

Green to the Very Door: Ecocriticism and Romanticism

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Close Reading of 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud'

In the poem 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', William Wordsworth uses simile and personification to explore nature as consolation in memory in the midst of escalating industrialism, revealing nature as humanity's natural companion and healer. By writing in the past tense for the first three stanzas, Wordsworth creates a reflective account of past lonely wanders, and how his natural surroundings transformed into 'jocund company', revealing nature as humanity's healing companion, and establishing memory as a core theme in the poem.¹ The final stanza, in the present tense, explores nature as consolation in memory, when the experience flashes 'upon that inward eye'. Significantly, Wordsworth composed the poem two years after he saw the daffodils which were the source of inspiration, demonstrating their consoling power even after this time.²

Wordsworth's opening line is rich in romantic characteristics, thematically setting up a ballad about an individual who finds a sense of purpose, consolation and connection in nature, after wandering 'lonely as a cloud'. The pronoun 'I' introduces the romantic theme of 'the individual', and is decisively a deliberate poetic choice, since it is known he was originally accompanied by his sister Dorothy on this walk.³ This focus on his own individual experience is demonstrative of romanticism's nature in valuing and celebrating each unique person's perspective and inner struggles.⁴ Through providing insight to his individual perspective and initial turmoil, Wordsworth explores nature as healing, solace and a companion, by later showing how the experience shifts his mindset. Though it could be argued that the choice may have been for rhythmic purposes, it is likely more representative of the poem being about Wordsworth's own personal experience with nature, and the profound and lasting impact the memory had on him personally; opening the poem up to exploration of the romantic trait of focussing on the inner self, without the need to consider or pretend to fully understand Dorothy's individual experience. The simile: 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' is important in that it is a repetition of the ballad's title, emphasising this

¹ William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads And Other Poems*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2003), p. 188.

² Wordsworth Grasmere, *The Poetry* (unspecified) < <https://wordsworth.org.uk/wordsworth/the-poetry/> > [accessed 19 January 2026].

³ Wordsworth Grasmere, unspecified.

⁴ Language and Philosophy, *What Is Romanticism?* [video]. 2024
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_offXNeFFQ> [accessed 14 January 2026].

melancholic mood; and in it being ‘an explicit, stated comparison’.⁵ This paints a picture of a person who feels lonely and aimless. Establishing the theme of loneliness creates a feeling of distance and disconnect between the poet and his surroundings, before showing, through personification and imagery, the healing benefits of nature on the human psyche later in the ballad when surrounded by such ‘jocund company’. Thus, the initial stanza, rich in romantic characteristics, demonstrates the nature of romanticism in celebrating the individual, glorifying nature and idealising the past.⁶ This image is deliberately established to show the individual’s affliction before later emphasising nature as providing solace. The feeling of disconnect intensifies with pastoral imagery of the cloud floating ‘high o’er vales and hills’. Wordsworth’s diction: ‘floats’ and ‘high’, demonstrate how empty and disconnected he (the cloud) feels, potentially serving to create relatability with the reader through familiarity. After all, Wordsworth largely aimed to challenge the notion that literature was solely for the ‘educated upper classes’ and claimed that the ‘lives of the lower classes were better suited to the exploration of the ‘primary laws of our nature’’.⁷ Using syntax in the following lines: ‘When all at once I saw a crowd/ A host, of golden daffodils’ establishes ‘personification’ before revealing the subject (daffodils). ‘Crowd’ as a collective noun for people, and ‘host’ suggesting a purposeful invitation, anthropomorphises nature, developing the idea of nature as a companion. This personification reiterates the ecocritical concept of interconnectedness in the notion: ‘nature exists as equally present, an entity which affects us, and which we can affect’.⁸ Conceivably, this is supported by the observation that Wordsworth, a human, likens himself to a cloud, and then actively proceeds to liken the daffodils to a crowd of people. This connects nature and humanity the same way romantic poetics connect ‘emotional communication and the natural world’.^{9,10} In addition to exploring nature as alive, Wordsworth’s personification demonstrates nature’s importance as a companion to humanity.

⁵ Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook*, 1st edn. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 101.

