"In Body, and Become a Living Soul": Wordsworth and the Vision of Existential Posthumanism

To understand posthumanism, one should go through the entire history of mankind and its production of literature; through literature, the ideas survived. Humanism emerges as a response to dogmatism and irrational faith. The notion of humanism is that "Man is the centre of the Universe", and this notion is smashed by the notion of "posthumanism". Although the historical movement from humanism to posthumanism appears gradual, certain intellectual and artistic moments anticipate this shift much earlier. These moments function as early waves that touch the shore before the formal articulation of posthumanist theory. The canvas of the posthumanism concept paints a bridge between human and nonhuman. The nonhuman is known yet untouched by the majority of people. From a posthumanist perspective, the nonhuman does not negate cognition or material of human presence; instead, it challenges the assumption that these capacities belong solely to the human subject. In this way, the nonhuman emerges as a co-constitutive force, shaping human existence through networks of interaction rather than standing in opposition to it. This animating presence does not exist as a fixed metaphysical entity but emerges through interaction, memory, and poetic perception. It flows across human and nonhuman forms, dissolving rigid boundaries between subject and world.

There is a gradual reimagining of embodiment, in which existence is no longer confined to the autonomous human body but is distributed across nature, art, and shared affective experience. Such is described by William Wordsworth in his poem, *"Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"*. Wordsworth describes a presence that flows through both the human and the nonhuman world when he writes of:

"... a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean and the living air."

He connects the points of human and nonhuman through a presence, further clarifies this relational understanding of existence when he suggests that human consciousness, momentarily freed from egoistic dominance, becomes attuned to the life of the world: *"We are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul."* Here, the phrase "laid asleep in body" does not indicate a rejection of embodiment but a suspension of self-centred perception, allowing the individual to participate in a wider field of being. *"Tintern Abbey"* is the epitome of this notion. Wordsworth paints the soothing landscape through his memories and the urge which calls him back over and over again to this place. "*Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect / The landscape with the quiet of the sky*": these two lines illustrate the poet's desire to withdraw from material excess and reorient his being toward a larger ecological harmony. This withdrawal is not a rejection of embodiment but a reconfiguration of presence. Similarly, the image of *"The Hermit sits alone"* functions metaphorically rather than literally. The hermit does not represent a soul detached from the body, but a mode of being freed from material domination and excessive human self-importance. This image anticipates a posthuman ethics that values detachment from anthropocentric control rather than bodily negation. Right after that line he continues, "*These beauteous forms, / Through a long absence, have not been to me/*

As is a landscape to a blind man's eye.": these lines suggest that nature possesses agency beyond human perception. The "beauteous forms" operate within the poet's consciousness even in absence, shaping thought and affect without requiring direct human control. The speaker does not dominate Nature; he is formed by it. Nature thus emerges as a nonhuman actor that co-produces experience, rather than a passive backdrop to human meaning. *"In lonely rooms, and 'mid the din/ Of towns and cities, I have owed to them/ In hours of weariness, sensations sweet"*: here Nature extends its agency beyond physical presence through memory. The self becomes a composite of external forces, undermining the idea of a self-contained human subject. Thus, Wordsworth brings interiority and exteriority into a dynamic relation, even as posthumanist thought challenges the primacy of interiority by emphasizing exteriority. Rather than separating inner consciousness from the external world, Wordsworth allows exterior nature to inform and shape interior experience. Through this sustained presence of the nonhuman world, he comes to understand and articulate his inner self. Towards the end he writes, "*Nature never did betray/ The heart that loved her*": by these lines he anticipates posthumanist ethics, which emphasize care, coexistence and vulnerability. For him Nature is not conquered, it is trusted.

In the modern and postmodern world, human life increasingly unfolds through technological and material extensions that shape memory, communication, labour, and emotion. Technology is not merely a tool but a condition through which life is lived, shifting the humanist idea of an autonomous self toward a posthuman existence that extends beyond the individual body. Machines and systems, though not conscious, influence behaviour, decisions, and social interactions, distributing agency across human and nonhuman networks. The result is a world where humans act within structures that enable and constrain them, eroding the illusion of complete mastery and control. N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman* provides a crucial corrective to misconceptions surrounding posthumanism. Hayles argues forcefully against the idea that posthuman existence involves transcending embodiment or abandoning the material body. She critiques fantasies of mind-uploading and digital immortality, insisting that consciousness cannot exist independently of a material substrate. In her formulation, posthumanism does not eliminate embodiment but relocates cognition within complex material systems. Consciousness becomes extended and distributed, relying on technological supports, bodily processes, and environmental contexts. This understanding resonates indirectly with Wordsworth's proto-posthuman vision. While modern posthumanism examines technological networks, Wordsworth anticipates a similar decentring of the human through ecological and poetic relations. Where contemporary humans extend themselves through machines, Wordsworth extends existence through nature and art. Both visions, however, converge in their rejection of human centrality and their recognition of life as something that flows beyond the isolated human subject without escaping material limits. Wordsworth's proto-posthuman vision offers an alternative model, one grounded not in technological survival but in ecological and aesthetic continuity.

