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Nature in a Sense: A Look at Wordsworth, Other Authors, and the Bible

Hope Wakeling
Ouachita Baptist University

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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

**“Nature in a Sense: A Look at Wordsworth, Other Authors,
and the Bible”**

written by

Hope Wakeling

and submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for completion of
the Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Dr. Johnny Wink thesis director

Dr. Jay Curlin, second reader

Dr. Joey Dodson, third reader

Dr. Barbara Pemberton, Honors Program director

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NATURE IN A SENSE: A LOOK AT WORDSWORTH, OTHER AUTHORS, AND THE
BIBLE

HONORS THESIS

BY
HOPE WAKELING

APRIL 25, 2018

Introduction

Some authors create memorable works because they develop a passion for their area of focus. For example, C.S. Lewis was able to describe friendship in terms that relate to our desire to have intimate connections with people. Jane Austen could display the development of a romance in such a way that many readers have wished a story like one of hers could be real in their own lives. Personally, seeing how nature is perceived by writers has always been special to me. Aspects of nature like weeping willows, Queen Anne's lace, the Rocky Mountains, stargazer lilies, and the Great Barrier Reef have a distinct kind of beauty; sometimes poets are able to put that loveliness into words when I find myself speechless.

Ever since high school, I have been captivated by the poems of William Wordsworth, who has been deemed the quintessential "poet of Nature" by many. Other memorable writers whose perspectives on nature have impacted the world include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Keats, and John Muir. Each of these individuals brings his unique view to the table, and I find myself overwhelmed by the depth in their words have in their poems, books, and essays.

For this paper, I will be looking at several topics. I plan to view Wordsworth's early life and several of his poems that were influenced by his view of nature. Next, I will examine Emerson's essay "Nature", Thoreau's classic work *Walden*, John Keats's poems that relate to the subject, and John Muir's writings on his travels in the Western United States. I will then look at different passages of Scripture that speak about nature and creation; I plan on using my findings in the Bible as a standard to determine whose view of the natural world is most accurate.

Wordsworth's View

William Wordsworth had a close connection with nature, even from childhood. He grew up mostly in the Lake District of England, and his childhood home was next to the River Derwent. Later in life, he stated that he was grateful for its “murmuring” and the “steady cadence” it had given him when he was young: “stillness and an openness to receive were the basic slate of Wordsworth's being” (Woof, “The Wordsworths and the Cult of Nature”).

His autobiographical poem *The Prelude* features many sensations he experienced during his schooldays as a young boy. While he was still a small child, his mother died, greatly affecting him. He “took for himself some birds that others had snared” (Woof) and “heard among the solitary hills/Low breathings coming after me. . .” [Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (from *Selected Poetry of William Wordsworth*), Book I, ll. 322-3]. Through those words, he expressed the fear felt by a child and the sensation that “he [had] angered unknown powers in Nature that [were] real and far bigger than he [was]” (Woof). Yet, he also experienced a sense of beauty while engaging with Nature; he would go on horseback rides with classmates from his school at Hawkshead and look around the ruins of Furness Abbey. Wordsworth believed that he had been given a glimpse of the eternal and that “Nature had let him ‘drink’ a ‘visionary power’”; Woof also states that “through Nature he could apprehend the spiritual beyond the immediacy of the material.”

Like his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge and others in their circle, Wordsworth got caught up in the chaotic events leading to the French Revolution throughout the 1790s and early 1800s, having visited France multiple times from 1790-1792 (Davies, *William Wordsworth*, 42, 45). He had hoped that a better government would come to France —

Yet in the regal sceptre, and the pomp
Of orders and degrees, I nothing found
Then, or had ever, even in crudest youth,
That dazzled me, but rather what I mourned
And ill could brook, beholding that the best
Ruled not, and feeling that they ought to rule (*The Prelude*, Book IX, ll. 209-14)

— but was disappointed when everything turned into a bloodbath: “Domestic carnage now filled the whole year/With feast days . . . /Head after head, and never heads enough/For those that bade them fall” (Book X, ll. 356-7, 362-3). During this time, he began to see Nature “not only in terms of the relationship between himself and the natural world, but also as intimately linked with the problems of society” (Woof).