⁶ Kate Miller-Wilson, ‘10 Key Characteristics of Romanticism In Literature’, *Your Dictionary*, 27 August 2020. <<https://www.yourdictionary.com/articles/romanticism-literature-characteristics>> [accessed 18 January 2026].

⁷ Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 6.

⁸ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction To Literary And Cultural Theory*, 4th edn. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 252.

⁹ Dr.Digvijay Singh, ‘The Philosophy Of Nature In William Wordsworth’s Poetry: A Study Of Harmony And Solitude’, *International Journal Of Humanities And Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, 13.12 (2024), 144-148 (p. 145) <DOI: 10.35629/7722-1312144148>.

¹⁰ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth And The Environmental Tradition*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p.17.

In exploring disconnect from nature and the world, he suggests the dire implications he feared industrialism would create.¹¹

Wordsworth opens the second stanza with a simile which introduces the sublime. It proposes the 'bigger picture' in introducing the theme of the celestial. Using this vast concept as incomparable to the daffodils glorifies nature in true romantic form; sublime imagery allows Wordsworth to relate the spiritual and emotional impact he believes that nature wields on humanity.¹² Universal imagery denotes spirituality, creating a conceptually sublime comparison for the reader, demonstrating the imaginative mindset which environmental interactions provide. Employing the sublime to convey the healing powers of nature, is similarly used in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Particularly, in chapter 10 when the 'sublime and magnificent scenes afforded (Victor) the greatest consolation that (he) was capable of receiving', thus directly exploring nature as consoling.¹³ When these scenes 'elevated (Victor) of all littleness of feeling' it evokes the idea of how Wordsworth's own 'littleness of feeling' in his loneliness and emptiness is elevated by the dancing daffodils.¹⁴ Sublime thinking continues with hyperbolic description of the daffodils as 'never-ending', possibly acting to deliberately reiterate the comparison to the vast and unparalleled size of the universe. Wordsworth reminds the reader of the impressive natural sights 'available to give joy 'unto all'', which are overlooked despite their vastness, potentially due to the preoccupation with industrialism.¹⁵ The hyperbolic 'ten thousand saw I at a glance' continues this concept of vastness, remarking on the impressive sight. Wordsworth personifies the daffodils 'tossing their heads in sprightly dance', drawing a sharp comparison with his own 'lonely' wandering. This is reminiscent of a passage in his poem 'The Ruined Cottage' where nature continues to thrive, 'oblivious to human suffering'.¹⁶ An ecocritical reading of this repetition may denote the effect of industrialism on humans and their mindset, while nature remains buoyant and energetic. Thus, here and Wordsworth's broader works open the interpretation that 'Humanity only survives in nature. Human survival and the survival of nature are therefore co-ordinate

¹¹ Jonathan Kerr, '245 Years On, Wordsworth Still Has So Much To Teach Us', *Wordsworth Grasmere Blog*, 7 April 2015. < <https://wordsworth.org.uk/blog/2015/04/07/245-years-on-wordsworth-still-has-much-to-teach-us/> > [accessed 18 January 2026].

¹² Wordsworth Grasmere, *Nature* (unspecified) < <https://wordsworth.org.uk/items/nature/> > [accessed 18 January 2026].

¹³ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or The Modern Prometheus*, (London: Penguin Random House, 2003), p. 99.

¹⁴ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 99.

¹⁵ Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 18.

¹⁶ Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 34.

with one another.’¹⁷ Combining this romantic-ecological concept with the possible ecocritical reading of the poem that nature saved this man, suggests we should feel implored to save nature. After all, Wordsworth ‘fully and consciously apprehended his debt to nature’.¹⁸

