

## *The Representation of Landscape and City in the Poetry of William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot*

تمثيل المناظر الطبيعية والمدينة في شعر ويليام وردزورث و تي إس إليوت

Imane Bensenouci <sup>1,\*</sup>, Ilhem Mortad-Serir <sup>2</sup>

1,2 Laboratory of Critical and Literary Studies, its Scholars in the Arab Maghreb  
of Creation at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Department of English, Faculty of  
Languages and Literatures, University of Tlemcen (Algeria)

menaceurbenimane@gmail.com

seririlhem@gmail.com

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### **Abstract:**

The present research paper is mainly concerned with the representation of landscape and that of the city in the poetry of both William Wordsworth and T.S Eliot. It demonstrates how each poet deals with the natural world and the urban life in his poems. It is a comparative study that is based on analyzing different poems by the two poets in terms of thematic level.

The main purpose of this research work is to show how although they belong to different movements, Wordsworth and Eliot share some undeniable similarities. It is completely true that each one of them defends his new poetic theory throughout his poetry. But there still exist some connections that are not to be overlooked; each one of them conveys the meaning of his poems by employing vivid images that are drawn from their external world, and they both try to bring new techniques and styles that fit properly their intentions.

**Keywords:** *City; Eliot; Wordsworth; Landscape; Modernism; Romanticism;*

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### **ملخص**

تهتم ورقة البحث الحالية بشكل أساسي بتمثيل المناظر الطبيعية والمدينة في شعر كل من ويليام وردزورث و تي إس إليوت و توضح كيف يتعامل كل شاعر مع العالم الطبيعي والحياة الحضرية في قصائده. إنها دراسة مقارنة مبنية على تحليل القصائد المختلفة للشاعرين من حيث المستوى الموضوعي. الغرض الرئيسي من هذا العمل البحثي هو إظهار كيف أنه وبالرغم أنهما ينتميان إلى حركات مختلفة ، إلا أن وردزورث و إليوت يشتركان في بعض أوجه التشابه التي لا يمكن إنكارها. صحيح تمامًا أن كل واحد منهما يدافع عن نظريته الشعرية الجديدة عبر قصائده ولكن لا تزال هناك بعض الروابط التي لا ينبغي إغفالها ؛ ينقل كل واحد منهم معنى قصائده من خلال استخدام صور حية مستمدة من عالمهم الخارجي ، ويحاول كلاهما تقديم تقنيات وأساليب جديدة تلائم نواياهما.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المدينة؛ إليوت؛ وردزورث؛ المناظر الطبيعية؛ الحداثة؛ الرومانسية؛

\*Corresponding Author .

## I. INTRODUCTION

Poets have always been fascinated by their surroundings whether it is the beauty of Mother Nature or the mysterious impressive urban life. All what they desire is a source of inspiration to their poems. Wordsworth is a natural poet; all his poetry deals mainly with everything that has a relation to nature. Eliot on the other hand is a poet whose main interest is the urban life and people's minds. Meanwhile, readers can find nature imagery in Eliot's poetry and urban life imagery in that of Wordsworth. In their poetry both of them have made use of a series of natural objects such as landscapes, seasons, weather, and water symbolism as a way of expressing their minds. They have managed to create a profound significance through different natural imagery. In addition to that, they have both drawn on different urban imagery in many different poems.

This research paper deals basically with the representation of landscape and that of city in the poetry of both Wordsworth and Eliot. It shows how each poet deals with the natural world and the urban life in his poems. The poems in this research work are deliberately selected. For Wordsworth the choice fell on "Tintern Abbey" (which is one of the most important poems of his collection of poems Lyrical Ballads) along with other poetic works, and for Eliot his collection *The Waste Land* that seems sufficient for the main purposes of this research work.

Throughout this paper we are going to analyze different poems using the comparative approach in order to see how different or similar the two poets can be. The main aim of this research is to show that despite the fact that Wordsworth and Eliot belong to different literary movement and different times they share some undeniable similarities.

## II. Romanticism and Modernism

Before the coming of the Romantics poetry was written in a very sophisticated way. Poems were all about important things and people like kings, queens, and gods; poets did not believe that the common people were good enough to have a poem written about them. But the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge (1798), contributed to freeing poetry from the chains and shackles of the neo-classical period. The Neo-classicists such as John Dryden, Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, had considered themselves as the true inheritors and interpreters of the classicists Aristotle, Horace and Longinus. This is why they believed that the best way to write successfully was to imitate the Ancients; in other words, the Greek's and Roman's traditions and rules of writing. They insisted that a good poet should have genius but should also check his opinions and avoid excess, enthusiasm, and emotionalism (Wordsworth, W., & Coleridge, 2005). Thus they were very conservative and dogmatic which led younger poets to reject their mechanical rules and artificial language. Wordsworth thought of breaking away from this tradition by writing something that should be completely different from what was written at that time. Thus, the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* is regarded as the coming of a new poetic movement which is 'Romanticism'. Wordsworth who was one of the major poets and critics of his time, contributed to the development of the Romantic Movement through his revolutionary theme and style. The reason why his poetry was called revolutionary is that he believed that poetry should describe incidents of common life and ordinary people, and that it should be written in deliberately plain words i.e. what Wordsworth calls "the real language of men" (Wordsworth, 2007)