Earlier in Wordsworth’s literary career, he had become good friends with fellow poet Coleridge. They took a few trips throughout Europe together during the course of their friendship. Sometimes it was just the two of them, but other times they took traveling companions along, like Wordsworth’s only sister, Dorothy. One of their treks was to Germany in 1798; while Coleridge enjoyed himself in Ratzeburg, Wordsworth found his experience in the countryside dismal and disappointing (Davies, 96, 99). Despite the unpleasant conditions—near poverty, lackluster surroundings, loneliness, etc.—he wrote poems that reminded him of his life in England. Some of the best-known works produced during this time included the Lucy poems, “Nutting,” and the beginning of *The Prelude* (99-101). Later, he, Coleridge, and Dorothy went on a journey to Scotland in 1803 (152, 154). Wordsworth found this trip more pleasurable, encountering more beautiful scenery in Scotland than he had viewed during his previous excursion in Germany. This trip invigorated him, giving him inspiration for his poems for many years and serving as one of the last occasions on which he felt a truly magical connection to nature.

In "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth proclaimed that he was a worshipper of Nature. Whether he meant this literally or not, he seemed to display pantheistic tendencies in his early years. I strongly believe that he had a great respect for the natural world which may have gone overboard at times.

Wordsworth felt a deep pull from Nature and marveled how the rest of the world could disregard the simple beauty everywhere in his poem "The World Is Too Much with Us," written in 1802. He expresses frustration early on when he writes, "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:/Little we see in Nature that is ours;/We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon" (ll. 2-4). Everywhere he looks, he notices that everyone else is focused on making money and obtaining the things they want rather than stopping to notice the grandeur of the outside world. Material wealth is the goal of people's affections instead of the wealth to be found in nature. He becomes exasperated to the point that "[he'd] rather be/A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn" (ll. 9, 10) than be part of a world that does not appreciate Nature. His lifetime was enveloped by the Age of Sail, a period lasting approximately from 1571-1862 in which most international industries depended on the sea to conduct trade with neighboring countries. Merchants and consumers looked at the ocean and saw only business profits. However, I would argue that Wordsworth wished they would appreciate the sea for its own inherent beauty and not just the potential to make money. His pantheistic leanings, referenced above, are on display in the last two lines of the poem: "Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;/Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn" (ll. 13-14).

Another work that displays his strong attachment to the natural world is his 1799 poem, "Nutting." One day, he journeyed into the woods and discovered hazelnut trees which had produced a bountiful yield. He became momentarily distracted by all the beauty that surrounded

him and ended up playing with flowers and listening to the murmurings of a brook. Having remembered why he was there, he sprang up and broke branches off the trees in a burst of exuberance to obtain the nuts growing on them.

Then up I rose,
And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash
And merciless ravage; and the shady nook
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
Their quiet being (ll. 43-48).

He immediately regretted his actions, reminiscing that “I felt a sense of pain when I beheld/The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky—/. . . for there is a spirit in the woods” (ll. 52-3, 55). Not only does he feel bad for wrecking a part of nature, but he also believes that he has angered the presiding spirit, either literal or figurative. This resembles the Greek mythological thought that spirits, called dryads, lived in forests and were harmed when a tree was harmed. Hamadryads, another fixture of Greek mythology, were nymphs who were joined to a tree from birth and died when their tree was destroyed.

He seemed to take a more moderate approach only a couple of years later. In his 1804 composition “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” he starts by saying that the “celestial light” that covered the natural world in his younger days has now disappeared. Wordsworth despairs at this realization and wonders if he can ever recapture that joy. At this point, it is possible that he includes himself in the “us” from the line “The world is too much with us, late and small,” since he no longer senses any enchantment in the outside world. Toward the end, however, he comes to accept that, while this magical feeling cannot be retained, he can still find beauty, even in the most common things of nature.

