

## Biocentrism in the Pastoral Poems of William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming

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### Abstract

The paper analyzes how both William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming depict nature in their poems, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living things and the importance of treating the natural world with respect and reverence. The comparison between Wordsworth, an English Romantic poet, and Tao Yuanming, a Chinese poet from the Jin Dynasty, could provide insights into the cultural and philosophical differences in their approaches to nature. Wordsworth frequently communicates a longing for a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature, indicating an aspiration for mutual respect and cohabitation. In Tao’s poems, there is a depiction of harmony between human existence and the natural realm, embodying a coexistence that resonates with the principles of biocentrism.

**Key words:** Biocentrism; Interconnectedness; Pastoral poems; William Wordsworth; Tao Yuanming

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### INTRODUCTION

Biocentrism is a philosophical perspective that places

equal value on all living organisms and their inherent worth. It recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings and emphasizes the importance of considering the well-being of all species in ethical and environmental decision-making. Biocentrism rejects the notion that humans are superior to other species and advocates for a more inclusive and holistic approach to understanding and valuing the natural world.

Scholars have examined the ethical principles that underpin biocentrism, focusing on the idea that all living entities possess inherent worth and deserve moral consideration. This perspective challenges anthropocentrism and highlights the interconnectedness of ecosystems and the moral responsibility to protect and respect the entire web of life. Studies explore how biocentric perspectives provide a foundation for valuing biodiversity, advocating for ecosystem health, and promoting sustainable resource management. Biocentrism is often seen as an alternative to human-centric ethics that acknowledges the intrinsic value of non-human entities. Jena and Behura (2023) emphasize on Bio-centric approach through which we can sustain the environment, fostering a more sustainable and ethically grounded relationship with the environment by embracing these values and fulfilling our responsibilities.

Research has explored how biocentrism redefines human-nature relationships. Studies examine how embracing a biocentric worldview can foster a sense of humility, interconnectedness, and ethical responsibility toward the natural world, leading to more sustainable interactions. Bhattacharjee (2021) made a study on Human-Nature relationship.

This paper explores how the principles of biocentrism are reflected in the pastoral poems of two renowned poets from different cultural backgrounds: William Wordsworth, a prominent figure in English Romantic poetry, and Tao Yuanming, a celebrated poet of ancient China. Through an examination of selected pastoral works by both poets, this

study aims to highlight the similarities and differences in their portrayal of nature, human-nature relationships, and ethical attitudes towards non-human life.

William Wordsworth, a central figure in the Romantic movement, is known for his deep reverence for nature and his belief in its spiritual and moral significance. His pastoral poems often depict the sublime beauty of the English countryside, portraying nature as a source of solace, inspiration, and spiritual renewal. Wordsworth's poems frequently explore the interconnectedness of humans and nature, celebrating the harmony and vitality of the natural world while lamenting the destructive impact of industrialization and human intervention.

On the other hand, Tao Yuanming, a renowned poet of the Jin Dynasty in ancient China, is celebrated for his Daoist-inspired pastoral poems, which extol the virtues of simplicity, humility, and harmony with nature. Tao's poems often depict rural landscapes, tranquil scenes of farming villages, and idyllic retreats, reflecting his philosophical belief in the natural order and the importance of living in accordance with the Dao. Unlike Wordsworth, Tao emphasizes the Taoist concept of wu wei (non-action) and the idea of following the natural course of events without imposing human will or desires upon nature.

By comparing and contrasting the pastoral poems of Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming through the lens of biocentrism, this paper seeks to elucidate how these two poets from different cultural and historical contexts articulate their ethical and aesthetic perspectives on nature, humanity, and the interdependence of all living beings. Through a close analysis of their literary works, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the universal themes of biocentrism and the diverse ways in which they are expressed across cultures and literary traditions.

## 1. BIOCENTRISM IN THE PASTORAL POEMS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Biocentrism include the belief that all living organisms have inherent value and should be treated with respect and consideration. It also emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings and recognizes the importance of biodiversity for the well-being of the planet. Biocentrism promotes the idea that humans are not superior to other species and should not exploit or harm them for their own benefit. Wordsworth's poems often convey a sense of nature's inherent worth, valuing it for its own sake rather than solely for its utility to humans. This perspective aligns with biocentrism's emphasis on recognizing the value of all living beings. Table 1 shows how Biocentrism is reflected in the pastoral poems of William Wordsworth.