Eliot on the other hand is a modernist poet who has initiated this movement along with

other poets and scholars at that time. Just as Wordsworth's collection of poems *Lyrical*

Ballads broke the traditional rules of literature and paved the way for a new literary movement, Eliot's *The Waste Land* (which is a collection of five poems and yet treated as one poem), is also considered by many critics as the key text of the Modernist movement. It reflects in tone, theme, and technique most of the principal facets of literary Modernism. The Twentieth Century was an era of wars; two world wars broke up killing millions of people. As a matter of fact, Modernism is a movement which is developed from the sense of loss and cultural decline. *The Waste Land* is regarded by many critics as a masterpiece of modern times. It is a poem which expresses the despair and disillusion of the twenties. Eliot wanted to launch a new mode of writing by using new techniques and rules of composition and also by innovating in terms of themes.

### III. Nature and Landscape in the Poetry of Wordsworth

In his Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth announces that the material of a poem should be found in human ordinary life. Landscapes, villages, lakes, love, happiness and memories are all useful themes for the poet because they are part of nature; "humble" and "rustic" life. For Wordsworth peasants and ordinary people who belong to simple rural communities are purer and closer to the natural world than people who live in cities, corrupted as they are, by emptiness and hollowness.

In his poem "Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth declares at the very beginning that the central theme is memory and that he is returning to a place where he has been before and that the experience of his visit to this place has given birth to beautiful memories which are still fresh in his mind. Thus, the entire poem is about how reflection can link the poet's past with his present and future: "While here I stand, not only with the sense/ Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts/ That in this moment, there is life and food/ For future years. " (IV. 65-68). Wordsworth here is convinced that by using memory and imagination, individuals could overcome difficulties and pains of life. "Tintern Abbey" illustrates the poet's fight against his loneliness by recalling past memories that he had with mother nature. Thus, memory is an essential concern in "Tintern Abbey". In addition, as he is a Romantic, Wordsworth deals with the traditional theme of nature and country landscape. "Tintern Abbey" is a nature poem, and is all about landscapes as described in these lines:

The day is come when I again repose  
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view  
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,  
Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits,  
Among the woods and copses lose themselves,  
Nor, with their green and simple hue, disturb  
The wild green landscape. Once again I see  
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines  
Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms  
Green to the very door; and wreathes of smoke  
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,  
With some uncertain notice, as might seem,  
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,  
Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire  
The hermit sits alone. (I. 09-23)

Wordsworth really sees nature as a source of regeneration and rebirth. His appreciation of natural scenes gives him a kind of relief. Nature has a good influence on the human mind and

helps the individual to reach intellectual and spiritual maturity. The loss of spirituality which he seems to fear here is given full expression in another poem, "London 1802" where he says:

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:  
England hath need of thee: she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;  
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Their soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

Here Wordsworth calls upon John Milton, the seventeenth century poet to come to the rescue of an England caught in the nascent grip of industrialism and materialism. There is also a sense of betrayal (forfeited) which we shall find in central position in *The Waste Land*. The poet (Wordsworth) in "Tintern Abbey" is tired of living in cities this is why he escapes to a more peaceful and quiet world in search of remedy in nature. As a matter of fact, though there are other themes treated in the poem like filial love (Wordsworth and his sister), the maturity of the human mind, memory and nature are still the focal points of "Tintern Abbey".

#### IV. Urban Life and the City in the Poetry of Eliot

The main themes of *The Waste Land* are particularly the modern world seen as mechanical and corrupted, death and rebirth and regeneration. Two of the poem's sections -- "The Burial of the Dead" and "Death by Water" -- refer specifically to the theme of death. Death can mean life; in other words, by dying, a human being can pave the way for new lives. The poet asks his friend Stetson: "That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?" (l. 71-72). Similarly, Christ, by "dying," redeemed humanity and thereby gave it new life. *The Waste Land* also refers to the spiritual and intellectual decay of the modern world. Throughout the poem, the image of a waste land shows us that, according to Eliot, 20<sup>th</sup> century culture is just a barren, desert-like world with no real redeeming qualities. Most importantly, the wasteland is infertile, and therefore incapable of letting anything grow. This infertility symbolizes the spiritual and intellectual death that has plagued the modern society, a society where it is impossible for any new hope of faith to grow or any good art either (Eliot, 1971)