In the third stanza the opening similes cease, and nature ‘gives joy’ and elevates the poet’s heart by providing immediate consolation.¹⁹ Wordsworth’s pastoral poesy explores the idea of daffodils as infectious and powerful through repeating personification. The daffodils’ ‘sprightly dance’ followed by ‘the waves beside them’ dancing explores the daffodils’ impact on their wider surroundings. Specifically glorifying the daffodils here, who outshine ‘the sparkling waves in glee’, demonstrates again that though the sea, like the Milky Way, is physically larger than the daffodils, it does not mean they are greater, particularly as a healing companion to man. Comparing the daffodils to these vast environments could be interpreted as encouraging a contrast between them and industrialisation, presenting nature as a still superior force upon humanity, though industrialism appears to be progressing humanity. Wordsworth’s diction in this stanza creates an uplifting and jovial feel: ‘sparkling’ and ‘glee’ reflect the poet’s ‘gay’ outlook now he is in ‘jocund company’. This signifies somewhat immediate consolation through nature, contrasting his previous loneliness to this newfound company, even if he is not conscious of it yet. The repetition of ‘gazed’ demonstrates the extent of his captivation by the daffodils. Importantly, the active reflection on ‘what wealth to me the show had brought’ concludes the third stanza, linking back to the ‘golden daffodils’. This descriptive diction compares the idea of superficial wealth with the more lasting and wholesome wealth, as brought by nature. Considering Wordsworth’s concerns regarding industrialisation, this creates a comparison between the wealth provided by the pastoral scape with the superficial ‘commercial’ wealth that the rise of industrialism provides. Wordsworth believed the latter threatened to ‘dissolve the bond between the natural and human worlds’, thus distancing people from what he believed is so fundamentally important to the human psyche.²⁰ Thus, he uses polysemous diction as means to explore his concerns and relate them to his readers. Doing this in the poetic form is poignant in exploring the ‘emotional communication between man and the natural world’.²¹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 21.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.18.

²⁰ Kerr, 2015.

²¹ Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 17.

The fourth stanza's temporal shift to the present, demonstrated in the shift from past to present tense, closes the actively 'reflective narrative' in the poem. It marks a physical shift from outdoors to indoors, finding Wordsworth contemplating. Wordsworth explores the consolation of nature in memory by reflecting on the enduring benefits of his experience. Using comparative diction, he demonstrates improvement from his past 'lonely' state to his current 'solitude', demonstrating how the same state of being alone has been reframed owing to his natural experience. 'Bliss of solitude' confirms this drastic reframing of spending time on his own. Similarly, 'in vacant or in pensive mood' echoes the emptiness of the first stanza's lonely cloud, with the new mindset brought about by the daffodils. Wordsworth contrasts physical presence with mental presence to demonstrate the power of nature. The idea of the narrator dancing with the daffodils, even though he is physically rested indoors, demonstrates nature's potency: the pastoral is ever-present, even when he is indoors, owing to the power of memory and imagination, thus alluding to its profound effect. 'For oft' reinstates his aim of relating to the general reader, those most affected mentally by industrialism, through linguistic choices. Although 'Flash upon that inward eye' is frequently interpreted to mean the memory, 'inward eye' is also representative of the 'special affinity' the English romantics had for 'inner eye' metaphors and similes.²² It connects nature and the sublime: this visual memory of the natural world appearing in the sacred and spiritual 'mind's eye'. Wordsworth translates a physical experience into a spiritual memory, and as such, brings 'the unconscious into consciousness' which Tarnas argued was imperative of romantic introspection.²³ The final lines connect the poet in dance with the personified daffodils when his 'heart with pleasure fills/ And dances with the daffodils', demonstrating that he has found ultimate consolation in this memory and a powerful relationship with nature. It is reminiscent of the 'Wordsworthian centre' which views nature and humanity as one.²⁴ This last stanza is distinctly effective in exploring nature as consolation in memory due to it taking place in the present: it suggests the first three stanzas are recollected from this reflective 'pensive' state on

²² Judson S. Lyon, 'Romantic Psychology And The Inner Senses: Coleridge', *PMLA*, 18.3 (1966), 246- 260 (p. 246) <DOI: 10.2307/460810>.

²³ Ronald L. Boyer, *On Romanticism in Jung's Psychology: A Reflection on Richard Tarnas' The Passion Of The Western Mind* (2017) < <https://www.depthinsights.com/Depth-Insights-scholarly-ezine/on-romanticism-in-jungs-psychology-a-reflection-on-richard-tarnas-the-passion-of-the-western-mindby-ronald-l-boyer/> > [accessed 22 January 2026].