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. (Wordsworth, XI, ll. 188-204)

An interesting perspective about the previously mentioned poems is that Wordsworth's outlook on nature seems to have changed within the space of five years. In "The World Is Too Much with Us," he expressed frustration at people who did not agree with him that Nature should be viewed as having inherent divinity. In "Nutting," he is frustrated with himself for remembering too late the "divinity" of the tree. Yet, as he grew older, he realized that nature no longer held the "holy" quality which he had perceived in childhood. As evidenced in "Ode," not only had he moved past the need for people to agree with him, but he was also beginning to accept that as a man, he could appreciate the beauty of nature without feeling the pantheistic impulse of his youth.

Emerson's View

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston in 1803 to a Unitarian minister. A quick definition of Unitarianism is that it is "an open-minded and welcoming approach to faith that

encourages individual freedom, equality for all and rational thought” (“Unitarianism explained,” www.unitarian.org.uk). It is also claimed that even though “Unitarianism has its roots in Jewish and Christian traditions it is open to insights from all faiths, science, the arts, the natural world and everyday living” (Ibid.). After his primary education, he “attended the Boston Latin School, followed by Harvard University (from which he graduated in 1821) and the Harvard School of Divinity. He was licensed as a minister in 1826 and ordained to the Unitarian church in 1829” (“Ralph Waldo Emerson,” www.biography.com). Sadly, his life took a dark turn when his wife of two years, Ellen Tucker, died of tuberculosis; he left the clergy because of this, in addition to the fact that he had a “recent crisis of faith” (Ibid.).

He then took a trip to Europe in 1832 and met literary figures Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth. Upon returning to America the next year, he gave lectures on spiritual experience and ethical living; and he moved to Concord in 1834 (Ibid.). He “often touched on the personal nature of spirituality” in his early talks, and he soon found “kindred spirits” in some writers and thinkers that lived in Concord, including Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, and Amos Bronson Alcott (father of Louisa May Alcott) (Ibid.).

During the 1830s, Emerson’s lectures were put in essay form; the one called “Nature” especially “embodied his new developed philosophy” (Ibid.). He also became known as the

central figure of his literary and philosophical group, now known as the American Transcendentalists. These writers shared a key belief that each individual could transcend, or move beyond, the physical world of the senses into deeper spiritual experience through free will and intuition. In this school of thought, God was remote and unknowable; believers understood God and themselves by looking into their own souls and by feeling their own connection to nature (Ibid.).

For the purposes of this paper, I will primarily focus on the section entitled “Nature” from

Emerson's larger work of the same name. His views on nature are very similar to Wordsworth's original thoughts on the subject.

Near the beginning of the essay, he claims that "the stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible" (Emerson, "Nature" from *Essays and Lectures*, 9). But in spite of this, he writes about how the stars tend to be taken for granted because people see them every night. Just as a younger Wordsworth reprimanded society for not seeing the beauty of nature apart from its profit potential, Emerson suggested that the stars would have to shine on a single night every thousand years for people to stop and gaze at a sight that should be breathtaking. It seems that he believed many people had become insensitive to the beauty that nature presents to us every day.

He also claims further on that only a "few adult persons can see nature" and that "most persons do not see the sun" (Emerson, 10). In order to truly see nature for all that it is, Emerson states that "the lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood" (Ibid.). The last part of that statement refers to Wordsworth's sentiments in "The World Is Too Much with Us" about being "a pagan suckled in a creed outworn." Toward the end of this section of his essay, he states that nature reflects the feelings of man, "an occult relation between the man and the vegetable" (11). He also warns about pouring in too much of one's own sorrow into this intimate connection. Memories of nature that made people glad on the first encounter now seem lifeless and bland. Whatever mood a person is in at the moment, their feelings seem to be embodied in the natural world. His theories give way to the idea that the environment itself is sympathetic to mankind's moods, whether joyful or somber; but he leaves it up to individual interpretation

whether the observer's state of mind *actually* changes environmental conditions or whether the observer only *perceives* that they change.

