



Title	Contact with Materiality:Wordsworth' s Alps and Thoreau' s Ktaadn
Author(s)	小口, 一郎
Citation	言語文化研究. 2018, 44, p. 223-241
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/68022
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Note	

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Contact with Materiality: Wordsworth's Alps and Thoreau's Ktaadn¹

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物質的自然との遭遇 ワーズワスのアルプスとソローのクターディン

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要旨：イギリスの詩人 William Wordsworth とアメリカの自然文学者 Henry David Thoreau は、近年の環境文学批評（ecocriticism）の観点から意義深い比較考察の対象となる。両者とも山岳や未開地への旅の中で、日常的認識の枠組みが覆される体験をし、その体験を作品化するが、そこに現代の新唯物論（the New Materialisms）や物質的環境批評（material ecocriticism）が問題とする自然の物質性の問題が顕在化しているからである。この論文では、主にワーズワスの自伝詩 *The Prelude* と、ソローの紀行文学 *The Maine Woods* の第1章“Ktaadn”を取り上げ、両作品が、アルプスやクターディン山の圧倒的風景を自然の他者性にとらえ、そこに自然の物質的存在を認識する可能性を示唆していたことを Kate Rigby や Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann らの環境文学批評の観点から読み解く。さらに、自然物の能動的作用（nature's agency）という現代環境批評の概念が、ワーズワスとソローに共有されていたことを示唆する。

キーワード：material ecocriticism, nature's materiality, trans-Atlantic ecology

1. Introduction

William Wordsworth and Henry David Thoreau can be looked at from a comparative literary perspective. Considering these authors together across the Atlantic can be justified on a number of grounds. Wordsworth is central to the literary movement of British Romanticism, while Thoreau is a representative writer of the American Renaissance, which is also known as American Romanticism. The fact that they belonged to kindred literary movements suggests that they are expected to have similar literary visions and artistic features upheld by analogous philosophical views. Critical interpretation

1 This article is supported by JSPS grants 15K02301 and 15H03189.

should be effective in shedding light on such shared aspects and developing readings that can lead to a better understanding of both writers. Scholarly approaches, too, should be able to make a significant contribution. It has been documented, in fact, that Thoreau, intellectually active two generations after Wordsworth, was under the direct influence of British Romanticism. Intertextual references to Wordsworth and several other Romantic poets constitute an important part of this American writer's literary works.²

These parallels become further meaningful when we take ecological perspectives in consideration. Re-reading of Wordsworth in terms of ecology has been underway for the past three decades. From the viewpoint of environmentally conscious criticism, or ecocriticism, fresh critical readings have been proposed, and the poet's pioneering role in the conservation of the English Lake District has been recognised.³ Thoreau has enjoyed a no less iconic status in ecologically minded literary studies as well as in environmental activism (Buell 362–69). In particular, his nature writing works are regarded as a milestone in the growing appreciation of American wilderness (Oelschlaeger 136).

These writers' respective ecological visions, intriguingly, established themselves by tracing similar processes. Each of the authors had a powerful philosophical mentor: Samuel Taylor Coleridge for Wordsworth, and Ralph Waldo Emerson for Thoreau. As established by the studies of Mary Jacobus, Jonathan Wordsworth and others, the Coleridge of the late 1790s was the most influential philosophical source for Wordsworth. Coleridge at that time entertained pantheist philosophy, and his philosophical position contributed to Wordsworth's literary vision of the natural world permeated by a divine active principle. This vision formed the initial basis of his nature poetry (Jacobus 59–82, Jonathan Wordsworth 184–201). This stage was followed by another phase when Wordsworth partly extricated himself from this dominant philosophical influence. As the current author argues elsewhere, this transition led to the full establishment of his ecological vision at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Koguchi, "Aesthetics of Nature" 34–43).

A comparable development to this two-stage process is observed in Thoreau. Initially he subscribed to his mentor Emerson's Transcendentalism. In a similar vein to Coleridge's pantheism, this philosophy postulates a natural world pervaded by God's design that unifies seemingly diverse phenomena into the

2 Thoreau's indebtedness to the British Romantic poets, especially to Wordsworth and Coleridge, has been widely discussed. For Thoreau's relationship with British and European Romanticism in general, see Miller, Smith and McIntosh. Hoag's study focuses on Thoreau's employment of the vocabulary of the eighteenth-century aesthetics of the sublime, which formed a theoretical basis of the Romantic view of nature. Specific references to Wordsworth in Thoreau have been explored, for instance, by Joy, Fergenson and Moldenhauer.