²⁴ John F. Danby, 'William Wordsworth: Poetry, Chemistry, Nature', in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. By Laurence Coupe (Oxon: Routledge, 2000), pp. 44- 49 (p. 49).

the couch, thus actively demonstrating how powerful this memory of nature is in its imagery throughout.

Overall, it is apparent that each stanza has an individual function in the storytelling of the individual: stanza one presents the wandering, lost individual, sets the scene, and introduces the inciting incident in his growth and development. Stanza 2 ‘glorifies nature’ with vivid imagery and presents nature in its carefree element. Stanza 3 sees nature beginning to have an impact on the poet, though he does not yet realise that. Finally, stanza 4 completes the story: the individual experiences solace brought about by nature and no longer views time alone as a lonely endeavour, but rather an opportunity for him to mentally revisit the daffodils.

In conclusion, the form of a poem alone as having ‘the capacity to alter mentalities’ seems an apt concept when considering Wordsworth’s choice to write in this form to explore the concept of altering mentality.²⁵ Interestingly, Wordsworth successfully explores nature as healing, with Mill’s response to Wordsworth’s poetry confirming that ‘the beauty, stability and endurance of nature are necessary prerequisites for human social and psychological well-being’ aligning with Wordsworth’s aims.²⁶ Thus, exploring nature through the ‘evergreen language’ of pastoral poesy, successfully shows nature and the form itself as possessing ‘permanent, enduring power’.²⁷ The poetry itself has the same consoling effect which Wordsworth intended to demonstrate to the readership can be garnered through interacting with nature. In *Romantic Ecology*, Johnathan Bate explores this direct relationship between poetry and nature, using Hazlitt’s comment that ‘poetry is ‘the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself’, which considering the consoling effect the poetry had on Mills, confirms Wordsworth’s understanding of this.²⁸ The poem’s rich personification throughout establishes nature as alive and a strong companion for humanity, reflecting the expressive and imaginative nature of romanticism. As discussed above, ecocritically, this personification could be considered to be exploring the natural world as a ‘present entity’ and may encourage further considerations of how we relate to nature.²⁹ The broader context of Wordsworth’s writing, especially ‘The Prelude’ which included a ‘mini-history of pastoral that contrasts the past with the present’ shows Wordsworth’s former considerations of the

²⁵ Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 33.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 33

²⁷ Ibid, p. 18.

²⁸ Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 17.

²⁹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 252.

changing landscape, and concern of industrialisation's cultural influence.³⁰ In this sense, his work relates to British ecocriticism's tendency 'to warn us of environmental threats emanating from governmental, industrial, commercial and neo-colonial forces'.³¹ Though this particular Wordsworth poem does not directly warn of these forces, awareness of Wordsworth's standpoint suggests a connected motivation which is stressed through promoting the pastoral landscape, rather than denouncing industrialism. He focuses on the ecocritical concern of 'the crucial matter of the relationship between culture and nature'.³² Overall, he decentralises industrialism by showing nature as the 'hero', the true consolation in the changing times, and as beneficial in the world's preoccupation with industrialism.³³ His reverse personification in the simile comparing himself to a cloud, further stresses the interconnectedness of humanity and nature, using these devices to demonstrate their equality. Another simile is used in the second stanza but is omitted from the third and fourth, creating a structural balance which reflects the consistent rhyme scheme and may hint at the balance required for nature and humanity to function properly. Much like the perfectly repeating rhyme scheme, repetition serves as an important literary device, with 'dancing' appearing equally in every stanza. Dancing as a creative 'art' form, explores the aliveness of nature, and personifies it in a way which characterises it as joyful and animated. It is used to personify the daffodils four times, comparing them to captivating 'entertainment'. Wordsworth's conclusive final line of dancing 'with the daffodils' reveals nature as humanity's natural companion and healer, consolidating his mindset shift, and final unity with nature. He has found ultimate consolation in the memory of nature, influenced by its buoyancy in the face of escalating industrialism. He is enlightened in his dancing, compared to his previous 'wandering' like a grey industrial cloud. In all, the poem explores both the immediate and enduring effects of nature, both as consolation.

³⁰ Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 19.

³¹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 251.

³² Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 252.

³³ Language and Philosophy, 2024.

