I. 397)

Accordingly, in Coleridge’s poems concerning nature, the external phenomena are similarly depicted as beauteous forms that are both nourishing and inspiring. For example, in “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” (1797) after describing the imagined beautiful natural scenery, Coleridge says: “. . . Henceforth I shall know / That Nature ne’er deserts the wise and pure; / No plots so narrow, be but Nature there, / No waste so vacant, but may well employ / Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart / Awake to Love and Beauty!” (59-64). In “Frost at Midnight” (1798) Coleridge ensures his baby boy the power of Nature that is endowed by God:

But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze 
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags 
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds 
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores 
And mountain crags; so shalt thou see and hear 
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible 
Of that eternal language, which thy God Utters, who from eternity doth teach 
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
Great universal Teacher! he shall mold
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask. (54-64)

In “France: An Ode” (1798) Coleridge extols the spirit of liberty in the external natural phenomena while expressing his disappointment of French Revolution: “O ye loud Waves! and O ye Forests high! / And O ye Clouds that far above me soared! / Thou rising Sun! thou blue rejoicing Sky! / Yea, every thing that is and will be free!” (15-18). In “Hymn to the Earth” (1799) Coleridge regards the earth as the mother: “Earth! thou mother of numberless children, the nurse and the mother” (1), and he himself is the child of nature: “Here, great mother, I lie, thy child, with his head on thy bosom!” (8). Nature is granted the role of nourishing mother and the poet, as the child, gets nourishment from mother earth or goddess nature. In “Inscription for a Fountain on a Heath” (1802) Coleridge suggests that this nook is a suitable place for travelers or pilgrims to take a rest: “Drink, Pilgrim, here; Here rest! and if thy heart / Be innocent, here too shalt thou refresh / Thy spirit, listening to some gentle sound, / Or passing gale or hum of murmuring bees!” (16-19). In “To Nature” (1815) Coleridge expresses his belief that he can get “deep, heartfelt, inward joy” from all the created things and learn the “lessons of love and earnest piety” from beauteous natural objects; he even worships Nature as the only God:

It may indeed be phantasy, when I
Essay to draw from all created things
Deep, heartfelt, inward joy that closely clings;
And trace in leaves and flowers that round me lie
Lessons of love and earnest piety.
So let it be; and if the wide world rings
In mock of this belief, it brings
Nor fear, nor grief, nor vain perplexity.
So will I build my altar in the fields,
And the blue sky my fretted dome shall be,
And the sweet fragrance that the wild flower yields
Shall be the incense I will yield to Thee,
Thee only God! and thou shalt not despise
Even me, the priest of this poor sacrifice.  (1-14)

Although he worships nature as the only God in this poem, Coleridge does not totally submit to the doctrine of nature religion. Actually, Coleridge has undergone ambivalent attitude toward pantheism, which is at odds with orthodox Christian beliefs. And consequently, he struggles to sustain a balance between his mind and the external objects.

In Coleridge’s poems he, similar to Wordsworth, exhibits a dialectic love between nature and mind. In Chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge thus defines imagination:

The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify.

So, Coleridge believes in the power of the infinite subjective I AM and the power of imagination to recreate or to idealize and to unify. In his poem, however, he is not so confident of his imagination as Wordsworth. In his early poems, as Raimonda Modiano suggests, “... an encounter with nature becomes the central event and leads
to various reflections on the possibilities and dangers of a close intimacy with natural objects and, conversely, on the incapacitating effect of a complete separation from them” (51). In the famous poem “The Eolian Harp” inspired by the harp’s “soft floating witchery of sound” the poet finds “the one Life” shared by the mind and the external world. Coleridge thus chants:

O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere—
Methinks, it should have been impossible
Not to love all thins in a world so filled;
Where the breeze warble, and the mute still air
Is Music slumbering on her instrument. (26-33)

As Bloom says in The Visionary Company, “We may have here the source of the extraordinary myth of an organic sense of seeing-hearing as the special mark of capable Imagination . . . .” (201). Then Coleridge lets go of his imagination: “And many idle flitting phantasies, / Traverse my indolent and passive brain, / As wild and various as the random gales / That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!” (40-43).

As a result of his “idle flitting phantasies” Coleridge bravely questions: “And what if all of animated nature / Be but organic Harps diversely framed, / That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps / Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze, / At once the Soul of each, and God of all?” (44-48). Coleridge suggests that maybe behind the miscellaneous natural objects, there is the intellectual breeze, which is “the Soul of each, and God of all”, and through this idea we can see Coleridge’s attempt to elevate imagination and nature to the level of supremacy. Yet, in the very next stanza, Coleridge depicts his wife’s reproof, which makes him turn back to the orthodox
Christianity: “But thy more serious eye a mild reproof / Darts, O beloved Woman! nor such thoughts / Dim and unhallowed dost thou not reject, / And biddest me walk humbly with my God’” (49-52). Therefore, Bloom thus comments on this poem: “The Eolian Harp (1795) is a honeymoon poem in which we encounter a dialectic between two Coleridges, the imaginative and intellectually daring poet, and the timidly orthodox young husband, glad to submit to the mildly reproving eye of his ‘Meek daughter in the family of Christ!’” (The Visionary Company 200). In the same year, the poem “Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement” (1795) also shows an experience of a communion with nature. When Coleridge reaches the top of “the stony Mount”, seeing the magnificent view, he exclaims: “It seem’d like Omnipresence! God, me thought, / Had built him there a Temple: the whole World / Seem’d imag’d in its vast circumference: / No wish profan’d my overwhelmed heart. / Blest hour! It was a luxury,—to be!” (38-42). Yet, at the moment of blessedness, he thinks of his social commitment and he says:

Ah! quiet Dell! dear Cot, and Mount sublime!
I was constrain’d to quit you. Was it right,
While my unnumber’d brethren toil’d and bled,
That I should dream away the entrusted hours
On roe-leaf bed, pampering the coward heart
With feelings all too delicate for use? (43-48)

Coleridge still cannot fully immerse himself in the “luxury” of the union of self and nature. In “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison” (1797), although his physical body is imprisoned in the lime-tree bower, his mind experiences an imaginative spiritual union with nature. While confined to the garden-bower, the poet imagines how his friends will enjoy the natural scene:

