

The Unethics of Technological Sublimity: The Representation of Environmental Pollution in the Poetry of William Wordsworth

Stavroula Anastasia Katsorchi

PhD Candidate, Department of English Literature and Culture, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, GREECE.

Corresponding Author: linakat94@yahoo.com



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ABSTRACT

Within a world that is suffering from an escalating climate crisis, literature and literary theory alike are called to arms. Their mission is to alert both readers and scholars to the looming ecological disaster, but also to encourage the invention and active promotion of ethical ways of dealing with the crisis. Assuming an ecological perspective, this paper turns to the Romantic period and the early signs of industrial destruction and discusses William Wordsworth's ambiguous, volatile stance towards technology. Building on Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, this paper contends that Wordsworth's early poems represent technology as a sublime object. This portrayal, however, invokes feelings of paralyzing terror, thereby promoting inaction as regards industrialism's environmental impact. Once technological advancement reaches the Lake District, however, and aesthetic distance is compromised, Wordsworth's attitude changes, becoming a condemnatory one, moving him to start a campaign against the expansion of the railway. Following Elaine Scarry's theorization of the link between aesthetics and ethics, it is demonstrated that sublimity constitutes a passive hence unethical way of conceptualizing technology, signalling the need of redefining humankind's position in and relationship with the rest of the world.

Keywords- climate change, Romantic literature, Wordsworth, the sublime, aesthetics, ethics, the technological sublime.

The publication of William Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads in 1798 is commonly considered the beginning of an artistic and intellectual movement, later entitled Romanticism, which ended with the coronation of Queen Victoria in 1837. One of the main features of the Romantic period is its opposition to the principles of the Enlightenment, which spread through Europe during the 18th century. The Enlightenment is known for its emphasis on human reason and empirical science, as well as for its consequent scepticism towards metaphysics and superstition. The belief in the power of the human mind laid the foundations for the quest of man's mastery over himself and the world. The dissemination of the ideas of the Enlightenment was concurrent with the rise of industrialism. The transformation of manufacturing processes began in the mid of the 18th century, and included the development of machinery and its induction in labour, the creation of the factory system, and the extensive use of steam power. The machine emerged as "a servant to man, constructed to aid him in his mastery

of nature" (Fisher 350). This Promethean view of early technology led to the reconceptualisation of nature itself as an object of exploitation rather than an admired land or a worshipped power (350). The appearance of the picturesque tradition in art at the end of the 18th century further enhanced man's alienation from nature. The picturesque ideal reduces the natural world to landscape and uses a point of view outside the observed environment, thus separating the spectator from the spectacle and creating a relationship of detachment between them (Hess 21). In this historical context, writers of the Romantic period not only challenged the principles of the Enlightenment, but they also expressed their concern regarding the ecological cost of industrialism. In their perspective, technology was shattering, both in the human soul and the environment, the ideals of beauty and vitality which nature represented (Clark 13). The artificial character of the new economy, labour, and urban life, as well as the exaltation of reason at the expense of feeling, further contributed to the

estrangement of humanity from the nonhuman realm (16). In this light, the Romantic writers turned to nature in its raw, untameable form, which embraces the human psyche and inspires feelings of admiration and respect. In the Romantic view of nature, man is not apart from or superior to other creatures and the natural world, but he exists in a system where everything is linked in an interdependent and interactive whole (Hutchings 176-77). One of these writers was Wordsworth, who was characteristically described as a poet of nature due to his protest against industrialism and the new economy.

When looking at literature from an environmental point of view, the Romantic period is a milestone in the development of an ecological kind of criticism, known today as ecocriticism. A major ecocritic, Jonathan Bate, argues that man's alienation from nature is one of the main causes of the planet's degradation (Song of the Earth 36). Admittedly, the green movement and Romanticism share the conviction that the effects of capitalist technology are catastrophic for the earth (Pite 358). They blame this ecological crisis on man's interpretation of his position in the world and his separation from the less significant nonhuman realm, which justifies exploitation (361).