Thoreau's View

Henry David Thoreau lived during the first half of the 1800s in New England. He graduated from Harvard College (now University) in 1837 and started a school in 1838 with his brother John, but unfortunately, the school closed after some time due to John's becoming ill ("Henry David Thoreau," www.biography.com). Sometime after Thoreau finished his education, he met Ralph Waldo Emerson, another Concord resident, and became great friends with him. Emerson was the person who first introduced him to Transcendentalism, "a school of thought that emphasized the importance of empirical thinking and of spiritual matters over the physical world. It encouraged scientific inquiry and observation" (Ibid.). Emerson helped him out by "[using] his influence to promote Thoreau's literary efforts" and giving him "access to the lands that would inspire one of his greatest works" (Ibid.).

In 1845, Thoreau spent around two years at Walden Pond, on "property owned by Emerson" (Ibid.). During his time there, he "flipped the standard routine of the times. He experimented with working as little as possible rather than engage in the pattern of six days on with one day off" (Ibid.). He had large amounts of time "to devote to his philosophical and literary interests"; he wrote about his experiences at Walden Pond in "a collection of essays" which were published in 1854 as *Walden: or, Life in the Woods* (Ibid.). The book "espoused living a life close to nature," and "it has inspired and informed the work of naturalists, environmentalists and writers" (Ibid.). Also, while at Walden, he was thrown in jail for one night because he would not pay a

poll tax. This event led him to write “Civil Disobedience,” one of his most widely known essays. He argued that it is better to “act on one’s own individual conscience and not blindly follow laws and government policy” (Ibid.). This essay has inspired men like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi during their efforts to change their countries through civil disobedience.

After his time at Walden Pond, Thoreau looked after Emerson’s house while the latter was visiting England. He wrote about “his observations on plant and wildlife in his native Concord and on his journeys,” and he “visited the woods of Maine and the shoreline of Cape Cod several times” (Ibid.). He also devoted himself to the abolitionist cause and made a daring attempt to save Captain John Brown’s life after the raid at Harper’s Ferry in 1859. After this failed venture, his preexisting tuberculosis became worse. He died on May 6, 1862. His writings have remained well known to this day, and his “radical studies of nature earned him the moniker of ‘father of environmentalism’” (Ibid.).

For the purposes of this paper, I will discuss two chapters from *Walden* that speak the most to me on this subject. In the first chapter I explore, titled “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” Thoreau takes pleasure in lands that displayed a measure of natural beauty. He talks with farmers about cultivating the land and mentally sees himself potentially owning the farm. He shows that he desires to enjoy a nature that is already in full bloom, but only through another person’s hard work.

I walked over each farmer’s premises, tasted his wild apples, discoursed husbandry with him, took his farm at his price, at any price, mortgaging it to him in my mind; even put a higher price on it—took everything but a deed of it—took his word for his deed, for I dearly love to talk—cultivated it, and him too to some extent, I trust, and withdrew when I had enjoyed it long enough, leaving him to carry on (87).

Not only did he attempt to reap nature's benefits with no labor involved, but he also encouraged his readers to adopt the same lifestyle: "Many think that seeds improve with age. I have no doubt that time discriminates between the good and the bad; and when at last I shall plant, I shall be less likely to be disappointed. But I would say to my fellows, once for all, as long as possible live free and uncommitted" (90). A few pages later, he tells why he decided to come and live at Walden Pond. He writes, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (96-7). Here he shows that he believes nature can teach him valuable life lessons that he could never learn from a book.