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The Green and Grey

A short story exploring nature and industrialism.

The Beginning

When I lived in the land, which I cannot and must not name for fear of its revival, I did not know what great responsibility taxed our custodian. Nor could I; for it was truly an horrific undertaking. Her rule over the land was tyrannical, and in this manner, we people were not a priority of hers. Yet, remarkably, her interests did not lie in money or in greed.

She, like the others who lived on her lands, simply lived. And they lived simply. They had not much to do in terms of labour, besides tend to a sick tree every so often, and in general they had little to think about besides the expansive landscape. As you can deduce- this was not a riveting existence, yet it was peaceful and calm; and peoples' spirits were in good temperament.

We seldom saw our custodian. She chose to reside some distance away from us and was sighted solely when the seasons turned- when white snow melted into spring bouquets, which blossomed into a golden sun, which from there spun amber onto green leaves, which withered into ghosts in the soil.

At these seasonal occurrences, on which she was present, she conversed little, if at all, and was least genial in nature. I always considered her countenance resentful, for she grew greatly agitated by even slight alterations to her land, including those outside our will. I supposed then that she cared not for our companionship, though now I can comprehend what sinister suppositions troubled her.

One occasion, I inquired as to whether she felt quite well. She responded curtly, 'it is changing'. I considered her response trivial, for there was obvious change: the turn of the sun's watchful regard before it withdrew completely and let darkness consume us.

The Travellers

As autumn crept upon us, two travellers approached the land and asked to be allowed admission. Our custodian nodded gracefully before saying the following-

'Walk as you will,

But care not to bend that same will

Of others.'

It was the first she had ever displayed any sort of geniality towards us, besides of course, allowing us to live in the land in the first instance, and we were disconcerted by her sudden solicitude. The travellers accepted her request and entered, bearing no sign of the misfortune they carried with them.

Their arrival, though first merry- for new company was a welcome amendment- turned grave, for they brought perturbing news of the land beyond ours. We would have believed it nonsense, some trivial fancy, if not for their afflicted countenances.

One eve, soon after, as a cold moon glared down upon us, illuminating us like a row of ghostly candles, a tear came to the eye of one of the travellers and he marvelled:

'We must be dead, for surely- this is Heaven.'

His companion responded: 'No, dear friend- we are at last alive! For this is creation.'

They went back and forth a while in this conflict before one turned and asked me to ascertain whether they were in fact dead or alive.

I was uncertain how to respond, for I had not entertained such thought before. Though I do now confess it were a worthy inquiry.

'I suppose that we could be dead- for we do little besides maunder the plains.'

'See!' Exclaimed the one fixated on Heaven.

'However,' I conjectured. 'I plead you take no offence at this; but when I first beheld you on arrival, I saw death in your countenances. Yet surely, with each step you have strode in this land, it is apparent you have attained the spark of spirit. I believe it true: you look more alive now than you have yet.'

'I hold no opposition to your theory: I hypothesise that this land heals.'

One in our group enquired after their original land. At this, one answered immediately:

'Do not ask us- I entreat you do NOT ask after that place from whence we came. I wish to forget it and forget it I had until this moment-'

He ceased suddenly, his face greyed. His companion offered:

‘He means to say that it is unlike here: the trees are greyed, and our sky is ashen. This colour green exists, true, but not like this- not spurting from soil. And the stars!’ His eyes shone in reflection of the brilliant starlight. ‘They are extinct!’

‘Then indeed: you lead me to suspect that it is from death whence you came.’ I concluded.

A clouded and troubled expression came over him.

‘Daylight is a stranger there, and night ne’er visited us, not as she does now. But let us talk no further on this- my companion grows ill of it.’

I nodded and we concluded our conversation. We did not talk of the grey land they once knew thenceforth.

Winter

The travellers’ visages parted further from death the longer they were with us, until we ceased to remember their former appearance, or ponder on the ghastly tidings of their original land. That was, until winter came and clasped her icy grip around us. A frost more frightful than any we had previously known suffused the air; and we woke one morning to discover the trees adorned in shawls, draped entirely in warmth- as was our custodian’s tradition.