**Table 1**  
**Biocentrism in the Pastoral Poems of William Wordsworth**

Poems	Biocentrism
I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud	•Appreciation of the natural world and its non-human elements for their intrinsic value
The Solitary Reaper	•Appreciation of Nature's Music •Interconnectedness
To the Cuckoo	•Celebration of Natural Life •Intrinsic Worth of the Cuckoo •Harmony with Nature
Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey	•Appreciation of Natural Beauty •Interconnectedness •Nature as a Source of Inspiration •Unity with Nature
To a Sky-Lark	•Celebration of Natural Beauty •Inherent Value of the Skylark •Interconnectedness •Intrinsic Worth of Nature

In the poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", the comparison of the daffodils to stars in the Milky Way suggests a biocentric perspective, appreciating the natural world and its non-human elements for their intrinsic value.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the Milky Way

(WW, P1, S2, L1-L2)

In "The Solitary Reaper", the reaper's song is described as a form of natural music, expressing her emotions and becoming an essential part of the Highland environment. This perspective values not only human creativity but also the expressions of other living beings.

Moreover, the mention of the Cuckoo-bird's voice as "thrilling" suggests an appreciation for the non-human life form, indicating a biocentric perspective that acknowledges the intrinsic value of the bird's voice.

*A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard  
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird*

(WW, P2, S2, L5-L6)

It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living things, observation of life, elevation of non-Human entities.

In the poem "To the Cuckoo", the idea that the Cuckoo is more than just a bird, but an invisible thing and a mystery, reflects a biocentric perspective. It acknowledges the intrinsic value and mystery of the non-human life form.

No bird, but an invisible thing,  
A voice, a mystery;

(WW, P3, S4, L3-L4)

It emphasizes the intrinsic worth of the cuckoo as a part of the natural world with its own value. Biocentrism promotes the idea that all living beings have inherent worth and deserve respect. According to Attfield (2014), all other things beings equal, basic interests take moral precedence over less basic ones, but like interests should

be given equal consideration.

In “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” he speaks of “A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought.” (WW, P4, S4, L43-L44) This recognition of nature’s agency aligns with biocentrism’s acknowledgment of the importance of non-human life.

And this prayer I make,  
 Knowing that Nature never did betray  
 The heart that loved her; ’tis her privilege,  
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform  
 The mind that is within us, so impress  
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
 With lofty thoughts...

(WW, P4, S5, L11-L18)

These lines emphasize a biocentric perspective, attributing agency and positive qualities to Nature as a living entity capable of guiding and nurturing.

Wordsworth’s poems often show reverence for animals and other non-human beings. His descriptions convey an appreciation for their qualities and roles in the natural world, reflecting a biocentric perspective that values all forms of life.

“To the Skylark” emphasizes the impact of the skylark’s song on human emotions, it can be interpreted as recognizing the inherent value of the skylark as a living being contributing to the rich tapestry of the environment.

Type of the wise who soar, but never roam;  
 True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!

(WW, P5, S2, L5-L6)

The lines suggest that the skylark, by soaring and being true to the points of heaven and home, embodies wisdom. This could be interpreted as a form of biocentrism, attributing wisdom and value to the non-human creature based on its natural behaviors and instincts.

It underscores the interconnectedness between the skylark and the larger ecosystem. The skylark’s song is described as a part of the “general song” of nature, suggesting its role in the broader ecological context.

Wordsworth’s poems often convey a desire for harmony between humans and the natural world, suggesting a mutual respect and coexistence that aligns with biocentrism’s values. According to Taylor(2011), every organism has moral worth because each has a built in goal that directs its growth and activities towards its survival and well-being. In Wordsworth’s pastoral poems, these instances of biocentrism contribute to a deeper appreciation for the intrinsic value of all life forms and the intricate relationships that sustain ecosystems. His portrayal of nature as a complex and interconnected web of living beings reflects a biocentric perspective that goes beyond human-centric concerns.

## 2. BIOCENTRISM IN THE PASTORAL POEMS OF TAO YUANMING

Biocentrism is an ethical viewpoint that places all living organisms and ecosystems on an equal plane of importance, recognizing the intrinsic value of all life forms. Tao Yuanming’s pastoral poems do not explicitly reflect a biocentric perspective, which would emphasize the intrinsic value and rights of all living beings within an ecosystem. However, He put emphasis on the natural environment, interactions with nature, minimal ecological impact, interconnectedness, and harmony with natural rhythms resonate with the principles of valuing all life forms and recognizing the importance of ecosystems. Table 2 shows how biocentrism is reflected in the pastoral poems of Tao Yuanming.