"Sounds," the second chapter I studied, is filled with Thoreau's reflections about the different noises he heard around his dwelling. One sound that he heard quite often is the train whistle of the locomotives used by the Fitchburg Railroad, and he describes it as "the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer's yard, informing [the author] that many restless city merchants are arriving within the circle of the town, or adventurous country traders from the other side" (121). While he praises the train's utility, he becomes disgruntled whenever its sounds and cloud of smoke disrupt his sense of tranquility of the nature around him. This sentiment is fairly similar to the line "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers," from Wordsworth's "World" sonnet. Thoreau may be concerned that he will not truly commune with nature if he focuses on the commerce associated with trains. He also mentions hearing screech owls when every other bird is silent; according to him, their "wailing [reminds him] sometimes of music and singing birds" but also makes him think about the sad and dark side of humanity (129). He is more receptive to the screech owl's noises than to those of the train, because these birds inspire in him

the philosophy of humanity that he retreated into nature to contemplate, while the trains are just bothersome.

What I gathered from Thoreau is that he desires to immerse himself in the beauties of nature without having to put in any effort to cultivate it according to his preferences. He wants farmers to do the hard work that creates the atmosphere of country life that he enjoys, while he is only willing to put in the toil to plant a small garden for himself (90). He also strongly wishes for the trains not to interrupt during the times that he is deeply reflecting on nature or sleeping. He commends the work that trains do for commerce and the way they represent human ingenuity; he would just prefer that they not infringe on his idealized environment.

Wordsworth took a slightly different view on trains. When he learned that the railway was going to come into the Lake District, he fought it every way he could. According to Davies's biography, "he feared all the common people from Lancashire would come into his vale and ruin it" (322). Wordsworth also thought that these "commoners" would not be able to see the value in mountains and lakes and "would therefore spoil the scenery for those of taste and discrimination, such as himself (Ibid.). While he was not against trains, he was opposed to "ten thousand Lancashire folk coming on day trips, or, even worse, the new merchant class building even more holiday homes" (323). The railway opened in 1847, but "it stopped at Windermere, thanks to his and other people's protests, and never reached Ambleside" where his house Rydal Mount was located (Ibid.).

Keats's View

John Keats was a British poet who was born on October 31, 1795. His father Thomas sent his two eldest sons (John and George) “to the small village academy at Enfield, run by the liberal and gifted teacher John Clarke” (“John Keats,” www.poetryfoundation.org). Not much is known about his early childhood, but we are left to assume that it was positive and that he had healthy connections with his family members. During Keats’s time at Enfield, he was remembered by friend Charles Cowden Clarke as “not merely the ‘favorite of all,’ like a pet prize-fighter, for his terrier courage; but his high-mindedness, his utter consciousness of a mean motive, his placability, his generosity, wrought so general a feeling in his behalf, that I never heard a word of disapproval from any one, superior or equal, who had known him” (Ibid.). He also started to read profusely during his early education. Sadly, his life was marked by tragedy at age 7 when his father died from an equestrian accident, and at age 15 when his mother succumbed to tuberculosis (“John Keats,” www.biography.com). In 1810, Keats departed from school to pursue a job as a surgeon and “became a licensed apothecary in 1816” (Ibid.).

However, life took him in a different direction. After meeting a publisher named Leigh Hunt and encountering new political circles, Keats was inspired to write his first sonnet, “Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison” (Ibid.). Hunt introduced him to a group of famed poets, which included Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Wordsworth. In 1817, Keats brought forth his first volume of poetry, entitled *Poems by John Keats*. This collection received some backlash from the literary world and caused him to hesitate before publishing his first epic poem *Endymion* the following year. The criticism only worsened, possibly causing him to doubt his abilities as a poet; but he was already starting to think of new ideas for his work. He reimagined what poetry could be by proposing that it “[draw] its beauty from real world human experience

rather than some mythical grandeur” (Ibid.). This philosophy influenced his writing during the rest of his short life.