Such continuity is achieved through art and poetry. When existence is invested in poetic creation, it exceeds biological limitation without denying finitude. Wordsworth articulates this vision in *"Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,"* where life persists through memory, imagination, and affect rather than physical permanence. This perspective resonates with Rosi Braidotti's concept of affirmative posthumanism, which emphasizes becoming, relationality, and continuity over mechanized endurance.

Wordsworth's celebration of affect further reinforces his proto-posthuman stance:

"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."

Here, the nonhuman becomes a site of ethical and existential insight. Nature is not subordinate to the human but participates equally in the production of meaning and life.

Thus, Wordsworth and posthumanism intersect with compelling philosophical resonance. Although posthumanism emerges as a formal theoretical framework in the postmodern period, Wordsworth's poetry anticipates its ethical foundations. The nonhuman, for Wordsworth, includes enduring entities such as nature and art, through which human existence is continuously reshaped. As Cary Wolfe argues, posthumanism challenges the autonomous human subject and situates life within ecological and material networks. Wordsworth's poetic imagination prefigures this vision by presenting the world as an interconnected field in which humans are neither masters nor outsiders.

The poem "*Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*" can be judged through the perspective of Eco-posthuman theory. It extends posthumanist thought by foregrounding ecological embeddedness, interspecies relationality, and the decentring of the human within planetary systems. Thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti and Cary Wolfe argue that subjectivity is not an autonomous human possession but an effect of relations among human and nonhuman forces, including animals, landscapes, material systems, and affective environments. From this perspective, ethical existence emerges not through mastery over nature but through attentiveness, vulnerability, and coexistence. Within such a framework, William Wordsworth's representation of the child can be read as an early or proto-eco-posthuman figure.

In Wordsworth's poetry, the child occupies a mode of being that is deeply embedded in the natural world and not yet structured by anthropocentric hierarchies. The child does not approach nature as an object to be possessed, used, or dominated, but experiences it as a living presence with which the self remains in continuous relation. In this poem, Wordsworth suggests that the child arrives as "*trailing clouds of glory*," a metaphor that indicates an openness to the world rather than a claim of superiority over it. This openness aligns with eco-posthumanism's emphasis on relational ontology, where identity emerges through ecological entanglement rather than human exceptionalism. Similarly, in the *Lucy poems*, Wordsworth depicts the titular figure Lucy as uncorrupted: "*And hers the silence and the calm/ Of mute insensate things*", Lucy would be able to understand the silent calm of natural objects that cannot speak or are apparently lifeless. This echoes the concept "*Noble Savage*" by Rousseau, which offers a compelling framework for examining human nature, social structures, and the movement from primordial simplicity to organized civilization. Lucy echoes posthumanist ethos; unlike any ordinary child's perspective. Universal vision of children may exhibit a form of self-centeredness or narcissism, because there is a belief that a child thinks the world revolves around them. This belief is rooted in their immediate perceptions and imaginative engagement, but this narcissism does not translate into a sense of superiority. Instead, it coexists with an ethical attentiveness to the nonhuman world, suggesting that early human consciousness is capable of self-awareness while remaining deeply connected to the life and rhythms of its environment.

As the child grows, Wordsworth observes that "*Shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing Boy*," signalling the gradual imposition of social, cultural, and anthropocentric structures that distance the human subject from the nonhuman world. Eco-posthuman theory interprets this process as the formation of humanist subjectivity, which privileges reason, control, and autonomy at the expense of ecological connectedness. The child's early intimacy with nature thus represents a pre-anthropocentric mode of existence, one that eco-posthumanism seeks not to romanticize uncritically but to recover ethically. This relational mode is further echoed in Wordsworth's assertion that "*The Child is father of the Man*," suggesting that ethical adulthood should not abandon the child's ecological sensitivity but learn from it. Eco-posthumanism similarly argues for an ethics of becoming that acknowledges interdependence with nonhuman life. In this sense, Wordsworth anticipates an eco-posthuman ethics in which human identity is shaped by its participation in a wider ecological network rather than by domination over it. Thus, Wordsworth's poetic child does not consciously reject anthropocentrism, but exists prior to its consolidation. This pre-anthropocentric condition resonates strongly with eco-posthuman thought, which critiques human exceptionalism while affirming relational, embodied, and ecological modes of being. By portraying the child as attuned to the rhythms and presences of the natural world, Wordsworth offers a vision of existence that aligns with contemporary eco-posthuman efforts to rethink humanity's place within a more-than-human world.

The intersection between Wordsworth's poetry and posthumanist thought underscores a profound reconfiguration of human existence within broader ecological and material networks. Wordsworth offers a *glimpse* of a posthumanist point of view rather than a fully developed posthuman philosophy. His poetry unsettles human centrality by emphasizing relationality, ecological interdependence, and the agency of nonhuman nature, but it does not entirely abandon human consciousness as the primary site of meaning. Nature in Wordsworth often acts as an active presence shaping the self, yet this influence is still mediated through human perception, memory, and emotion. Thus, while his work anticipates posthumanist concerns by challenging strict anthropocentrism and foregrounding ethical coexistence with the nonhuman world, it ultimately remains grounded in a Romantic environment. Wordsworth, therefore, gestures toward a proto-posthuman vision without fully dissolving the human subject, offering an early but incomplete articulation of posthumanist thought.

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