At this observation, we gathered and headed towards the cavern our custodian allowed us to shelter in during these months. The cavern was located at the height of a modest mountain; a one-day walk from where we were. The expedition was a lengthy one but would have been longer if not for the trees’ sheltering us from the elemental evils. I noted the travellers’ glances at the garbed trees, whilst we, small and frail in their mighty comparison ventured onward.

The eve of our walk, celebrated by our reaching of our destination, one of the travellers stood at the cavern’s mouth, peering down on the sea of shawls, and turned to us in anticipation.

‘May I propose to you all a consideration; you who do not yet know the solitude a permanent roof may bring, and what a home of all seasons might entail.’

Several murmurs emanated from our circle, and one asked him to proceed his musings.

‘These trees, for which there are many, sheltered us finely on our pilgrimage to this cavern today.’

The hum of agreement reverberated around the cave.

‘I propose that we seek a more permanent shelter from these very beasts.’

‘How ever do you mean?’

‘I mean that in an altered form, these same trees who watched us from beneath their shawls, could serve us: they could house us all! There would be no need to wander wearily up this winter rock; for that shelter which we could so easily possess.’

‘Sir, surely you do not suppose we can simply rearrange them! They stand firm and immovable where they are stationed!’

‘Blade would deem them less immovable- we would fashion them in a manner suited to our wants.’

Objections pierced the air. None spoke apart from I.

‘Sir, that is treason. You must be wary of our custodian overhearing such things! We will live as we have always lived- *with* the trees.’

The cave lapsed into silence, and the man’s companion apologised for any caused offence, of which there was much. Winter passed slowly and the disagreement was eventually forgotten. However, on reflection, and it is only on reflection that I observe any significance in the occurrence: I sighted the custodian near the cavern one morn; she was between trees with one hand pressed against the bark, the other holding a loose shawl. I assumed she was tending to one afflicted with sickness and dismissed it entirely.

The Structure

I woke one spring morning to discover a most peculiar creature on the plain. It was holding off the sun, and seemed to study me, though it had no eyes.

‘Have mercy, please!’ Cried I, hand raised to conceal it from my vision, when its clenched jaw gaped open. I considered it might be my end, and that surely it was preparing to consume me, when a traveller appeared at its jaw.’

‘Oh heavens, it has entrapped you already! How! How are you not yet in the beast’s stomach?’

He hurried to my side, legs still attached -to my astonishment- and kneeled over me.

‘Wake entirely, for your mind still slumbers.’

Per his instruction, I sat up fully, eyes closed and inhaled the morning air slowly and completely.

‘Thank you,’ I said. ‘That was indeed a most despicable terror.’

‘It appears so.’ He tended, but when I unsealed my eyes again the creature still sat watching.

‘Heavens! It is still there!’

Following my gaze, he recognised what horrified me and- I jest not- he laughed at me, in ridicule!

‘You must not be afraid, for that is no beast nor creature. Come- come closer.’

He extended an arm so I could steady myself and took me to the beast. In nearness, it was more beast-like than ever: its skin was coarse and cutting, feathered with short thorns.

‘It shall devour us!’ Cried I.

‘It shall not.’ A voice too frail to originate from such a beast, sounded from within. It was a voice I recognised, and I turned to the traveller in alarm.

‘Your friend! It has devoured him.’

The creature’s mouth thence opened inward and revealed the man’s companion, seated fully limbed in the dark stomach.

‘Well, how do you like it?’

‘How ever did you slay such a large beast?’

‘With blade.’ The one said proudly.

You may think me ignorant or ingenuous now, for not having calculated the truth of this beast’s origins, but you must comprehend that it beared no resemblance to its previous form of which I was so accustomed to, and so, myself and the others took shelter in the creature for many weeks. All until the traveller left to slay another so we might have more room.

The Missing Man

‘Have any seen my dear friend, my fellow traveller?’ Entreated the traveller who had stayed that same evening.

We replied in the negative, and a search divided amongst us. We searched the shoreline, scanned the stark meadows, and steered finally into the dark forestry.

‘Perhaps your companion was defeated by the beast.’ Someone offered timidly.

‘Impossible.’

‘Would he have returned to whence you came?’ I enquired.