On this basis, this paper assumes an ecological point of view in its discussion of Wordsworth's ambiguous and indeed volatile stance towards technology in his poetry. It aspires to show that by representing industrial development as a sublime object, he fails to adopt an ethical attitude towards the environment, since the sublime inspires feelings of paralyzing terror, thus encouraging inaction. At first, the paper presents Edmund Burke's and Immanuel Kant's theorisation of the sublime as an aesthetic category, and illustrates how it can also be applied to the manmade world, following David Nye's theory of the technological sublime. Afterwards, it examines a number of Wordsworth's poems and demonstrates how his initial response to technological development alludes to the sublime as an object of horror but also of reverence and domination. Ultimately, it argues that once the railway expands to the Lake District, the sublime experience dissolves, allowing Wordsworth to fully realise and lament the danger posed by industrialism. Building on Elaine Scarry's link between aesthetics and ethics, this paper proposes that sublimity inhibits the adoption of an ethical attitude towards the environment in a world that is only beginning to be touched by pollution and climate change.

The sublime and the beautiful were established as central aesthetic categories with distinct features in 18th century philosophical thought with the publication of Burke's treatise. In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, Burke categorises the sublime as a passion that relates to self-preservation, unlike beauty which is described as a social quality inasmuch as it inspires tenderness and affection towards others (86, 89). The sublime is defined as whatever "excite[s] the ideas of pain, and danger, . . .

whatever is in any sort terrible, . . . or operates in a manner analogous to terror" (86). Furthermore, Burke contends that the sublime exists in nature and evokes feelings of astonishment, which are so powerful that they suspend the motion of the soul and overwhelm the mind to such an extent that it cannot entertain any other object (101). The sublime can be a source of delight, but only with the condition of aesthetic distance. Therefore, terrible objects can please if observed from a distance, but if they are too near, then they are simply terrible (86), hence why we take pleasure in the representation of spectacles which in reality would be shocking (91). Among the features that Burke attributes to the sublime are obscurity, magnificence, and infinity, since it is perceived as a superior power whose operations cannot be fully comprehended (102, 114-15).

Burke's work on the sublime and the beautiful inspired Kant, although his theorisation diverges in a number of ways. In his *Critique of Judgement*, he emphasises the quality of the sublime as a subjective state of mind rather than an exterior object (86). As an experience, the sublime defies the limits of our judgement, and excites feelings of displeasure at the inadequacy of the imagination and at the same time, paradoxically, delight in this inadequacy (88). Kant, like Burke, also associates the sublime with nature and mentions the necessity of aesthetic distance. However, he goes one step further and divides the sublime into two categories: the mathematical sublime, which concerns dimension, and the dynamical sublime, which regards force and might. This second version of sublimity, in particular, evokes feelings of helplessness, and paralyses the subject, forcing them into submission (91-93). Finally, although Burke has also hinted at a gendered understanding of the beautiful and the sublime, Kant explicitly identifies women with beauty and men with sublimity due to characteristics such as tenderness, justice, and nobility, which he understands as essential to their nature (Observations 35-36).

Most modern theories of the sublime are based on Burke's and Kant's analyses, although they disregard the aspect that connects sublimity with the natural world. This comes as no surprise, since the Industrial Revolution was already underway when the two philosophers published their works. When there is social progress, philosophy must advance too, or else it risks becoming outdated. In this light, although the term technological sublime was coined in the second half of the 20th century, David Nye argues that technology and sublimity became linked already in the 18th century. The use of steam engines for the construction of trains is determined as the first emergence of the technological sublime (Nye xiv). This new form of sublimity has been inspired by Kant's assertion that reason overcomes sensory experiences, including the sublime. The Kantian subject, although at first dwarfed by the terrible object, finally manages to rise above it and reaffirm his freedom with the help of reason and moral law. Nye's interpretation of this aspect of the

Kantian sublime is that technology, as a product of man's reason, finally dominates the natural world. Therefore, he understands "railways and steamboats as realisations of Kant's 'dynamical sublime' insofar as they symbolically conquered 'natural' limits of time and space" (Economides 76). Through this lens, the technological sublime also complies with Burke's condition of infinity, inasmuch as industrial achievements, like the ones mentioned, appear as superior powers that excite ideas of limitlessness in their ability to connect distant places. Obscurity comes into play as well, since the capitalist implications of industrialism are only beginning to take shape. From a more feminist perspective, the technological sublime also bears gender connotations in its domination of the natural world. Following Kant, who asserts reason's masculine ability to overcome the experience of the senses, which are commonly equated with the feminine, technology as an offspring of reason establishes its dominion over nature, a realm associated with sensory perception as well as femininity (Economides 78-9). Overall, the rise of industrialism reconceptualised the sublime as a feeling, excited by both natural and manmade objects, which stuns the senses and forces the unsuspected spectator to use their mental capacity to perceive its power.