So my friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirit perceives his presence. (37-43)

“Intense perception of outward objects thus provides the means by which the mind accomplishes its feat of grasping the presence of a spiritual power in the world of sense” (Modiano 52). Coleridge feels “A delight / Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad / As I myself were there!” (43-45). Then he can see the beauty of natural objects even in this garden-bower prison. Consequently, he concludes that so long as we can “keep the heart / Awake to Love and Beauty,” nature will never disappoint us. Here nature is bestowed with the Almighty Spirit, which can help unify human mind and nature. Then in “Frost at Midnight” (1798) Coleridge restates this kind of belief. In this poem Coleridge expresses his hope that his son will have the privilege of being reared by nature so that he will see and hear “The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language, which thy God / Utters, who from eternity doth teach / Himself in all, and all things in himself. / Great universal Teacher! he shall mold thy spirit, and by giving make it ask” (59-64). Thus nature is bestowed by God the spiritual supremacy and we can learn the spirit, the one life through the external natural objects.

Coleridge’s idea of the interaction between nature and mind in another poem “The Nightingale” (1798) in the same year is very interesting. In this poem Coleridge overthrows the long-lasting conceit that represents the nightingale as a melancholy bird because he believes: “In Nature there is nothing melancholy” (15). In his opinion the nightingale becomes a melancholy bird just because “some
night-wandering” man projects his own sorrows onto nature and “named these notes [of the nightingale] a melancholy strain / And many a poet echoes the conceit” (22-23). Coleridge believes that the nightingale has “Nature’s sweet voices, always full of love and joyance.” Coleridge thus warns Wordsworth and Dorothy:

My Friend, and thou, our Sister! we have learnt
A different lore: we may no thus profane
Nature’s sweet voices, always full of love
And joyance! ’Tis the merry Nightingale
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
With fast thick warble his delicious notes,
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
Of all its music! (40-49)

According to Coleridge, a poet should empty his mind of any irrelevant thought and surrender his whole spirit to nature; and he should make nature lovelier in his poem.

Poet who hath been building up the rhyme
When he had better far have stretched his limbs
Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell
By sun or moon-light, to the influxes
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements
Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song
And of his fame forgetful! so his fame
Should share in Nature’s immortality,
A venerable thing! and so his song
Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself
Be loved like Nature! (24-34)

This poem is a presentation of Coleridge’s idea concerning the interaction between mind and the external objects. Coleridge refutes the projection of one’s mind onto the outside world and insists on surrendering the self to nature. And this idea is somewhat similar to Wordsworth’s “wise passiveness”. Besides, he believes that in this way the poet can have a successful interaction between mind and nature and so discover that nature is full of love and joyance. What is interesting is that if depicting the nightingale as a melancholy bird is a projection of human mind onto nature, why is it proper to call the bird “the merry Nightingale”? Here we can infer that Coleridge takes it as a priori that nature is full of love and joyance, and this is also similar to Wordsworth’s belief. Basically, in this poem Coleridge still holds the orthodox idea of Christianity, that is, God creates everything for the profit of human beings and so the poet’s mission is to depict the beautiful nature to glorify God; therefore, Coleridge asks Wordsworth and Dorothy not to “profane⁵ / Nature’s sweet voices”. In this poem Coleridge begins to realize the possibility for the poet to project his mind onto nature and influence the way he sees nature. “The Nightingale” seems to mark the beginning of a transition in Coleridge’s idea toward man and nature.

In “The Nightingale” Coleridge assures himself of the love and joyance in nature and expects the poet to “make all Nature lovelier”; yet in the next year in the poem “Hymn to the Earth” he seems to admit that there is not only joy but also sadness in nature. Coleridge says: “Into my being thou [nature] murmurest joy, and tenderest sadness / Shed’st thou, like dew, on my heart, / Till the joy and the heavenly sadness / Pour themselves forth from my heart in tears, and the hymn of thanksgiving” (12-14). Then “Dejection: An Ode” shows a sharp contrast to “The Nightingale”. In

⁵ Italics mine.
“Dejection: An Ode”, as Modiano says, “Coleridge claims that the submission of the self to nature is a fruitless course to take since nature’s own life and one’s ‘genial’ powers depend entirely upon the mind” (54). In this poem Coleridge juxtaposes a storm and the decline of his imagination to elaborate his idea of the interaction between nature and human mind. At the beginning, a storm is predicted since the new moon has the old moon in her lap: “I see the old Moon in her [the new moon’s] lap, foretelling / The coming-on of rain and squally blast” (13-14). At the same time the poet wishes that the storm will startle away the dull pain he feels: “Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed, / And sent my soul abroad, / Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give, / Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!” (17-20). In the next stanza Coleridge describes his pain: “A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear / A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief, / Which finds no natural outlet, no relief, / In word, or sigh, or tear—”(21-24). This inexplicable grief cannot be comforted or eliminated by nature or poetry. So, while the poet gazes “on the western sky, / And its peculiar tint of yellow green” (28-29) in a “balmy and serene” eve, he gazes “with how blank an eye!” Even the fair moon cannot arouse him from this pensive mood and inspire him: “Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew / In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue; / I see them all so excellently fair, / I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!” (35-38). Then in the third stanza, Coleridge admits that his innate powers fails him and none of the external natural objects can liberate him; therefore, at the end of that stanza he says: “I may not hope from outward forms to win / The passion and the life, whose fountains are within” (45-46). Contradicting his own view mentioned above, Coleridge now asserts the priority of the mind over nature. In the following stanza, he further develops this idea and claims:

O Lady! We receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!