3 Ecocritical reading has become a major part of Wordsworthian studies. This critical approach began with Jonathan Bate's seminal study of 1992, which appreciates both the ecological vision inherent in the poet's writings and his role as a vocal activist for the conservation of the English Lake District. Bate was followed by Karl Kroeber, who proposed a slightly different approach, laying an emphasis on the biological and neuro-scientific aspects of the ecological consciousness of the English Romantic poets. A large number of further readings and theoretical debates appeared in response to Bate and Kroeber, and this trend has been continuing to the present day with no sign of abatement.

"One" (Oelschlaeger 135). However, like Wordsworth, Thoreau before long became sceptical about Emerson's dogmatic teaching, and this philosophical trajectory led to an important part of Thoreau's ecological thinking.

Pantheist philosophy such as advocated by Coleridge and Emerson is based on monism. Pantheism typically postulates a world presided over by a single benevolent divine principle. In logical terms, this world system is internally harmonious and self-sufficient, leaving no room for the existence of evil, problems or conflicts; or these disturbing elements are to be annihilated in time. It is obvious that this religious view is not effective in dealing with environmental issues and human concerns about them. Ecological thinking figures large on the present-day social agenda because the nature-human sphere is fraught with problems, contradictions and conflicts. The Emersonian or Coleridgean world does not lead to serious thinking about the environment and human society because it postulates no serious disturbances inside itself; or if such disturbances exist at all, they sort themselves out in due course of time. Hence it is significant that Wordsworth and Thoreau continued thinking about nature and the human place in it after they distanced themselves from their pantheist mentors' views. Allowing for intellectual complexity, the environmental thought of these authors might be able to bring a valid perspective to address present-day issues in ecology.

Indeed, both Wordsworth and Thoreau have a number of insightful moments that can be a key to important issues in ecocriticism. Among their pivotal texts, this article principally takes up a passage from Wordsworth's autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, and "Ktaadn," a chapter from Thoreau's travel writing work, *The Maine Woods*. The former focuses on the poet's ascent of the Alps, and the latter describes Thoreau's journey to Mt. Ktaadn, the highest peak of the State of Maine. In *The Prelude*, the climber Wordsworth is overwhelmed by the sublime Alpine scenery, but his narrative focus eventually converges on a unified perspective in the framework of creative imagination. The only exception is the "soulless" image of Mont Blanc, which remains outside this cognitive framework. This episode, along with other related works, suggests that the poet is having a glimpse of the otherness of nature, which is normally occluded from human perception. Thoreau, on his journey to Mt. Ktaadn, too, is surrounded by the immensity of nature that goes beyond the harmonious world of Emersonian Transcendentalism. After this disturbing experience, Thoreau advances his thinking ahead of Wordsworth's. He observes the otherness of nature encountered in Maine's wilderness in greater detail and discerns it as the elemental materiality of nature.

Nature's otherness and materiality, hinted by Wordsworth and more clearly intuited by Thoreau, has a special significance in view of twenty-first-century material ecocriticism. Nature as the material can be looked at in relation to the recent "material turn" (Iovino and Oppermann 75) in the humanities that aspires to overcome dualism by connecting the material and the discursive, and nature and humanity.

Thoreau's *Ktaadn* chapter has actually been interpreted by Johnson in the context of the New Materialisms. This new position, with material ecocriticism constituting part of it, is still in its early days and expected to produce further outcomes by being applied to an increasingly wider range of texts.

With this theoretical development in mind, in this article I shall take a related but slightly different perspective recently put forward by Kate Rigby in her article "Earth, World, Text." Her method, concerning itself with the post-structuralist issue of nature's textual unrepresentability, may not be exactly the same "materialist" view in the sense defined by Iovino and Oppermann, or by Johnson. But Rigby's interest in semiotic representation will be effective in delving into the epistemological aspect of Wordsworth and Thoreau, an aspect central to both writers as their works are closely involved in human consciousness and nature's place in it.

2. Wordsworth's Alps: Imagination's Enclosure

Wordsworth's *The Prelude* is a long autobiographical poem. In its first completed form of 1805, the poem extends to more than eight thousand lines in thirteen books. The passage in question, depicting his climbing of the Alps, occurs in Book 6. There is another conspicuous mountain-climbing scene in Book 13. This later-book episode and several other related passages from Wordsworth's poetical corpus will also be discussed to support my argument on the Alps passage.⁴

Wordsworth's walking tour to the Alps as described in *The Prelude* can be divided into four stages. 1) On his way to that mountain range, the walker Wordsworth feels one with the surrounding scenery. 2) The poet's consciousness, while composing this Alps passage, suddenly faces a powerful epiphany of imagination rising from inside his mind. 3) Back in the mountainscape, the walking poet feels overwhelmed by the ruggedness of the mountains, but after a while a stable understanding of the significance of the scene is attained. 4) Finally serene oneness with nature is regained in his walk down the mountains. This four-stage process, to be examined below, indicates that the sublime mountain scenery shakes the poet's cognitive frame, before it is redeemed into a stable state through the work of creative imagination. Cognitive crisis comes, but it soon passes away thanks to the poet's own internal power.