**Table 2**  
**Biocentrism in the Pastoral Poems of Tao Yuanming**

Poems	Biocentrism
Returning to Live in the South(No.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Harmony with Nature</li> <li>•Interdependence</li> <li>•Appreciation for Nature</li> <li>•Reconnection with Nature</li> </ul>
Returning to Live in the South(No.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Respect for Nature’s Rhythms:</li> <li>•Coexistence with Nature</li> <li>•Recognition of Nature’s Impact</li> <li>•Human-Nature Relationship</li> <li>•Interaction with Nature</li> </ul>
Returning to Live in the South(No.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Recognition of Interconnectedness</li> <li>•Harmony with Natural Rhythms:</li> <li>•Appreciation for the Environment</li> </ul>
D r i n k i n g Wine(No.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Nature’s Intrinsic Value:</li> <li>•Interaction with the Natural World</li> <li>•Respect for Non-Human Life</li> </ul>
D r i n k i n g Wine(No.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Appreciation of Nature’s Beauty</li> <li>•Interconnectedness</li> </ul>

In the poem “Returning to Live in the South (No.1)”, the speaker expresses a longing for a more natural and rural environment, suggesting an affinity for the natural world. This desire to live in harmony with nature resonates with the biocentric principle of valuing the interconnectedness of all living beings within their habitats.

“My nature originally loved hills, mountains.” (TY, P1, S1, L2) suggests a deep connection and affinity with nature, particularly the love for hills and mountains, which aligns with the biocentric perspective that emphasizes the intrinsic value of the natural world.

In “Returning to Live in the South (No.3)”, the line “I saw my beans below the southern hills, but grass flourishes, while bean seedlings are scarce.” (TY, P2, S1, L2-L3) suggests an observation of the natural environment, where the natural growth of grass seems to prevail over the intended cultivation of bean seedlings. It reflects an awareness of the dynamics of the natural world and the interactions between human activities and the environment.

In “Returning to Live in the South (No.5)”, the line “A mountain stream, clear and shallow, is there to wash my feet.” (TY, P3, S1, L3-L4) indicates a connection with the natural world, specifically with the mountain stream, and emphasizes the simplicity and purity of the environment. It aligns with the biocentric perspective by highlighting the value of natural elements in the narrator’s experience.

His poems frequently emphasize the intrinsic beauty of nature, appreciating it for its own sake. His descriptions of landscapes, flowers, and trees reflect a genuine admiration for the natural world’s aesthetic qualities. These depictions contribute to a biocentric perspective that values animals for their place in the natural order. Taylor (1986) claims that all living things have the same inherent worth. According to Taylor, stating that a being possesses inherent worth means acknowledging that it holds intrinsic value independent of its practical utility or human appraisal. Thus, living entities possess inherent value inherently, regardless of their significance relative to other entities.

In the poem of “Drinking Wine (No.5)”, the description of picking dew-bathed chrysanthemum petals and infusing them with autumn colors reflects an appreciation for the beauty and value of nature’s elements beyond their utility to humans.

I pick chrysanthemums from the east hedge  
and gaze, at leisure, on South Mountain.

(TY, P4, S1, L5-L6)

This line expresses the speaker’s connection with nature, as they engage in a leisurely activity of picking chrysanthemums and gazing at South Mountain. It reflects a biocentric perspective by emphasizing the appreciation and interaction with the natural environment.

In his poems, Tao occasionally focuses on non-human elements like birds, fish, and insects. These depictions underscore his appreciation for the diversity of life forms and their significance in the natural environment. Tao’s portrayal of nature’s independence and rhythms suggests that it operates according to its own rules and cycles. This recognition of nature’s autonomy aligns with a biocentric perspective that values nature beyond its interactions with

humans.

In “Drinking Wine (No.7)”, the line “I pick dew-bathed petals, float them on that forget-your-cares stuff.” (TY, P5, S1, L2-4) demonstrates a close connection to nature through the act of picking dew-bathed petals and engaging with the natural elements. It aligns with a biocentric perspective by emphasizing the beauty and simplicity found in nature.

Tao’s poems often convey a sense of harmony and balance between human life and the natural world. This sentiment reflects a biocentric view that emphasizes the coexistence and mutual dependence of all living beings. Tao Yuanming’s descriptions of nature’s beauty, its diverse inhabitants, and its intrinsic rhythms contribute to a biocentric perspective that values all life forms and the delicate balance of ecosystems.