And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,

Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud

Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,

Of all sweet sounds the life and element! (47-58)

Coleridge prominently expresses the idea that the human soul is the sustaining, life-giving force of nature; therefore, the mind is nature’s “wedding garment” and “her shroud” and “A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud” must issue forth from the soul and envelope the earth. However, Coleridge’s attitude is not so definite; the soul may be able to send “a light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud” to envelope the earth but the soul seems not independent and the harmony between one’s inner life and the life of the outward nature seems to be what Coleridge really pursues. Therefore in stanza 5, Coleridge names joy “this light, this glory, this fair luminous mist” and thus defines joy: “Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power, / Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower / A new Earth and new Heaven” (67-69). Here Coleridge advocates the importance of imagination as Harold Bloom says: “Joy, the Imagination itself, the great I AM, the word of primal creation, issues forth as a light, a glory, a fair, luminous cloud, an ultimate voice which is the strong music of the soul” (“Wisdom and Dejection: Four Poems” 23). Nature is not forgotten since “joy” can give us “A new Earth and new Heaven” only by wedding Nature. Nature may be important, but
the role of nature has changed from the dominant one in the previous poems to the subordinate one in this poem and now it is the inner mind, the imagination that dominates. Yet, imagination, or joy, does not sustain Coleridge’s vitality in life and each visitation of afflictions, the poet says in stanza 6, “Suspends what nature gave me at my birth, / My shaping spirit of Imagination” (85-86). Different from Wordsworth, who has a firm faith in his mind and his imagination, Coleridge does not think his imagination can be the redemption. Hence, he refutes the arguments in stanzas 2-6 as “viper thoughts”, as “Reality’s dark dream” and he says: “I turn from you, and listen to the wind, / Which long has raved unnoticed” (96-97). Now Coleridge turns to nature, to the storm predicted in the first stanza. “In effect, the speaker appeals once again to an external force as a rescue measure for his impaired self, a gesture that represents a clear departure from his earlier affirmation of nature’s total subordination to the mind” (Modiano 62). Coleridge calls the wind “Mad lutanist,” who “Mak’st devils’ yule” (106) or “Thou actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!” (108) or “Thou mighty poet, e’en to frenzy bold” (109). According to Bloom, Coleridge seems to condemn his arguments in the previous stanzas through this analogue; that is, he is just like the mad wind, raving bombast (“Wisdom and Dejection: Four Poems” 22). Then through the wind Coleridge first hears “the rushing of a host in rout” (111); yet, after “a pause of deepest silence” the poet continues:

And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,
With groans, and tremulous shudderings—all is over—
It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!
A tale of less afright,
And tempered with delight,
As Otway’s self had framed the tender lay—
'Tis of a little child
Upon a lonesome wild,
Not far from home, but she hath lost her way:
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear. (115-125)

Has the poet’s imagination been repaired so that he can hear the tales in the wind?
Or is Coleridge the little child who has lost her way and moans and screams intermittently? The answer seems implied in the last stanza, where Coleridge asks “gentle Sleep” to visit his friend and when she wakes up, the poet wishes: “With light heart may she rise, / Gay fancy, cheerful eyes, / Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice; / To her may all things live, from pole to pole, / Their life the eddying of her living soul!” (132-36). Then at the very end of the whole poem, Coleridge addresses the lady: “O simple spirit, guided from above, / Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice, / Thus mayest thou ever, evermore rejoice” (136-39). Coleridge gives his sincere blessing to his friend without mentioning his own situation and this may imply that he can never find back his vital soul but he hopes that his friend, the Lady, may “evermore rejoice” since she is the “simple spirit, guided from above”. Actually, in this stanza Wordsworth is replaced by dear lady in Coleridge’s process of revision. Originally Coleridge has intended to write this poem to Wordsworth. This implies that Coleridge believes that Wordsworth has the simple spirit, which can help him rejoice evermore while Coleridge, lacking this simple spirit, may never recover from this torpor. As Bloom suggests: “Coleridge’s passionate undersong, poised dialectically against the serenity of his poem’s resolution, evidences that his comparative damnation came because he lacked both Wordsworth’s guidance (egotism, as we call it now) and Wordsworth’s saving simplicity” (24). Without Wordsworth’s firm faith in imagination, Coleridge fluctuates in the dialectic love
between nature and mind.

“Hymn Before Sun-rise in the Vale of Chamouni” (1802), a praise of the great Mont Blanc, is a poem concerned the interaction between nature and mind, although Coleridge does not so fully develop his idea as in “Dejection: An Ode”. Beside, this is one of the last poems where description of nature still dominates. In this poem Coleridge praises the magnificent and sublime scenery of and around Mont Blanc and he attributes all the magnificence to God. Coleridge thus writes: “O dread and silent Mount! I gazed upon thee, / Till thou, still present to the bodily sense, / Didst vanish from my thought: entranced in prayer / I worshipped the Invisible alone” (13-16).

As Kant suggests the sublime is beyond human thinking and understanding; therefore, the mount vanishes from Coleridge’s thought and “entranced in prayer” he begins to worship God. Although Coleridge praises God and attribute the sublime creation to God, he does not forget his “shaping spirit of Imagination”, his thought. Hence, directly after his worship of God, he says:

Yet, like some sweet beguiling melody,
So sweet, we know not we are listening to it,
Thou, the meanwhile, wast blending with my Thought,
Yea, with my Life and Life’s own secret joy:
Till the dilating Soul, enrapt, transfused,
Into the mighty vision passing—there
As in her natural form, swelled vast to Heaven! (17-23)

The soul almost reaches heaven and mingles with it and so in the next stanza the poet tries to awake his soul to be more active in the interaction with nature. Coleridge cries: “Awake, my soul! not only passive praise / Thou owest! not alone these

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6 According to Modiano, the last important poems where nature still holds a central role are “Dejection: An Ode”, “The Picture”, and “Hymn before Sunrise”, which were published in 1802.
swelling tears, / Mute thanks and secret ecstasy! Awake, / Voice of sweet song! Awake, my heart, awake! / Green vales and icy cliffs, all join my Hymn” (24-28). Then the following fifty-eight-line praise of Almighty God can be regarded as the embodiment of this awakening. And at last he says: “Thou kingly Spirit throned among the hills, / Thou dread ambassador from Earth to Heaven, / Great Hierarch! tell thou the silent sky, / And tell the stars, and tell yon rising sun / Earth, with her thousand voices, praise God” (81-85).