In the first of these four stages, humanity and nature, or the poet's consciousness and the surrounding Alpine scenery, are in harmony. Nature in a friendly manner helps the poet's journey forward as shown in the metaphor of a ship cruising by a full wind: "a ship / Upon the stretch when winds are blowing fair" (*Prelude* 6.435–36). The dominant atmosphere is that of "pastoral life" (6.437) that serves to integrate humanity with nature. In front of Wordsworth, and his walking companion Robert Jones, is a symbiotic

4 Quotations from *The Prelude* lines are taken from *The Prelude: The Four Texts*. Unless otherwise indicated, the 1805 version is used. Other Wordsworth poems are quoted from *William Wordsworth*.

landscape of culture and primeval nature in unison:

A green recess, an aboriginal vale,
 Quiet, and lorded over and possessed
 By naked huts, wood-built, and sown like tents
 Or Indian cabins over the fresh lawns
 And by the riverside. (6.448–52)

No wonder Wordsworth's heart "leaped up" (6.446) there, as if he were seeing a rainbow in the sky.

These serene lines are followed by the discordance of the second stage. With the Alpine scenery coming in sight, Wordsworth expects to feel exhilaration. But in reality the scenery fails his hope. He finds the image of Mont Blanc, the highest peak of the mountain range, as "soulless":

That day we first
 Beheld the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved
 To have a soulless image on the eye
 Which had usurped upon a living thought
 That never more could be. (6.452–56)

This Mont Blanc image does not sit well with the pastoral context established in the first stage. As inferred from the line that the mountain "usurped" Wordsworth's "living thought," the mountain is a visual image signifying nothing. The encounter with Mont Blanc, in other words, does not become a meaningful event in the poet's cognitive framework. Curiously, this experience was only short-lived as it was soon replaced by more reassuring natural scenery. The next day, "The wondrous Vale / Of Chamouny" (6.456–57) with its sublime glacial landscape "reconciled us to realities" (6.461). This reconciliation is not elaborated further, however. The shocking encounter with Mont Blanc is left behind without being given a meaningful place in the narrative of his Alpine journey.

The flow of the narrative is then abruptly interrupted in the second stage. In the build-up to this crucial moment, the climber Wordsworth feels a strong urge to attain a great Alpine height. His words, "an under-thirst / Of vigour never utterly asleep" (6.489–90), allude to such a mountaineering ambition. As it turned out, he lost his way among the mountains and crossed the mountain range without being aware of it. While composing this part, Wordsworth recalls that he had "dejection" (6.491) and "A deep and genuine sadness" (6.492). At this very moment, from deep inside his consciousness, the power of imagination rises up as if to countervail his frustrated feelings:

Imagination—lifting up itself
 Before the eye and progress of my song

Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,
 In all the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me! (6.535–39)

Thomas Weiskel reads this epiphany as an effort to reaffirm the poet's own internal power in the face of the awe-inspiring force of external nature that threatens the poet's consciousness. Wordsworth's utterance, "I recognize thy glory" (6.542), is indeed addressed to his own being, or to "my soul" (6.541). This epiphany is the positive sublime, or "the extreme consciousness of self mounting in dialectical recoil from the extinguishing of the self" (Weiskel 202–03). More precisely, this threatened annihilation of the self is being imposed by the transcendent presence felt to reside in the immensity of nature, or in the psychoanalytic terms of Weiskel, in the symbolic order of the Word (Weiskel 202). The poet can secure his own artistic originality by the power of "an unfathered vapour" (*Prelude* 6.537), which can be called transcendental, as it is independent of any paternal authority outside the poet's own being. The vocabulary that describes this revelatory moment, indicating infinity and eternal becoming, gives witness to the strength of this acquired confidence in the power of the poet's own private self: "awful promise" (6.544), "greatness" (6.546), "infinitude" (6.549), "hope that can never die" (6.550), and "something every more about to be" (6.552).