The two poems of his that I will discuss here are “To Autumn” and “Ode to a Nightingale,” as I propose that they exemplify his beliefs on nature. In the first poem, he writes in a style that possibly personifies Autumn as a woman with hair lifted by the wind who reaps the field and has songs of her own. He even shows the beauty to be found in the natural world that may have become commonplace to his readers. Examples include ripened fruit ready for harvest, familiar birds chirping, wind blowing through a granary, bees gathering pollen for honey, and a sunset casting color over a reaped field. This poem is an example of how he wrote “in the confines of his aesthetic quest rather than [brooding] over [nature] fundamentally as a universal force or the basis of his spiritual longings” (Charles Ngiewih Teke, “John Keats and Nature, an Ecocritical Inquiry,” www.literature-study-online.com). Other Romantic poets focused on the possible spiritual connection between man and nature, but Keats chose to concentrate on the beauty found in nature’s material aspects.

In “Ode to a Nightingale, Keats is expressing how he feels tired with the worries and cares of this world and desires to find an escape, which is largely reminiscent of Wordsworth’s negative feelings about “getting and spending” and not paying attention to nature in “The World Is Too Much with Us.” He wants to flee “the weariness, the fever, and the fret/Here, where men sit and hear each other groan” (www.poetryfoundation.org, ll. 23-4). The method he plans to use is to figuratively join the nightingale in the forest, “not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,/But on the viewless wings of Poesy” (ll. 32-3). This goes against Wordsworthian thought when he wrote, in the poem mentioned above, about seeing Proteus and Triton in the sea during his complaints of how seamen did not seem to notice the beauty of the ocean. Throughout the poem,

he speaks of being in misery and close to death; but thoughts of the natural world give him comfort. He describes the forest in evocative terms:

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,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

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 (ll. 35-50).

Earlier in the poem, he speaks of getting drunk with wine to numb his pain; and Bacchus is associated with wine in Greek mythology. By rejecting Bacchus, he rejects both mythological solace and human attempts to find peace through intoxication, and replaces both options with contemplating nature through poetry.

Two of Keats's most famous lines of poetry from "Ode on a Grecian Urn" read as follows: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need know." Throughout the poems referenced above and in his work at large, he emphasizes that nature should be thought of in terms of the beauty found in it, not in ways that it can connect people to spiritual dimensions. However, he presents beauty as the only thing that matters in life. He puts it in the place of religion without overly spiritualizing it. Concerning his views on faith in general, not enough evidence exists to make a positive claim about what he believed.

Muir's View

John Muir was born in Scotland in 1838; his father immigrated the entire family to Wisconsin in 1849. He went to the University of Wisconsin in the 1860s and discovered the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In the summer of 1869, he hiked the Sierra Nevada mountain range, which he termed the "Range of Light" ("John Muir Quotes," www.sierracollege.edu). Some of his admirers included Emerson and Teddy Roosevelt, who both met him and were "touched by his passion for the wilderness" (Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, vii). He became an advocate for wilderness preservation, and his 1890 writings about Yosemite helped it to be "designated a national park" (Muir, vii-viii).

One day, Muir was approached by a shepherd named Mr. Delaney, who asked Muir if he would travel in the Central Valley of California with Delaney's flock "to the headwaters of the Merced and Tuolumne rivers – the very region I had in mind" (4). During this journey, Muir would be given complete freedom to "learn something of the plants, rocks, and animals" (5).

He was captivated by a lot of what he saw during his travels. For one, he became "greatly interested" in the Sabine pine (*Pinus Sabiniana*); yet he called the red, or silvertip fir (*Abies magnifica*), the most magnificent tree he had ever seen in all of his travels up to that point (15). Also, he was especially fond of a section in the Merced Valley called Horseshoe Bend, described as "a glorious wilderness that seemed to be calling with a thousand songful voices" (17). He even became fascinated with the Douglas squirrel, saying that it was the feistiest, most active animal he had seen in the Sierra Nevadas.