After that poem Coleridge seldom discusses the interaction between his mind and nature. What is noteworthy is that in the poem “To Nature” (1815) Coleridge worships nature as God. As Bloom says: “Wordsworth’s account of nature is that of a lover describing his mistress. Coleridge’s nature is less of a Muse, and blends at last into the male Godhead of Hebraic and Christian tradition” (*The Visionary Company* 231). It seems that Coleridge evades the dialectic between nature and mind and attributes the supreme power to the deity. Besides, according to Abrams, in *Biographia Literaria* published in 1817, Coleridge raises the idea of a cosmic ecology of nature, man and mind, in which all the living creatures coexist in the unity of a higher form as Coleridge says, “We had seen each in its own cast, and we now recognize them all as co-existing in the unity of a higher form, the Crown and Completion of the Earthly, and the Mediator of a new and heavenly series” (218). This idea seems more plausible from the ecofeminist perspective than Wordsworth’s subjective domination of nature.

In Shelley’s poems concerning the relation between nature and imagination, the power of nature is also highly recognized but different from Wordsworth or Coleridge, who most of the time emphasize the beauteous forms in nature, Shelley often depicts the sublime natural scene, which defies perception by the senses but commands the attention of imagination. When Wordsworth evades the wild, violent, incontrollable
side of nature to build a bower of bliss through imagination, Shelley shows the
greatness of the mind or imagination through the negative side or the sublime nature
that is not admirable or even causes the feeling of pain. To Shelley both the mind
and nature are mystic and intangible. He believes that there is great and immense
power behind nature yet because of Shelley’s famous skeptic attitude toward orthodox
Christianity, he will not attribute the power to the deity. To Shelley, both nature and
imagination are powerful and imagination seems to be a poet’s way to get some
understanding of the inconceivable nature of the universe. “Hymn to Intellectual
Beauty” and “Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni” seem to express
Shelley’s two modes of imagination as Bloom suggests: “The Intellectual Beauty
compels the heart’s response, but ‘the secret Strength of things’ in Mont Blanc
addresses itself to the mind, and terrifies the heart” (The Visionary Company 295).

In “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” Shelley expounds how imagination interacts
with the supreme power behind those beautiful natural scenes. In the first stanza of
“Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” Shelley starts with description of the inconstant,
fleeting, mystic character of “intellectual beauty” by comparing it to summer winds,
moonbeams, hues and harmonies of evening, clouds, memory of music fled, and “like
aught that for its grace may be / Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery” (11-12). At the
very beginning Shelley says: “The awful shadow of some unseen Power / Floats
through unseen among us” (1-2). So, intellectual beauty is the shadow of some
unseen power, which belongs to nature. The power of nature is unseen and
intellectual beauty, which is precariously, is only the shadow of that unseen power.
For Shelley intellectual beauty can consecrate human thought or form: “Spirit of
Beauty, that dost consecrate / With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon / Of
human thought or from” (113-15), and when this spirit is gone, human beings will live
in darkness and despair. Then the third stanza shows Shelley’s religious skepticism;
Shelley does not believe what the god says can save us from doubt, chance, and mutability and he believes that only the light of the spirit of beauty alone “Gives grace and truth to life’s unquiet dream” (35). In the fourth stanza, Shelley expresses the belief that man can be immortal if this spirit is in his mind. And this spirit has close connection with the beauty in nature so in the next stanza, the poet says: “When musing deeply on the lot / Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing / All vital things that wake to bring / News of buds and blossoming,— / Sudden, thy shadow fell on me; / I shrieked, and clasped my hands in extacy!” (55-60). Then Shelley ensures that he will dedicate his powers to this spirit and at the end of the last stanza Shelley implores the spirit:

Thus let thy power, which like the truth
Of nature on my passive youth
Descended, to my onward life supply
Its calm—to one who worships there,
And every form containing thee,
Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind
To fear himself, and love all human kind. (78-84)

In this poem Shelley seems to suggest that among the diverse appearances of this world there is the unseen power behind, only if we have the intellectual beauty, a kind of imagination, can we see and feel the beauty and glory of that power and love this human world. In this kind of interaction between nature and imagination, both are inevitable and neither is debased.

If “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” displays the beauty of both nature and imagination, then the famous “Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni” shows the sublimity of them. Critics believe that “Mont Blanc” originates from Coleridge’s “Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouni” and is influenced by
Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” but Shelley presents more of discrepancy than consistency in his poem. In this poem Shelley exhibits the great power behind natural scene; different from Wordsworth’s wholly benevolent nature, nature in Shelley’s poem has also malevolent aspect. Coleridge attributes the greatness of nature to God and asks the natural objects to praise God while Shelley feels doubtful of that belief. At the very beginning of the poem, Shelley states the interactive relation between nature and human mind through the metaphorical connection between human thought and river:

The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters,—with a sound but half its own (1-6)

Contrary to Wordsworth’s emphasis on the glory and splendor brought by nature, Shelley shows the diverse thoughts caused by natural objects—“now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—Now lending splendor” and since the source of human thought brings its tribute from nature, it can have a sound only “half its own”. “There is no hierarchical discrimination between the status of the mind and that of the everlasting universe of things” (Leighton 63) Besides, this metaphorical connection between nature and mind can be seen as the integration of nature and human mind, though maybe only rhetorically, which is a contrast to the separation between the description of nature and the account of his meditation in most of Wordsworth’s poems. In the second stanza, Shelley depicts the grandeur of Ravine of Arve and the

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7 See Harold Bloom’s The Visionary Company and Angela Leighton’s Shelly and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems.
Arve River and the reaction of his thought. Facing the awe-inspiring scene, at first the mind seems to emerge in “an unremitting interchange / With the clear universe of things around” and then part of the thoughts become his poetic creativity. As Shelley gazes on the ravine and emerges in the interaction with the outside world, he says:

One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings
Now float above thy darkness, and now rest
Where that or thou art no unbidden guest,
In the still cave of the witch Poesy,
Seeking among the shadows that pass by
Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,
Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
From which they fled recalls them, thou art there! (41-48)

According to Bloom, “the ravine itself is an emblem of a mind more comprehensive than the poet’s, a power akin to the light that sweeps through the world in the Hymn of Intellectual Beauty” (The Visionary Company 295). This may be true but I’d rather put emphasis on the relation between the mind, the ravine and poetry. It seems that through this declaration Shelley demonstrates the integration of nature and mind in creating poetry. The wondering thought now float above the ravine, now stay in the cave of Poesy with ravine and though the poet tries to find some phantom, some faint image of the ravine or the things in the universe, he finally realizes that the ravine is in his own mind. Both the mind and the ravine help make poetry. Neither is dominant but both are active.