Wordsworth's response to the new industrial setting of England has taken many forms in his poetry, shifting from condemnation to admiration and back. This volatility could be potentially attributed to what Kant calls "our ignorance of things," which stimulates our passions and inspires admiration as a prerequisite of the sublime (Critique 105). In poems written around the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, Wordsworth speaks from a sceptical and even mournful standpoint and represents nature as already affected by industrialism. In his renown poem "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," whilst listing the aspects of the natural and rural world he is re-encountering upon his return to the place, he refers to "wreaths of smoke" (17) rising above the trees. The image is brief, subtly inserted amongst more elaborate images of the landscape, and Wordsworth does not dwell on it further. However, even such a fleeting image can provide evidence about the existence of wandering charcoal-burners who turn wood to coal for use in local iron factories. Though singular in itself, charcoal-burning in the 18th century eventually led to the deforestation of vast expanses of land (McKusick 66). Jonathan Bate also understands Wordsworth's wreaths of smoke as repercussions of industrialism, although he suggests that the poet sublimates it with pastoral smoke ("Toward Green Romanticism" 66). Nevertheless, "Tintern Abbey" is overall not a poem about environmental pollution.

In the same year, Wordsworth wrote another poem which deals more explicitly with the reverberations of man's mastery over the world. "Lines Written in Early Spring" could be summarised as a lamentation of "what man has made of man" (8). In the second stanza,

Wordsworth claims that the human psyche is fundamentally connected to the works of nature, hence he cannot help but mourn for the current human condition. In the subsequent stanzas, he makes a note of all the natural elements that filled him with joy, from the playfulness of the birds to the fairness of the flowers, which, he believes, enjoy the air around them. At the end, he speaks of the existence of pleasure in the natural world as "Nature's holy plan" (22), thus representing nature as a creative, even maternal power which has been nevertheless dominated by the works of man. Wordsworth's poem, however, is to some extent anthropocentric. He "enacts an essentially urban consciousness" and grieves for the alienation of the poet and, by extension, of humanity from nature (Clark 62). Here, his concern is not so much the destruction of the environment but the human condition, what man has made of himself rather than of nature.

Wordsworth proceeds in a similar manner when, almost a decade later, he writes his sonnet "The World is too Much with Us":

*The world is too much with us; late and soon,
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! (1-4)*

In these lines Wordsworth introduces the main theme of the sonnet, namely man being out of tune with nature. He does not represent the natural world as altered. Rather, he shows that it proceeds in its harmonious, eternal manner, whereas it is man who has lost his touch with its elements. Wordsworth's claim that scenery "moves us not" (9) anymore, could be linked to the emergence of the technological sublime, in the sense that magnificence can now be found elsewhere, and its injection into daily life averts one's attention from the natural. Citizens have become consumers, and the dominance of rationality in industrialised nations like England has led to their alienation from nature (Economides 40). Processes of quantification and calculation, as shaped in the Enlightenment, distance the modern subject from the "living, dynamic world of moonlit seas and howling winds that resonate profoundly with human experience" (41). In the industrialised world, nature becomes just another quantifiable resource. Astonishment is now reserved for the achievements of man.

Eventually Wordsworth endorses technological sublimity, and this manifests particularly in a sonnet written in 1833, entitled "Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways". Here the poet is not so much concerned with the state of humanity in the industrialised world, but rather with the relationship between nature and technological means. In the opening lines of the poem, he claims that the operation of these manmade creations will not be scorned by the poets, despite their battle with "old

poetic feeling” (1-3). This old poetic feeling can be traced in the natural world, which has nurtured “[with] beauty and fear” (The Prelude Book I, 303) the poet who now witnesses its subjugation caused by humanity’s own initiative. Wordsworth admits that industrialism does “mar / the loveliness of nature” (4-5), but he does not condemn it for doing so. On the contrary, he asserts that this unfortunate fact will not inhibit the human mind from “that prophetic sense of future change” (5-7), thus becoming “an apologist for [the] cause” (Economides 80). Industrial advancement, as it becomes evident in the closing lines, has allowed humans to triumph over time and space. What this entails is that Wordsworth, in manner much reminiscent of the Enlightenment and contrary to his previous lamentation in “The World is Too much With Us”, celebrates the power reason for its ability to create machinery so that men become masters of the world. Furthermore, following Emerson who claims that factories are as much objects of nature as beehives, in this sonnet Wordsworth represents technological means as natural, since it was after all nature who gave man the capacity to construct them (Economides 93). Thus, instead of coming into conflict, industrial progress is embraced by nature as “her lawful offspring” (10-11).