According to Schweitzer (1923), everything that lives have a will to live (or an inbuilt drive toward self-preservation and living its own life), and the reverence that one feels toward one’s own “will-to-live” ought, morally, to be extended to all. Biocentrism is an ethical perspective that places all living beings and ecosystems at the center of consideration, valuing their intrinsic worth and rights. While both William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming exhibit ecocentric and anthropocentric perspectives in their pastoral poems, there are also elements that align with biocentrism, reflecting their appreciation for the natural world beyond its utility to humans.

### 3. COMPARING BIOCENTRISM IN THE PASTORAL POEMS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND TAO YUANMING

Biocentrism, as a philosophical perspective, emphasizes the intrinsic value and moral standing of all living beings, placing them at the center of ethical considerations. Table 3 presents the similarities and differences of Biocentrism reflected in the pastoral Poems of William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming.

**Table 3**  
**Comparison of Biocentrism in the Pastoral Poems of William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming**

	William Wordsworth	Tao Yuanming
Biocentrism Reflected in the Pastoral Poems	Intrinsic Value of Nature	Nature’s Intrinsic Beauty
	Equality Among Living Beings	Animals as Part of the Ecosystem
	Nature’s Autonomy and Agency	Non-Human Life’s Significance
	Reverence for Non-Human Life	Nature’s Independence and Rhythms
	The Natural World’s Impact on Human Well-Being	Harmony and Balance
	Mutual Dependence in Ecosystems	Nature as a Source of Sustenance
	Harmony with the Environment	Humility and Reverence for Nature

Both William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming share a profound appreciation for the intrinsic value of all life forms and the delicate balance of ecosystems in their

poetry. Despite differing cultural contexts and styles, both poets contribute to a broader understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance



of mutual respect within the natural world. Wordsworth, in his poems, emphasizes nature's inherent worth beyond its impact on human emotions, portraying animals and inanimate objects as having significance in the natural order. He attributes agency and spirit to nature itself, aligning with the biocentric perspective.

Similarly, Tao's poems express admiration for the intrinsic beauty of nature, suggesting an awareness of its autonomy and interdependence among all living beings. While Wordsworth focuses on the interdependence of elements within ecosystems, Tao's depiction of nature's balance and harmony reflects an understanding of the interconnectedness of all its elements, contributing to a shared theme of respect for the natural world.

Wordsworth's poems often express a desire for harmony between humans and nature, suggesting a mutual respect and coexistence. Tao's poems convey a sense of harmony between human life and the natural world, reflecting a coexistence that aligns with biocentrism's values. This is similar to the study of Bhattacharjee (2021) that embracing a biocentric worldview can foster a sense of humility, interconnectedness, and ethical responsibility toward the natural world, leading to more sustainable interactions.

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## CONCLUSION

Both William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming emphasize the inherent worth and value of nature itself, beyond its utility to humans. They express a sense of equality among all living beings, recognizing animals as integral parts of the natural world. Both poets attribute autonomy and agency to nature, portraying it as a dynamic force with its own rhythms and significance. They demonstrate respect and reverence for non-human life forms, acknowledging their importance and contribution to the ecosystem. Both poets explore the concept of harmony and balance in the relationship between humans and nature, highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings.

However, there are some differences Wordsworth's pastoral poems are rooted in the English Romantic tradition, whereas Tao Yuanming's poems emerge from a Chinese literary and philosophical context. While both poets celebrate nature's beauty, Wordsworth often emphasizes the sublime and transcendent qualities of nature, whereas Tao Yuanming focuses on simplicity, tranquility, and the Taoist concept of naturalness. Moreover, Wordsworth's poems often depict humans as separate from and sometimes dominating nature, whereas Tao Yuanming's poems emphasize a more harmonious and humble relationship between humans and the natural world.

In addition, Wordsworth finds inspiration in the English countryside and his personal experiences, while

Tao Yuanming draws inspiration from the rural landscapes of China and his philosophical contemplations on Daoist principles.

These similarities and differences reflect how biocentrism is interpreted and expressed within the cultural, philosophical, and literary contexts of these two poets.

In conclusion, the pastoral poems of William Wordsworth and Tao Yuanming stand as timeless expressions of biocentric philosophy, championing the intrinsic value of nature and advocating for a harmonious relationship between humanity and the environment. Through their evocative imagery, poignant reflections, and profound insights, Wordsworth and Tao invite readers to contemplate the beauty, resilience, and interconnectedness of the natural world. Their works serve as a poignant reminder of the importance of adopting a biocentric perspective in our interactions with the environment, recognizing that all living beings deserve respect, reverence, and protection. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, the biocentric ethos embodied in the poetry of Wordsworth and Tao continues to offer invaluable insights into our relationship with nature and the imperative of stewardship for future generations.

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