In the third stanza the great Mont Blanc finally appears and the sublimity is exhibited before us:

Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,
Mont Blanc appears,—still, snowy, and serene—
Its subject mountains their unearthly forms
Pile around it, ice and rock; broad vales between
Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps,
Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread
And wind among the accumulated steeps;
A desart peopled by the storms alone,
Save when the eagle brings some hunter’s bone,
And the wolf tracts her there—how hideously
Ghastly, and scarred, and riven.—Is this the scene
Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young
Ruin? Were these their toys? Or did a sea
Of fire, envelope once this silent snow?
None can reply—all seems eternal now. (60-75)

The sublime Mont Blanc presents eternity through the serene, desolate scene.

Facing this malevolence, this eternity of nature, Shelley is inspired to an understanding of the mysterious nature:

The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be
But for such faith with nature reconciled;
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel. (76-83)

This wilderness can teach “awful doubt” or “mild faith” and Bloom thus defines
“awful doubt” and “mild faith”; “The ‘awful doubt’ is of any orthodox view of nature that sees it as the direct handiwork of a benevolent God. The ‘faith so mild’ is the solemn and serene natural piety of Wordsworth which is too timid to apprehend that nature is not concerned with man’s specific good” (*The Visionary Company* 295).

How can man be reconciled with nature? With “faith so mild”? In *A Norton Critical Edition of Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, “But for” in line 79 is interpreted as “only” or “merely” based on the explanation of Wasserman and Judith Chernaik, and therefore, man may be reconciled with nature only through such a faith. Yet, I do not think Shelley will postulate such a faith as a means to get reconciliation with nature since Shelley originally has doubt of the orthodox view of nature. I think “but for” here means “without” and Shelley suggests that man can only reconcile with nature when he is disillusioned with the goodwill of nature. I believe Bloom also holds a similar opinion because he says: “To reconcile oneself with nature, one needs to recognize its potential malevolence. The mountain’s voice, if understood, tells us that the power of good or evil is in our own wills, for we can choose how to utilize natural power” (*The Visionary Company* 295). Shelley seems to have an overall view of nature since he sees both the benevolence and malevolence of nature and he also admit the power of the mind, which can project human subjective idea toward nature.

And the next stanza, in which both creation and destruction of natural power is depicted, is a further demonstration of the indifference of nature. In this stanza, the cycle of human life contrasts with the permanent power of nature, which seems immense and colossal beyond human reach. Yet, in the final stanza, Shelley affirms the status of Mont Blanc as the emblem of natural power and the meaning-giving power of human imagination. At the beginning of the last stanza Shelley says:

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“Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:—the power is there, / The still and solemn power of many sights, / And many sounds, and much life and death” (127-29). There are many magnificent sights silently appear there which “none beholds”; yet, the power is there on the top of Mont Blanc. Therefore: “The secret strength of things / Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome / Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee! / And what were thou, and earth and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind’s imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?” (139-44). Finally, Shelley returns to human imagination and affirms too the strength of human imagination, which can comprehend the meaning of the outside world since if silence and solitude were vacancy to the human mind’s imaginings then Mont Blanc, and earth and stars and sea would be nothing too. In my opinion, Shelley’s attitude toward nature is more praiseworthy than Wordsworth’s from the ecofeminist point of view. Shelley holds a more neutral attitude toward nature, without idealizing or demonizing it excessively. Both the benevolent side and the malevolent side are accepted. Besides, he recognizes the sublime aspect of nature, which is beyond human understanding; yet, at the same time, he also affirms the strength of human imagination and acknowledges its value in comprehending the meaning of nature.

“Ode to the West Wind” is another example of the poet’s interaction with nature. In this poem, the west wind is “unseen presence” like the unseen power in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and it is “Destroyer and Preserver”, similar to the solemn power in “Mont Blanc”. As the emblem of the inexplicable power behind nature, the west wind destroys and renews the appearance of the world. In the first three stanzas, Shelley depicts the change the west wind brings to leaf, cloud, and wave. It destroys but it also brings hope for a renewal. Then in the fourth stanza, Shelley seems to debase his human status and pleads to be the object driven by the west wind: “Oh! Lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud! / I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed! / A heavy
weight of hours has chained and bowed / One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and
proud” (53-56). Actually, he is still aspiring because he believes that he is “tameless,
swift, and proud” just like the west wind. Therefore in the final stanza, Shelley
emphasizes the mutual dependence between himself and the west wind. He aspires
high and wishes to be the west wind:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:

What if my leaves are falling like it own!

The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,

Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,

My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe

Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth

Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

Be through my lips to unawakened Earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? (56-70)

Shelley acknowledges the mysterious, insusceptible power of nature, which may be
beyond human reach; yet, he also glorifies human imagination. When he says “Be
thou me”, he identifies himself with the west wind and both become prophets to the
natural world and human world.

Then comes “Shelley’s lyrical farewell to the theme of the power hidden behind nature and the poet’s relation to that power” (Bloom The Visionary Company 302), that is, the beautiful ode “To a Skylark”. In this poem the skylark, I suppose, is not only a bird but Shelley’s emblem of the beautiful, glorious nature: “Hail to thee, blithe Spirit! / Bird thou never wert— / That from Heaven, or near it, / Pourest thy full heart / In profuse strains of unpremeditated art” (1-5). Shelley especially emphasizes the joy the bird brings, just like the joy the beautiful nature brings to human beings: “In the golden lightning / Of the sunken Sun— / O’er which clouds are brightening, / Thou dost float and run; / Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun” (11-15). This song, this joy, just like the unseen power in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty”, is unseen but felt:

The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight,
Like a star of Heaven
In the broad day-light
Thou art unseen,—but yet I hear thy shrill delight,

Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear
Until we hardly see—we feel that it is there. (16-25)