A significant point about Muir's writings is that he personifies Nature, believing that it is a caretaker of everything in the outside world, almost like a mother tending to her children.

Therefore, it has the power to sustain plants and keep them alive. He even goes on to say that human beings have harmed Nature by their carelessness and trampling of plants and grasses. He mentions that people paid a lot of money to tour the area but did not really observe the beauty of the meadows and mountains. In his work *Our National Parks*, he encourages his readers to let the powers of Nature refresh and calm them: "Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves" ("John Muir Quotes"). His writings are driven by a desire to preserve the natural beauty of the West from the encroachment of industrialized society. This wish is similar to what Wordsworth said in "Nutting" about how nature needs to be protected from any kind of harm.

Even though his mindset toward nature was common for environmentalists during his lifetime, Muir strikes me as unusual because his beliefs are different from many present-day environmentalists. He proclaimed many times that God created everything in the natural world.

The air is distinctly fragrant with balsam and resin and mint, every breath of it a gift we may well thank God for. Who could ever guess that so rough a wilderness should yet be so fine, so full of good things. One seems to be in a majestic domed pavilion in which a grand play is being acted with scenery and music and incense, all the furniture and action so interesting we are in no danger of being called on to endure one dull moment. God himself seems to be always doing his best here, working like a man in a glow of enthusiasm (80).

Later in his journal about his Sierra Nevada travels, he states, "These blessed mountains are so compactly filled with God's beauty, no petty personal hope or experience has room to be" (174). Anyone can clearly see that he gave God credit for every beautiful thing he saw while in the "Range of Light."

A Look at Scripture

There are many verses in the Bible that speak about nature and the different things associated with nature. One passage that immediately comes to mind is Genesis 1; the first verse says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The rest of the chapter talks about how God created light and dark, dry land, plants, trees, animals, and humans. Job 12:7-10 tells us to look at creation and see God’s power in directing natural processes:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;
or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish in the sea inform you.
Which of all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every creature
and the breath of all mankind.

Wordsworth wrote in *The Prelude* about natural objects having a “moral nature”:

To every natural form, rock, fruits, or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
I gave a moral life: I saw them feel,
Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass
Lay imbedded in a quickening soul, and all
That I beheld respired with inward meaning (ll. 127-132).

In Psalm 19:1, we see that even the sky above “declares the glory of God.” Scripture also tells us that “[i]n his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land” (Psalm 95:4-5). In Romans 1:20, Paul writes that God’s divinity is evident in nature in order to make himself known to mankind. The authors I have studied, except for Keats, realized at some level that nature had some divine qualities, but did not attribute them to the Creator in their works discussed above.

Wordsworth, as previously mentioned, wrote that he worshipped Nature. If literal, this statement is in violation of the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3). Various sources indicate that he respected the Church of England and Christian principles, but it is not clear that he became a Christian. He makes a good point when he tells his readers to appreciate the sea in “The World Is Too Much with Us” in the lines:

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn (ll. 11-14).

Psalm 107:23-24 emphasizes that those who do business by ship have an opportunity to see God’s work in the ocean. Yet, he declares himself willing to become a pagan to admire nature fully, calling special attention to the sea.

In “Nutting,” he feels joyful about being outside among the trees but becomes sad when he thinks that he has hurt the spirit in the woods.

. . .and, unless I now
Confound my present feelings with the past;
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—. . .
. . .—for there is a spirit in the woods (ll. 48-53, 56).

By contrast, Isaiah 55:12 talks about nature being joyful because God is there. Specifically, “the trees of the field [. . .] clap their hands”; but the verse does not attribute divinity to the trees.

Finally, he learns to value nature without looking for spiritual fulfillment in “Ode: Intimations of Immortality.” Psalm 65:8-13 follows the same sentiment, recognizing that nature is beautiful because God cares for it.

The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;
where morning dawns, where evening fades,
you call forth songs of joy.
You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.
You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.
You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.
The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.
The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;
they shout for joy and sing.