Another central theme in *The Waste Land* is that of rebirth and resurrection which is shown by the Christ images and many other religious metaphors. Water in the poem is a source of rebirth, but it can also destroy. Eliot's vision is essentially of a world that is neither dying nor living:

Here is no water but only rock  
Rock and no water and the sandy road  
The road winding above among the mountains  
Which are mountains of rock without water  
If there were water we should stop and drink  
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think  
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand  
If there were only water amongst the rock  
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit  
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit  
There is not even silence in the mountains

But dry sterile thunder without rain  
There is not even solitude in the mountains  
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl  
From doors of mudcracked houses

In these lines the poet keeps repeating an image of a landscape without water; everything is dry mountains of rock with no water, thunder without rain, and a mouth which cannot spit. All these images are metaphors to the modern world and modern people which seem to be dry and without life since water represents life and rebirth.

#### V. Nature and The City: Wordsworth and Eliot

As it is known "Wordsworth belongs to the Romantic Movement, which attempted to express feelings and arguments that man's happiness lies in his maintenance of organic links with nature (Arab, S.A; Mahrouf, N; Deramchia, Y; Dahim, O; Bensemmane, 2011). Wordsworth's main interest is the natural world. He believes that nature provides a good influence on the human mind. All the manifestations of the natural world, from the highest mountain to the simplest flower, produce elevated thoughts and passionate emotions in people who observe these natural elements. As he is a worshipper of nature, Wordsworth describes landscapes in all his poems (Beach, 2003).

Tintern Abbey is a beautiful landscape that can inspire the soul and the heart of men. Furthermore, in Wordsworth's other poems such as "Daffodils", he is completely inspired by the beauty of those yellow shining flowers which are a symbol of rebirth and regeneration. He uses the image of the daffodils beneath the trees, the water of the lake moving alongside the strip of daffodils, but most of all is delighted seeing them dancing. Thus, there is a fantastic description of landscapes and natural vision:

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden Daffodils;  
Beside the Lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. (Daffodils I. 01-06)

On the other hand, Wordsworth also describes the city (London) in his sonnet "Lines Composed Upon Westminster Bridge", it is as if London was turned, magically, into some country landscape. But we know this cannot be true:

This City now doth like a garment wear  
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
Open unto the fields, and to the sky,  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air. (Westminster 01-05)

Eliot on his part used a quiet number of landscapes and natural images in *The Waste Land*. It is mostly concerned with urban life. Eliot describes modern city landscapes which symbolise spiritual deadness. Unlike Wordsworth who celebrates the beauty of nature, Eliot uses natural elements but to symbolise the hollowness and dryness of people who live in the waste land:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers. (l. 01-07)

Even if, the **flower** is considered a symbol of life, in the twenties and according to Eliot, **it presents and evokes a pessimistic vision of reality**. In the lines above, we find the “lilacs” which are flowers of purple colour (Eliot, 1971). Contrary to Wordsworth who describes the daffodils which bring happiness to the heart, Eliot uses lilacs which have poetic associations of meanings with death. “Dried tubers” may also reflect the aridity and the sterility of the landscape inhabited by people who prefer wasting time, and remaining on a superficial level of knowledge characterised by complete lack of passion. In addition, there are many other descriptions of landscapes such as the Thames River and other natural elements in the following lines:

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only  
There is a shadow under this red rock, (l. 23-26)

There is a great deal of city images and references in *The Waste Land* since it is a poem about life in the city. Eliot describes London as “Unreal city”; it has been portrayed as ugly and cruel through the entire poem: “Unreal City/ Under the brown fog of a winter noon” (III. 207-208). Eliot wants to show his despair over the city and its people through the image of the constant fog in London. He also describes the crowd of people ‘flowing’ over London Bridge, the place where Madam Sosostri practises her trade. Modern people are hopeless that they all turn to a gypsy who tells fortune. In addition to that, Eliot refers to many places in London such as the East-London pub, King William street, Queen Victoria Street as well as Magnus Martyr and Saint Mary Woolnoth Churches.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Wordsworth’s and Eliot’s presentation of country and city makes their poems full of vividness and evocation. They make use of natural elements in order to be more symbolic and allusive. But while the former celebrates virgin nature, the latter focuses on the sterility and deadness of urbanised nature and its attendant loss of beauty and spirituality. As a conclusion to this research paper, one can say that Wordsworth and Eliot share some undeniable similarities; each one of them conveys the meaning of his poems by employing vivid images and metaphors, they both draw from their external world (Nature or City), and at last they both try to bring new techniques and styles that fit properly their purposes. Finally, even though they treat their themes differently both poets call for a social reform and for a healing power that can save the human kind from fatal corruption.

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