Then Shelley uses several similes to describe the sweet, overflowing melody of this unseen bird: the skylark is compared to “a Poet hidden,” “a high-born maiden,” “a glow-worm golden,” and “a rose embowered”. Yet, in Shelley’s opinion, the
skylark’s joyous melody surpasses them all: “Sound of vernal showers / On the twinkling grass, / Rain-awakened flowers, / All that ever was / Joyous, and clear and fresh, thy music doth surpass” (56-60). Then, as in the “Ode to the West Wind”, the poet prays for an interaction with the bird, and it seems that through this kind of sharing the poet can transcend the human world and get some understanding of the joyous natural world. Therefore, Shelley pleads:

Teach us, Sprite or Bird,
What sweet thoughts are thine;
I have never heard
Praise of love or wine
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine:

Chorus Hymeneal
Or triumphal chaunt
Matched with thine would be all
But an empty yaunt,
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want. (61-70)

Compared with the natural song of the skylark, the human song is just an empty yaunt. And Shelley wonders what is the origin of lark’s song and where does it get the happy strain. To Shelley, the lark’s joyous song is something ideal since it lacks “languor” or “Shadow of annoyance” and the bird “lovest—but ne’er knew love’s sad satiety” (80) and the bird seems understand the truth of death, so it has no fear of it. Compared with the bird, human beings seem unable to enjoy such pure, absolute joy since “We look before and after, / And pine for what is not— / Our sincerest laughter / With some pain is fraught— / Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought” (86-90). To Shelley, however, this saddest thought that is inevitable in
human world is also inevitable in understanding the joy of the bird’s song because he says in the very next stanza: “Yet if we could scorn / Hate and pride and fear; / If we were things born / Not to shed a tear, / I know not how thy joy we ever should come near” (91-95). Here, I deem, Shelley points out the paradoxical destiny of man: he can never produce such delightful song as the bird since his life is full of hate, pride, fear and sadness; yet, if he has no such negative emotions, he can never really understand the joy of the bird’s song. This characteristic of human world makes man inferior to nature but this also becomes the privilege of poet. I believe this is why Shelley asks the bird to teach him only half the gladness: “Teach me half the gladness / That my brain must know, / Such harmonious madness / From my lips would flow / The world should listen then—as I am listening now” (101-05).

Though the poet cannot be the “Scorner of the ground” as the lark, he, with the sadness of the human world, interprets better the lark’s joyous music and is able to give pleasure to man through his “harmonious madness”. I think Shelley strikes a better balance from his dialectic love between nature and man. The way he interprets the bird’s song is subjective, since no one knows if the bird really feels happy or not. This joy, however, is only one aspect of natural power and Shelley never limits the power to this joy. In his lyrics on the Mont Blanc, the west wind, or the skylark, the natural objects represent certain aspects of the unseen power in nature, sometimes sublime and dreadful, sometimes beautiful and pleasant. Yet, they have one common characteristic, that is, they cannot be totally under the control of man. Shelley the poet, nevertheless, through imagination, interacts with those natural objects and gets certain understanding of the unseen power of nature. He does not think the mind can surpass nature by giving meaning to it as Wordsworth does, nor does he attributes the power of nature to God as Coleridge. In *Defence of Poetry* Shelley thus explains the central idea “sympathy”: “A man, to be greatly good, must
imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own” (Clark 283). This statement seems to resemble Keats’s idea of “negative capability” and Shelley’s lyrics may be the epitome of this belief, which is different from Wordsworth’s “egoistical sublime” (Keats’s words, see below).

Keats, famous for his idea of “negative capability”, “supplements and corrects Wordsworth” (Paglia 381). For Keats, “negative capability” is “the ability of the mind to detach itself from its own identity” (de Man “The Negative Road” 41) and according to Walter Jackson Bate, “negative capability” includes the ideal of “disinterestedness,” the ideal of “receptivity” and this is similar to Wordsworth’s “wise passiveness” (“Negative Capability” 13-28). This idea, though resembles Wordsworth’s “wise passiveness”, is a sharp contrast to what we find in Wordsworth, “for whom the determining moment occurs when the mind exists in and for itself, in the transparency of an inwardness entirely focused upon the self” (de Man “The Negative Road” 41). Though their attitudes in facing nature are different, their ideas of imagination are quite alike. In “To My Brother George” Keats describes imagination as horsemen and when the portals of the kingdom of poesy open, “The Poet’s eye can reach those golden halls, / And view the glory of their festivals; / Their ladies fair, that in the distance seem / Fit for the silv’ring of a seraph’s dream” (35-38). Then, by means of imagination, the poet sees:

Their rich brimm’d goblets, that incessant run
Like the bright spots that move about the sun;
And, when upheld, the wine from each bright jar
Pours with the luster of a falling star.
Yet further off, are dimly seen their bowers,
Of which, no mortal eye can reach the flower;
And 'tis right just, for well Apollo knows
'Twould make the Poet quarrel with the rose. (39-46)

For Keats imagination has the power to change or even beautify the world. In “Sleep and Poetry” Keats similarly compares imagination to the charioteer and with his “wond’rous gesture” the trees and mountains become humans: “The charioteer with wond’rous gesture talks / To the trees and mountains; and there soon appear / Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear, / Passing along before a dusky space / Made by some mighty oaks: as they would chase / Some ever-fleeting music on they sweep” (136-41). Then Keats concretely describes the behavior of those personified natural objects and at last Keats wishes that he might know “All that he (the charioteer) writes with such a hurrying glow” (153-54). Here we can see that Keats, similar to Wordsworth, admires the power of imagination, which can humanize, personify natural objects. We can also find some Wordsworthian ideas in Keats’s “Ode to Psyche”. In this ode Keats declares that he will be the priest of Psyche and “build a fane / In some untrodden region of my mind” (50-51), and this actually implies Keats’s worship of human mind, as Bloom says: “Keats has identified himself as a prophet of the loving human soul, and is poised before declaring that the paradise for the soul is to be built by the poet’s imagination within the poet’s own consciousness” (The Visionary Company 402). Wordsworth declares that he can regain the Paradise through the wedding between “the discerning intellect of Man” and “this goodly universe”; while Keats in the last stanza of “Ode to Psyche” builds a “rosy sanctuary” within his mind by means of poetry:

And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreath’d trellis of a working brain,
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
With all the gardener Fancy e’er could feigh,
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
To let the warm Love in! (58-67)

Wordsworth projects his imagination onto the outside world to build his ideal nature and Keats creates an even more ideal nature “That shadowy thought can win” in his mind. It seems that to both the imagined landscape is much more satisfactory than the real nature. Therefore, Keats stresses the ability of “Fancy” because “the gardener Fancy” “Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same”. In this way, it seems that fancy or imagination surpasses nature. In the poem “Fancy” Keats further details the ability of fancy: she can bring back the “Beauties that the earth hath lost” (30); she can “find / Thee a mistress to thy mind” (79-80); therefore, Keats says: “Let the winged Fancy roam, / Pleasure never is at home” (93-94). Like Wordsworth’s “philosophical mind”, Keats’s fancy can help him get back “All delights of summer weather; / All the buds and bells of May,” (32-33) and “All the heaped Autumn’s wealth” (35).

However, Keats’s departure from Wordsworth is more significant. As mentioned above, Keats’s idea of “negative capability” shows his contrast to Wordsworth. W. J. Bate has analyzed the development of Keats’s “negative capability” in his namesake article and here I will just point out some important letters concerning Keats’s idea of “negative capability”. The term first appeared in Keats’s letter to George and Tom Keats on December 27, 1817 and Keats writes: “. . . what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is when
man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason . . .” (Rollins 1: 193). And this “negative capability” can best be exemplified by a passage in his letter to J. H. Reynolds on February 9, 1818, in which Keats compares the active bee with the passive flower and argues against the common notion of giving and receiving:

It has been an old Comparison for our urging on—the Bee hive—however it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee—for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving—no the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits. . . and who shall say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted? . . . let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey-bee like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at: but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive—budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from every noble insect that favors us with a visit—sap will be given us for Meat and dew for drink” (Rollins 1:232).

Besides, in his letter to Richard Woodhouse on October 27, 1818, Keats explains the ideal of the “characterless” poet and argues against the Wordsworthian style: “As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—It has no character . . . .” (Rollins 1:387). Then a few lines down he further explains: “A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity . . . .”
So, Keats emphasizes passive receptivity and self-annihilation. Here Keats promotes a very different concept of self. These ideas surprisingly correspond to Kristeva’s idea of *chora*. Kristeva borrows this Greek term from Plato’s *Timaeus*, which originally means “womb” and according to Kristeva, Plato thinks it is space vis-à-vis reason and it is unstable, uncertain, ever changing and becoming (Kristeva *Revolution in Poetic Language* 239 n. 12). Kristeva uses this term to indicate situation in the pre-Oedipal stage in which the semiotic order dominates and this semiotic order, as the counterpart of symbolic order in society, can subverts the symbolic order. In this semiotic order the subject is the subject-in-progress, which is unstable, uncertain, ever changing and becoming. Therefore, Mellor says, “Keats’ poetic theory is self-consciously positioned within the feminine gender” (174). With the feminine passivity, Keats desires, as Dickstein suggests, “[n]ot to master nature but to be mastered by it, almost to become a part of it and participate in its rhythms” (39). Although Keats presents more femininity in his theory of poetry, I do not think he really plays the role of a “female” poet and holds ambivalent attitude toward gender, as Mellor suggests in *Romanticism and Gender* (171-86). Keats maybe admires those feminine characteristics but it does not mean he wants to be a female. In those love poems and poems concerning “fancy” or “imagination” we can see Keats is still very masculine. I agree, however, that when Keats faces nature he becomes more feminine and passive and we can also find the application of “negative capability” in some of his poems.

For example in the famous poem “Bright Star, Would I Were Stedfast as Thou Art” Keats, by sympathetic identification, transforms himself into star, sea and shore. According to Paglia, “The identity-free poet is a feminine receptacle into which pour the Many of nature” (382). The “Ode to a Nightingale” is also a good demonstration of this “negative capability”. Critics have issued very many different interpretations
of this poem, but I will focus on Keats’s application of “negative capability” in this ode. At the beginning Keats points out the distinction between the bird and the poet through the depiction of his feeling as he hears the nightingale “Singest of summer in full-throated ease” (10): “My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk, / Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains / One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk” (1-4). Different from the merriment other poets usually get, Keats’s feeling is quite extraordinary; he even thinks of death. Yet, he explains: “‘Tis not through envy of thy happy lot, / But being too happy in thine happiness,—” (5-6). The oxymoron common in Keats’s poetry shows the acuteness of this happiness, which makes the poet’s heart ache. Besides, this numbness and death echoes not only the torpor caused by vintage or Hippocrene in the next stanza in which Keats expresses his wish to fade away with the bird but also the idea of death, which reappears in the sixth stanza. Then in the third stanza the sorrow in the human world is presented as a sharp contrast to the happiness of the bird’s song and it also explains Keats’s wish to become the nightingale. Then in the fourth stanza Keats imagines that he becomes the bird:

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,

Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,

But on the viewless wings of Poesy,

Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:

Already with thee! tender is the night,

And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,

Cluster’d around by all her starry Fays;

But here there is no light,

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9 Morris Dickstein has listed many critics ideas in *Keats and His Poetry: A Study in Development*, pp. 205-21.

10 Italics mine.
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways. (31-40)

In this stanza we seem to see Keats flutter the wings of Poesy and soar high with the
nightingale. Yet there is no light so the poet cannot see but smell and hear what is
around him. Hartman thinks that for Keats the fifth stanza is the surmise, “the
middle-ground of imaginative activity, not reaching to vision, not falling into
blankness” (*Wordsworth’s Poetry* 11). Stuart M. Sperry, however, thinks the
elimination of the primary sense intensifies the others and it leaves much room for
imagination (264). I approve more of David Bromwich’s idea. Bromwich thus
explains Keats’s intention:

Unlike the bird he cannot join the night’s tenderness simply by doing what
is in his nature. He can join it nevertheless, by looking with different eyes
on what has surrounded him all along. This is the major transition of the
Ode, and as he enters it Keats’s impression is that he is dazed, and for the
first time must move slowly.