Industrial achievement as represented in this sonnet evokes an experience of the sublime in relation to its seemingly incomprehensible quality, infinite dimension, terrifying power, and gender connotations. In his own essay on the sublime and the beautiful, Wordsworth, like Kant who defines ignorance as a prerequisite of admiration, argues that the subject is incapable of responding appropriately to sublimity due to the lack of similar experiences (Economides 49). This unfamiliarity surfaces in the poem as well, when Wordsworth suggests that maybe the mind will be able to understand “what in soul ye are” (8), or in other words, what is the essence and the purpose of machinery. As stated in the previous section, reason is fundamental for the Kantian sublime. The imagination is overwhelmed with an object too immense, therefore the mind has to go beyond its limits in order to grasp and rise above the sublime object (Wlecke 49-50). Indeed, the sonnet can be described as an encounter with the technological sublime per se. Technology’s ability to transcend time and space complies with Burke’s condition of the sublime regarding infinity. The steamboat’s and railway’s power to expand and link distant places approaches to infinity in relation to the limitations people knew until then. Moreover, Wordsworth describes industrial means as having “harsh features” (10) in comparison to the beauty found in nature, and this comparison already alludes to theories of the sublime and the beautiful. For Burke, harshness is a feature of the sublime, whereas smoothness is of beauty (148). This quality, alongside the destruction of nature, makes technology a sublime object that excites feelings of terror and pain, as far as the natural world is concerned, but also inspires awe and reverence. Also, as already evident in his earlier poems, technology is conceptualised

as a masculine sublime force as opposed to feminised nature. In this sonnet in particular, nature is described as lovely and maternal, features traditionally linked with the feminine. Understood within a patriarchal system of thought, the technological sublime facilitates the “penetration of nature’s womb” (Hutchings 184). Instead of struggling against this violation, nature assumes the role of a tender mother who forgives and embraces her offspring (Economides 93). What comes into play, therefore, is a juxtaposition of an aesthetic of the beautiful in nature with the technological sublime, and the triumph of the latter.

In associating technology with sublimity, Wordsworth conforms to principles of the Enlightenment regarding the superiority of human reason and its ability to prevail over the world by virtue of his technological achievements. However, as argued by modern ecocritics, it is precisely this impression that has led to ecological crisis. Furthermore, by gendering industrial progress and nature, he ends up justifying the destruction of the environment in the name of a seemingly natural hierarchy. Consequently, although Wordsworth exposes the detrimental ramifications of the new system, by resorting to the aesthetic of the sublime he vindicates and even encourages its operations, and fails to represent it in a way that would be ethical towards the endangered environment.

The English landscape was changing rapidly, and industrial advancement seemed unstoppable. It came as no surprise, therefore, that just over a decade after Wordsworth sonnet “Sonnet, Viaducts, and Railways”, it was proposed that the railway should expand to the Lake District. Even today the Lake District is inexplicably connected to Wordsworth and his poetry. Wordsworth was born in 1770 in Cockermouth near the Lakes, and he returned there in 1799 to settle with his sister Dorothy in Grasmere. He considered it the right place for his poetic retirement, inasmuch as he could dwell in tranquillity near nature and his home. Thus, despite his endorsement of industrialism in the past few years, the proposed railway expansion was directly met with opposition on his behalf. He took action by writing a sonnet, which appeared in the London Morning Post in October 1844. This poem, called “Sonnet on the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway” begins as following:

*Is there no nook of English ground secure
from rash assault? Schemes of retirement sown
in youth, and mid the busy world kept pure
as when the earliest flowers of hope were blown,
must perish;— how can they this blight endure? (1-5)*

Then, the poet proceeds to condemn the “false utilitarian lure” (7) that threatens to violate the fields, and urges nature to “protest against the wrong” (14):

Baffle the threat, bright Scene, from Orrest-head

Given to the pausing traveller's rapturous glance:

*Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance
of nature. (9-12).*

What this poem represents is an outright rejection of the railway, and by extension of the harm it causes to the environment. Although nature is still portrayed as a feminine force that must beg for its liberation from dominant technology, Wordsworth no longer represents industrial achievement as a sublime object. Key to this understanding is the notion of aesthetic distance theorised by both Kant and Burke. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, in particular, Burke states that "when danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight" (86). Delight is fundamental to the feeling of the sublime, because without it, horrible objects are merely horrible. In this light, now that industrialism is reaching for Wordsworth's home, aesthetic distance is lost and the magnificence of technological progress no longer appeals to him. The sublime experience dissolves due to the nearness that makes danger real and allows it to directly affect the observer. Although still depicted as harsh, powerful, and dominating, in this sonnet the new system fails to excite feelings of awe and reverence, nor does it overwhelm the imagination. It is not embraced by nature but comes into direct opposition with it. It destroys without justification, and the natural world is urged to confront this offense. In contrast with his earlier accepting and even vindicating attitude, Wordsworth now understands technology only as a condemnable violation. This occurs, I argue, due to the loss of aesthetic distance which dismantles the sublime experience since the danger is too close to the subject. This leads to the reconceptualisation of industrial expansion as a violation both of the poet's "literary landscape and the poetic identity he has constructed there" (Hess 119). Thus, for the sake of self-interest as well as for the environment, Wordsworth's protest tries to achieve the preservation of "the area as a refuge of culture, aesthetics, and subjectivity against a seemingly all-despoiling tide of modernity, utilitarianism, and industrialisation" (117).

Later in the same year, Wordsworth published another protest sonnet on the subject of nature's destruction by industrialism. In "Proud Were Ye, Mountains", the poet directly speaks of the emerging economic system as "a Power, the Thirst of Gold" (4) that reigns over the country and seeks to sell the beauty and peace of the mountains in order to build the railway. He mentions the whistle, which signals the appearance of the train in the area, and he proceeds to urge the "Mountains, and Vales, and Floods . . . / to share the passion of a just disdain" (13-14). The penetration of beautiful nature by the train as technology's product may be gendered in its representation still, but the purpose behind this operation is by now clear to the poet who, no longer astonished, criticises the economic system. The sound of the train's whistle may be coarse, but it does not inspire awe, only

discomfort and scorn. It becomes evident, then, that in Wordsworth's two protest sonnets sublimity has been dissociated from technology. This allows the poet to fully realise the effects of industrialism on the environment and protest against them rather than justify the process on the grounds of it being evidence of man's reason and its mastery over the world. Economides notes, however, that due to "Wordsworth's earlier endorsement of the technological sublime, all this comes as too little, too late" (96).

The above sonnets were the beginning of Wordsworth's campaign against the Lake District railway. This movement was the "first public protest against the railways specifically on behalf of landscape aesthetics, and like other early protests it focused on cultural rather than ecological preservation" (Hess 123). The sonnets were followed by the publication of two letters in the press, wherein Wordsworth claims that everyone around Windermere is perturbed about the proposed railway on the grounds that it will disturb the peace and destroy the beauty of the country (Economides 123). In the same letters, as well as others sent to various correspondents, Wordsworth also criticises mass tourism inasmuch as the railway would allow the low classes to visit the country and intrude upon the tranquillity of the inhabitants (Mulvihill 324). Interestingly, it has been argued that Wordsworth's contribution to the rise of tourism was in no small measure. Back in 1810 he published his *Guide to the Lakes*, a book addressed to those travelling to the Lake District. Beyond that, his and Coleridge's poetry and their exaltation of the local landscape encouraged many tourists to use the train and visit the area (Economides 96).

The reaction to Wordsworth's protest sonnets and letters was and remains contradictory as well as controversial. On the one hand, his construction of the countryside "as a sphere of high culture, which would be violated by the infusion of 'low' or popular culture" (Hess 116) earned him condemnatory comments on the grounds of "class snobbery and elitism" (McKusick 75). Although there might be some truth to these accusations, Wordsworth denied any intention to interfere with the pleasures of the low classes and insisted that the connection between the urban and the rural sphere would transform the character of the Lake District (75). On the other hand, his cause was defended for its attempt to protect the area. His neighbour Hartley Coleridge published a letter, wherein he claims that Wordsworth's purpose is not to keep away the poor but to preserve domestic privacy, which is in the interest of the homes and the natural world (Wells 38). Furthermore, Wordsworth's campaign influenced significantly the 19th century thinker John Ruskin and his own work on pollution and the environment. This can be discerned in Ruskin's lectures on the storm-cloud spreading over and changing the weather of England, as well as in his text concerning the Lake District railway, where he follows Wordsworth in arguing that the wave of tourists endangers the

country's tranquillity. As Bate observes, "the young Ruskin . . . learnt from Wordsworth how to look at clouds; the old Ruskin looked at the clouds and became convinced that the weather was undergoing radical change" (Romantic Ecology 61).