‘Nay. Impossible.’ He repeated.

We walked the rows of bark-clad giants, and as we progressed, the creak and crack of trunks followed us. A sensation I have now learnt to be fear pressed against my nerves, when a child from our group called out in the darkness.

‘Mama, what troubles the trees?’

We ran to where he stood, discovering him pointing earnestly at a gathering of about five trees turned inwards to each other, fastened in a tight embrace. At first, it might have occurred to be a natural composition, but the trees... they trembled, as though taking shallow breaths, as a person in hiding might, when attempting to retain complete stillness. Stranger still, something gleamed in the dark, trickling down the bark in a thick black thread.

‘Whatever is that?’ A heroic man from our company walked toward the congregation, arm outstretched in preparation to examine the strange substance. When- a sound which haunts me to this day, like the low growl of a creature entrapped in a hollow vault, scraping for release, reverberated.

The ground, I maintain, trembled slightly. The man’s foot, which loitered in that stage of motion between taking his next step, lingered and trembled, as something inconceivable happened. The trees twisted outward- not with branches alone, but with their entire bodies. All at once, they moved as though to face us, to reveal, hanging there amongst them, exhibited by five angled branches, the lost man for whom we had searched.

‘Friend!’ Cried the traveller to his companion. But his companion hanged loose; a thread disjointed and departed. His idle head limply hung, and his skin greyed, visited by death again.

‘I believe he is gone.’ I wagered gently, but the now solitary man ignored my words.

‘What is the meaning of this? Friend! Are you with us?’

No sound came from the being who was once flesh. But from the beings, who were indeed *beings* at this point, shot a dagger-like branch which plunged through the heart of the young child's mother. The shrill scream which can only come from a child who witnesses their guardian brutally dislodged commenced.

'Run, for heaven's sake! Run!' cried I.

The traveller stared at his friend still, who swayed slightly but limply in the dark. The child was collected by another in our company. And we ran. I believe the traveller failed to stop regarding his friend, for we did not see him after this point. As we fled, trunks viciously protruded from the rich earth, spraying soil in our faces, but we trembled through the oppressing scene. For the first time, we knew fear, and our once green land greyed rapidly.

The barren fields stared solemnly after us as we scudded through, diminishing in numbers. Some fled down the short slope to the sands, soon sunken in swirling spitting shafts pitting the shoreline. The sea lashed at us with a chilling ferocity, and the trees- I cannot extend the horror it is to see such large trees, once so amenable- persisted hunting us.

Our cries pierced the vale of night, splitting the grey clouds which huddled above, spitting sharp and biting stones at us. Nowhere was safe: our only prospect was the other land, from where the late travellers had originally fled.

'To the grey land! 'Tis our only hope now.' I cried, charging on.

Through the barren scape, more of us were lost to this elemental cavalry, and it was only when we were met with our custodian, seated in lamentation, with her head lowered, that the trees ceased their brutalities.

She sat at the threshold which connected the lands. Silently, she looked upwards at the trees, eyes glazed with tears, then turned to us.

'You have, all of you, shamed this land, and have brought unto yourselves what now follows.' She attempted to hold her head high but the gate behind her trembled, shaking, and her head lowered in a similar motion.

'What happens, dear custodian?' Cried one of our company.

'The greyness sought now comes to seek you: all that is green will be grey.'

As she imparted these words unto us, grey indeed pervaded, grasping at the grass, and tracing our hunters' bark upwards like poisonous nails. The grey ran through the blades of grass, pushing them forward and flattening them into a hard ground. Grey finally surrounded us all, encompassing our borders, transforming the trees into large metal beasts. Our own spirits must have been green, for they too left with our custodian.

'Now, it is dead.' Said she. And with her words, she stepped from where she stood and disintegrated, disappearing into dust.

'Where did she go?' Cried the child, who was still in his saviour's arms.

'She has returned to the land.'

Critical Commentary on 'The Green and Grey'

Inspired by romantic literature, particularly Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, I aimed to create a piece exploring industrialism, nature and the 'scenic sublime'.³⁴ I used the gothic tropes pathetic fallacy and foreshadowing to create suspense and convey the romantic message of industrialism as harmful to nature.