Keats is not the nightingale and this is his limitation. He can only imagine to be like
the bird and to put stress on other senses than the sight seems easier. In the fifth
stanza, Keats depicts the world he enters and creates:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover’d up in leaves;
And mid-May’s eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,

The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. (41-50)

Then the sixth stanza, often deemed to be the climax, deals with Keats’s wish to die. At the beginning Keats says: “Darkling I listen; and, for many a time / I have been half in love with easeful Death, / Call’d him soft names in many a mused rhyme, / To take into the air my quiet breath” (51-54). So, to Keats death is always welcome. Now, after imaginatively experiencing the world of the nightingale, death seems to be much more desirable. Hence, Keats writes: “Now more than ever seems it rich to die, / To cease upon the midnight with no pain, / While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad / In such an ecstasy! / Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain— / To thy high requiem become a sod” (55-60). Bloom thus explains this idea of death: “For he has reached the height of living experience, and any descent out of this state into the poverty of ordinary consciousness seems a death-in-life, a pain to be avoided, in contrast to the life-in-death ‘with no pain’ to be maintained were he ‘to cease upon the moment’ (The Visionary Company 411). Then in the next stanza Keats deliberately contrasts his mortality with the immortality of the nightingale’s song: “Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird! / No hungry generations tread thee down; / The voice I hear this passing night was heard / In ancient days by emperor and clown” (61-64). The exclamation “forlorn” connects the seventh stanza and the eighth and also bridges the imaginary world of the bird’s song and the real world as the poet says: “Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self! / Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf” (71-74). Keats seems to admit the limit of fancy but his imagination and his idea of “negative capability” leads the reader to experience the immortal song of the nightingale. This is quite different from Wordsworth’s appropriation of nature since in Wordsworth’s poem, “nature, or a careful selected aspect of it, was bent to the will
of the poet” (Bromwich 187).

Another poem which demonstrates “negative capability” is “To Autumn”. In this poem, Keats is able “to make his conceits and metaphors spring out of a genuine identity of nature with man, rather than out of an intellectual awareness of an analogy between both . . . .” (De Man “The Negative Road” 35). In this poem, autumn is personified but this personification, instead of human subjective imposition, seems more like a means for human beings to understand nature. At the beginning, “Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, / Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun” (1-2) load and bless the vines with fruits and they work together

To bend with apples the moss’d cottage-trees,

And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells

With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,

And still more, later flowers for the bees,

Until they think warm days will never cease,

For summer has o’er-brimm’d their clammy cells. (5-11)

With the least human intervention, the ripening process vividly shows itself before our eyes and we seem to experience the beautiful natural course personally. As Paglia suggests, “Keats reproduces the harvest fruits as they ‘swell’ and ‘plump’ with mouth-filling fatness” (382). And the effect is tactile. In the second stanza, the personified autumn helps us experience the harvest time the autumn experiences every year and the effect is visual. The autumn is sitting on a granary floor, or sound asleep on a half-reap’d furrow, “Or by a cider-press, with patient look, / Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours” (20-21). Then the last stanza describes the music of autumn:

    Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-cricketts sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies. (26-31)

Through these three stanzas Keats depicts the whole natural process of autumn, from the mellowing at the beginning of autumn, then the reaping at the height of autumn, and finally the spareness of early winter. Keats gives nature an immediate and convincing presence and “‘To Autumn’ internalizes the nature mother at her fleshiest” (Paglia 384).

The patriarchal hierarchy can be seen in some of the Romantic lyrics. In most of the lyrics in this period, women, deemed close to nature, is silenced and manipulated by men. Nature, defined as female, most of the time is dominated by the male poets’ imagination. Man and his mind are always endowed with the superiority to control and dominate women and nature. As Roach puts it: “In patriarchal culture nature is overpersonified and women are underpersonified. Women are perceived to merge with nature, to be part of the nonhuman surroundings and only semihuman. Similarly, nature is perceived as female, as virgin resource to be exploited or raped, as sharing in woman’s semihuman quality” (56). This statement is especially true, I think, in describing Wordsworth’s poems.

Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* advocates the idea of androgyny and suggests that Shakespeare’s brain is androgynous and so are Keats’s and Coleridge’s. Shelley is considered to be a-sexual and Wordsworth is more masculine. Woolf categorizes them according to the masculine or feminine characteristics in their works. With no clear, analytical discussion of the special features of their works, Woolf’s
idea is more intuitive instead of theoretical. In this chapter, through the analysis of their dialectic love between nature and mind, I try to distinguish the Romantic poets’ attitude in facing nature and how they strike a balance between nature and their imagination. In this aspect, I discover that in facing nature, Wordsworth puts more emphasis on his own imagination and therefore is more masculine, while Keats is more passive and feminine; Coleridge’s attitude is quite ambivalent and at last he seems to reject to face this conflict and attribute the supreme power to God; as to Shelley, with the emphasis on both the power of nature and that of the imagination, I think he is somewhat androgynous.

With the strong belief and assertion of self identity, the Romantics’ emphasis on imagination has its historical background and is quite understandable. Besides, this innovative emphasis is also a great contribution to human world, especially to art since it helps set up artists’ autonomy and help artists find the value of their works.

While facing nature, the important inspiration in the Romantic period, the conflict between nature and mind (or self) is inevitable. The Romantic ego is potently male and in the figurative battles with nature, it is capable of incorporating into itself whatever attributes of the female it desires to possess (Mellor “On Romanticism and Feminism” 7). As Marlon B. Ross also puts,

Solipsistically magical, the ‘self’ can transform any external object into an aspect of itself while pretending to deny the externality of that object; it can envision and contain the infinite world by peering into the finite self, appearing to liberate the self from its own borders, appearing to capture the world for itself, appearing to father the world. (27)

It seems that this statement reflects the general situation in the Romantic lyrics. The stress on imagination and self identity is similar among the Romantics but the difference in degree and in the way they apply their imagination somewhat
distinguishes them. This is not a value judgment of their poems since it is not really fair to criticize the nineteenth-century attitude from a twenty-first-century perspective. Yet, I believe, through the ecofeminist reading of those canon works, we may know better how to adjust ourselves in facing nature and this study therefore may help us get a more moderate attitude toward nature.