In the end, Wordsworth's campaign was unsuccessful and the Kendal and Windermere railway opened in 1847. Despite this failure, his protest managed to "establish a precedent for protecting the area, as well as a pattern of rhetoric in which future environmental campaigns would be fought" (Hess 138). What can be inferred from this is that Wordsworth was motivated to action only after the dissociation of technology from sublimity. Although in his earlier poetry he recognises the perils of industrialism, he receives the threat passively until it builds up to his endorsement of the technological sublime. It was only after the dissolution of sublimity that he took action. His protest may have been egalitarian and disdainful towards the will of others, hence not truly ecological (148-49). Yet, it allowed him to represent nature's destruction in all its unjustified immensity and even inspire others to observe and fight against this calamity after him. At this point, I would like to invoke Elaine Scarry's *on Beauty and Being Just*, a book that sheds light on the link between aesthetics and ethics. Although her analysis regards beauty and its relation to justice on the grounds of its symmetry and search for truth, it lays the foundations for understanding how aesthetic experience can generate particular attitudes (30-31, 80, 97). Thus, on the basis of its self-preserving hence antisocial quality and the feelings of helplessness and paralysis it excites, the sublime appears to inhibit action while instead encouraging inaction. This becomes evident when examining Wordsworth's volatile attitude towards industrial progress, since, as this paper demonstrated, he protests actively only after divorcing technology from sublimity. In this light, the sublime is conceptualised as an unethical attitude towards nature due to the suppression of action, which could otherwise protect it. In a world of climate change and increasing pollution, representing environmental destruction accurately and taking action for its prevention is, in the most literal sense, vital.

In his time, Wordsworth only got to see the emergence of technology and the new economic system. As it can be observed in Ruskin's storm-cloud lectures later in the 19th century, the English weather was already undergoing radical change due to industrialism. Today, however, we are facing a much larger and urgent threat: climate change, whose effects include "not only extreme weather events, such as heat waves and catastrophic hurricanes, but also coastal flooding, drought, an increase in arboviruses such as malaria, and ecosystem collapse" (Kainulainen 109). If the technological sublime demotivates active protest and interference, then what constitutes an ethical attitude towards the environment? To begin with, we must redefine what counts as 'nature'. What Wordsworth defends as 'natural' is not the

nonhuman realm but "a mode of relatively non-exploitative and stable settledness, a locally focussed non-capitalist lifestyle" (Clark 19). Nevertheless, his work managed to inspire future protest for environmental purposes. This shows that works of literature can be understood as "acts of environmental imagination", capable of "[affecting] one's caring for the physical world" by representing it as "more or less precious or endangered" (qtd. in Hutchings). Literature can raise awareness about climate change and sensitise citizens to taking measures for the prevention of further damage to the planet. The issue of representation comes into focus as well, since as it was argued in this paper, the conceptualisation of technology as sublime can lead to unfruitful rationalisation and inaction. Scarry associates beauty with the attainment of social justice, whereas Economides encourages an aesthetic response involving a feeling of wonder.

Most importantly, however, to face the problem one must go back to its cause. As mentioned earlier, humanity's understanding of its place in the world plays a fundamental role in its alienation from and destruction of nature. Yet, it has been established that "neither physically nor psychologically can we live without green things; . . . the earth is a single vast ecosystem which we destabilize at our peril" (Bate, *Romantic Ecology* 40). The achievements of reason and the advancement of technology have given humans the impression that they are that chosen, special species that breaks the great chain of being that holds all life together. Yet, the exploitation of the planet's resources and the nonhuman realm has created a threat which endangers humanity as much as the rest of the species. To deal with this, humans must first "adopt an ethic of identification with all things" that puts an end to their desire to elevate and separate themselves (Hutchings 182), similar to Wordsworth's call to the mountains to become his allies in protesting. In the end, we only have this planet, and it is a home for all.

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