Emerson was effectively a deist due to his belief that God was “remote and unknowable,” but the Bible refutes this claim. James 4:8 reminds us that God is near to those who humble themselves and draw near to him. His statement that there is a spiritual connection between the earth and humans is illustrative of the foolishness that led the humans in Romans 1:22-23, 25 to worship “created things rather than the Creator.” Clearly, the world was too much with them; and they left no room for God.

According to Thoreau, the best way to enjoy nature is to reap its benefits without doing the work to obtain them. This attitude is condemned in 2 Thess. 3:10: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” Both Thoreau and the Thessalonians needed a reminder that doing ordinary work is not a waste of time. The Thessalonians were waiting for Jesus to return and thought work might get in the way; Thoreau thought it was better to develop a philosophy of humanity without being impeded by work. In Genesis 2:15, God commanded Adam to work, both to keep the Garden of Eden fruitful and to nourish Adam’s soul. It is highly possible that Thoreau would

have had a more complete philosophy if he had been able to find a good balance between very little work at his home and employment that focused on gaining as much money as possible.

Keats noticed the beauty to be found in nature, but focused on it to the exclusion of giving God credit. Psalm 96:9 commands readers to “worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness,” and Psalm 115:16 states that God has given us the earth to inhabit. We should appreciate the beauty that the earth contains, but we must acknowledge that God gave everything its beauty. If Keats had the hope of Jesus’ return as described in Psalm 96:11-13 to sustain him, he might have lived with a joyful expectation, more than what can be gotten merely by enjoying nature’s beauty alone.

Muir was correct in thinking that everyone should take care of the earth. We know from Psalm 24:1 that the earth belongs to the Lord; therefore, we must maintain it because we love and want to obey God. When we disobey God in any way, our sin and its consequences negatively affect the earth as well as ourselves. Isaiah 24:4-6 confirms this point by saying that the earth wastes away when people break God’s laws. Also, Muir states repeatedly in his writings that God is the source of nature. The Bible reinforces this in John 1:3 by saying that everything was made by God.

Conclusion

After conducting all of my research, I shall do my best to make a reasonable conclusion about which author had the most Biblically correct view of nature. First, I will provide a brief synopsis of each author's thoughts; then I will decide.

William Wordsworth displayed pantheistic leanings in his younger years, as is shown in some of his earlier poems, believing that the natural world had divinity dwelling in it. Upon reaching his mid-thirties, he became more conservative about nature and started to enjoy nature simply because it displayed so much beauty, even in common things.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a Unitarian-turned-Transcendentalist who held to the beliefs that God is distant from the earth and humans and that we can only "[understand] God and [ourselves] by looking into [our] own souls and by feeling [our] own connection to nature." He also stated that other people seemed to take the beauty of the natural world for granted because they saw it constantly.

Henry David Thoreau, also a Transcendentalist, made an attempt to live at Walden Pond so that he could benefit from nature without putting in any substantial labor to make anything grow or bear fruit. Also, he wanted quiet solitude to be able to develop his philosophy of humanity; even work was considered an obstacle in his path toward this goal.

John Keats focused so much on the beauty to be found in nature that any spiritual connection was of no concern to him. Apparently, this belief seemed to take the place of any form of religion in his life. Beauty, in a sense, was his "god."

John Muir advocated for the preservation of natural landmarks and for efforts to be made to take care of every aspect of the natural world. Yet, he declared several times that God brought forth all of the beauty to be found in the outside world.

While I do believe that the beauty of nature should be treasured and preserved for as long as possible, I realize that nothing earthly lasts forever. God, however, lasts forever. Surprisingly, there are two authors who seem to me to have had the most accurate view of nature: **John Muir** and an older and more conservative **William Wordsworth**. Both men believed that the beauty of nature should be protected, and one never tried, and the other stopped trying, to hold a pantheistic view of the natural world. Also, explicitly or implicitly, the two of them displayed respect for godly principles.

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