I was also inspired thematically by Bate and Wordsworth's romantic poetry; discovering a distinct difference in the way the romantic cause was related.³⁵ Unlike the idealised and glorified nature presented by Wordsworth, anti-pastoral works such as Blake's 'London' directly focus on industrialism's impact.³⁶ This comparison inspired me to create antithetical landscapes: the green land representing a Wordsworthian presentation of nature; the grey land representing bleak industrialism. These juxtaposing 'lands' helped me explore two important romantic landscapes through an ecocritical lens.

Engaging with Jhan Hochman's thought that 'culture fashions and manipulates world nature', I demonstrate how despite the travellers feeling 'at last alive' in the green land, their

³⁴ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction To Literary And Cultural Theory*, 4th edn. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 255.

³⁵ William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads And Other Poems*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2003).

³⁶ Greg Garrard, 'Radical Pastoral?', in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. By Laurence Coupe (Oxon: Routledge, 2000), pp. 182- 186 (pp. 182- 185).

‘grey land’ culture remains intact, with them desiring structures.³⁷ Their culture manipulates the nature of this green world, bringing harm to it and themselves. Coequally, the green land residents’ culture of treating nature as equal manipulates their world’s nature too. They wish to live ‘*with* the trees’, displaying outrage at the thought of dislodging them. Hochman argues that for ‘green cultural studies to be an effective politico-cultural tool in the service of nature’ it will need to grant nature’s entities and beings the same respect given to humans.³⁸ Thus, I granted the trees in my story the same power humans have; in exploring ‘deforestation’ as ‘dehumanisation’. Exploring them as equal ‘*beings*’ which were ‘once so amenable’ now ‘persistently hunting’ the people, sees them literally enact equal treatment. I personify the ‘grey clouds’ as hurling ‘sharp and biting stones’ to explore how the ‘grey culture’ is manipulating and manifesting itself within nature.

Blake’s pathetic fallacy illustrates the industrialist environment ‘in every face I meet/ Marks of weakness, marks of woe’. Creatively inspired by this, I explore pathetic fallacy through the travellers’ countenances.³⁹ The narrator ‘saw death’ in their countenances on their arrival, observing ‘the spark of spirit’ attained in the ‘green land’, and even when merely recounting the grey land, the traveller’s ‘face greyed’. Influenced by how Shelley creates suspense in foreshadowing destiny’s ‘immutable laws’ which decreed Victor’s ‘terrible destruction’ I decided to emulate this; showing how the narrator only comprehends what ‘sinister suppositions troubled’ their custodian in hindsight.⁴⁰ These suppositions are foreshadowed by pathetic fallacy when the narrator discusses the ‘darkness (consuming)’ them. Although the sun is literally setting, the custodian’s comment ‘it is changing’ indicates greater change: the darkness consuming the land foreshadows the upcoming darkness which consumes the land.

Overall, emulating the romantic literary genre was important in crafting a piece which engages with romanticism. Though retaining consistent archaic diction was challenging, reading *Frankenstein* aided in successful emulation, and improved my writing craft. Shelley’s subtle but effective seasonal anthropomorphism helped me emulate the desired style with

³⁷ Jhan Hochman, ‘Green Cultural Studies’, in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. By Laurence Coupe (Oxon: Routledge, 2000), pp. 187- 192 (p. 188).

³⁸ Hochman, p. 192.

³⁹ William Blake, *London* [colour-printed relief etching with watercolour on wove paper] (1794) <<https://jstor.org/stable/community.15699115>> [accessed 2 January 2026].

⁴⁰ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or The Modern Prometheus*, (London: Penguin Random House, 2003), p. 43.

‘autumn crept upon us’.⁴¹ Additionally, I reproduced her ‘spark of being’ in the ‘spark of spirit’ to deliberately create a hopefully recognisable intra-textual reference for readers.⁴² Hochman’s statement allowed me to explore culture ecocritically and demonstrate the suffering which could emerge from nature’s relationship with culture ‘made monstrous’ through gothic and romantic concepts.⁴³

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⁴¹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 98.

⁴² Ibid. p. 58.

⁴³ Hochman, p. 192.