

Both David Malouf's An Imaginary Life and William Wordsworth's Romantic poetry explore, in detail, the tension between humanity and the natural world. Both writers, however, place the focus of their respective works on the overcoming or conquering of such tension to achieve a relationship with nature that is full of vitality and significance. Despite being influenced by different cultural and social values, Malouf and Wordsworth both ultimately have the same agenda; to prove that any tension that does exist between humanity and nature is a barrier that must be brought down. Only then can we feel "nature overflowing" our souls.

Critical to Wordsworth's exploration of the tension between humanity and the natural world is the era in which Wordsworth lived. He was part of the Romantic

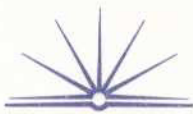
movement that strongly opposed the social upheavals such as the Industrial Revolution that were occurring at the time. Indeed, it was this "din of towns and cities" that, for Wordsworth, had created the tension between humanity and the natural world. In Tintern Abbey, we are consistently reminded that nature should be the "food for future years" by which to survive by. ~~Thus the cultural context~~ & further, Wordsworth is influenced by the type of 'nature' he wishes to interact with. Unlike the harsh "lofty cliffs" in Ovid's ~~exiled~~ world, Wordsworth immerses himself in a typically English landscape; "hedgerows", "cottages" and "lines of sportive wood". Nonetheless, despite these varying definitions of 'the wild', both writers still acknowledge the tension that invariably occurs.

Wordsworth relies on heavy religious connotations

to not only explore the tension between humanity and the natural world, but also provide a means by which to break down the tension. Nature to Wordsworth is a source of pleasure, "when like a row I bounded o'er the mountains", a comforter, "How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee", but most importantly a spiritual embodiment of God, "And I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thought". Once again, this is very much a reflection of Wordsworth's cultural values, and is different from Ovid's approach to breaking down the tension between humanity and the natural world. Malouf's Ovid, unlike the pantheistic speakers in Wordsworth's poetry, sees religion as a perhaps creating some of the tension that occurs. Ovid paints a fairly perjorative view of the 'gods', saying "if the Gods are with

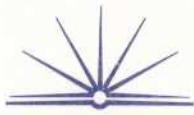
you there, then it is because you... conjured them up..." Indeed, Malouf, through Ovid, suggests that no God is needed in order to reach an unbridled union with nature, where "everything lives in sympathy". Thus we can see both writers use concepts of religion, or indeed lack of it, in order to explore possible solutions to the tension that is naturally between humanity and 'the wild'?

Both Malouf and Wordsworth further explore tension and man's relationship with nature through language and imagination. This is seen clearly in Wordsworth's The Solitary Reaper. For Wordsworth, the image of a "solitary highland lass" ultimately conjures up numerous images of the natural world and man's interaction with it, purely through his imagination.



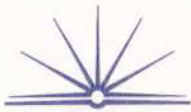
This method is paralleled by Malouf in the scene in which Ovid is trying to understand a story that Ryzack is 'singing'. Like Wordsworth, Ovid is intrigued by the sound he hears, "it is the tune I recognise". While Wordsworth feels frustration, "will no-one tell me what she sings?", Ovid too, is drawn to the sound, "I let the strange words fill my head, understanding nothing, but fascinated nonetheless".

Then, both use their imagination to explore their respective relationships and views on the tension between man and nature. Wordsworth thinks of man's mindless destruction, "some battle, long ago" and other negative emotions "is it... some natural sorrow, loss or pain?". Ovid is determined to relate the story to the 'wild', "Is it a bear? A wolf?". Thus both writers clearly use the imagination to initially



explore the tension between humanity and nature and intrinsically provide solutions to overcome the barriers.

The concept of the progression from childhood to adulthood plays a vital role in both texts in exploring the tension between humanity and the natural world. The progression that Ovid undergoes is a cyclical one, in which he realises he must return to his childhood to fully understand nature. He finds himself "more and more often slipping back to my childhood", and the link that children have with the wild is shown from the start when Ovid, as a boy, says "there is something in our nature that we share with wolves". Further, Malouf uses the personification of nature as a child to emphasise this

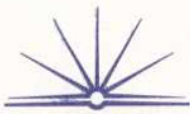


cyclical progression that Ovid undergoes: from saying "the cliffs oblique against the sky, the sea leader beyond" to "everything hews in ~~sig~~ sympathy".

Wordsworth, too, recognises the significance of childhood, however undergoes a more linear progression. In the Prelude, he says "I was fostered alike by beauty and by fear", however it was these "early ~~unse~~ pains and nurseries" that have led to a "calmer existence".

Thus once again both writers use a similar concept to explore the evolving relationship between ~~man~~ humanity and the natural world through maturity. In doing so, they also provide solutions or suggestions on how we might break down this tension.

Thus it can be seen that both



Malouf and Wordsworth use common themes to explore the tension between humanity and the natural world.

The 'natural world' in both texts ~~is~~ is different with regards to cultural and social contexts, as ^{are} ~~is~~ the situations in which they 'the world' is explored.

The world' is the natural world, the ~~world~~ animal world, the edge, ~~are~~ or simply some other plane of consciousness.

Indeed the term is used in its most esoteric sense. ~~Das~~ The main theme, however

of both writers, is to overcome this tension and recognise, as Ovid did, that "between our bodies and the ^{world} ~~universe~~ there is a unity and commerce."