After this momentary rise of imagination, the narrative resumes for the third stage of this Alpine sequence. The traveller Wordsworth walks into a deep vale called the Gondo Gorge. The sight of this steep valley is overwhelming, violently dynamic and self-contradictory:

The immeasurable height
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
 And everywhere along the hollow rent
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
 The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
 Black drizzling crags that spoke by the wayside
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light. . . . (6.556–67)

That the ravine is perceived as gigantic is indicated by the fact that the surrounding woods are immeasurably high, the torrents are flowing down as if high "from the clear blue sky" (6.661), the river is flowing so far below that it induces a "giddy" (6.665) feeling, and that this depth is in stark contrast to

the open sky above. Many features of this scene are self-contradictory, not converging on a sense of oneness. Waterfalls are continuously sounding a blast, but this strong movement of air is said to be "stationary" (6.558). Winds are blowing but at the same time checking each other. Inanimate rocks make sound as if they had a voice and conscious will. The gorge overall is characterised by mutually conflicting qualities: "Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light" (6.567). This topography thus disorients the poet. There seems no way to make sense of his confused perception.

However, the poet's confusion is removed in the immediately following lines. The apparently indefinable scenery comes to be resolved into a unified dimension. All the diverse features of the Gondo Gorge are now compared to images of oneness: "workings of one mind, the features / Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree" (6.568–69). Furthermore in this symbolic unity, the ravine assumes an apocalyptic aspect. The gorge's features are now likened to "Characters of the great apocalypse, / The types and symbols of eternity, / Of first, and last, and midst, and without end" (6.570–72).

The apocalypse and eternity here mentioned, together with the signs of infinity and perpetual becoming alluded to in the preceding lines, "The immeasurable height / Of woods decaying, never to be decayed" (6.556–57), suggest that the poet's cognitive experience is closely related to the rise of imagination in lines 535 to 539. The landscape of the valley is strongly tinged with infinite and eternal power, which is comparable to the infinity and eternal becoming attributed to the imagination the poet faced a moment before. Though not indicated explicitly, it can be inferred from the shared features of this landscape description and the passage on imagination, that the poet's cognitive activity in the lines 556 to 572 are upheld by the internal imaginative power of his own psyche. The apparently unmanageable force of nature becomes ultimately under control by the poet's consciousness. Imagination finally encloses wild nature within the symbolic framework of the apocalypse, which is still threatening, but none the less a conventional cognitive scheme of understanding.

The immediately following fourth stage has a very different atmosphere. The pastoral mode and nature-human harmony reappear in the poet's gently descending journey down the Italian side of the mountains. The lakes of Locarno and Como form a landscape of undisturbed tranquillity, and the half-wild, half-cultivated land around the latter lake indicates humanity on amicable terms with nature:

. . . I spoke
Of thee [Como], thy chestnut woods, and garden-plots
Of Indian corn tended by dark-eyed maids,
Thy lofty steep, and pathways roofed with vines
Winding from house to house, from town to town
(Sole link that binds them to each other), walks,
League after league, and cloistral avenues

Where silence is if music be not there. . . . (6.592–99)

The four stages of the narrative of the Alpine journey are thus brought to a conclusion. The pastoral mode of stage 1 is re-introduced in the downhill walk, and hints of wild nature, such as “woods” (6.593) and “lofty steeps” (6.594), are integrated in the harmony of nature and humanity. Within the course of these stages, Wordsworth’s perception is disturbed by the wildness of Alpine scenery and then regains composure by the faculty of imagination. The imagination serves to contain a disquieting experience within its all-encompassing power. As a result the wayward side of nature, or its otherness, remains unrevealed, occluded under the subliminal realm of mind.

The Prelude also has a passage structurally similar to the climbing of the Alps in its thirteenth book. This episode is a further piece of evidence to cognitive enclosure by the imagination. One misty night, Wordsworth ascends Wales’ highest peak, Snowdon. On the way to the summit, suddenly the mist is partly cleared by being penetrated by moonlight: “. . . instantly a light upon the turf / Fell like a flash! I looked about, and lo, / The moon stood naked in the heavens at height / Immense above my head” (13. 39–42). The poet finds himself in a revelatory scene:

. . . on the shore
I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
Which meek and silent rested at my feet.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean; and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the sea—the real sea, that seemed
To dwindle and give up its majesty. . . . (13.42–50)

The mist is behaving as if it were changing into the sea and then into headlands that are stretching into the real Irish Sea. Literal reading will probably interpret this nightscape as symbolising the transforming power of external nature. But after meditating upon this scene, Wordsworth decides that this is not just a display of nature’s own power, but nature’s re-enactment of the work of imagination, because it is the human imagination that turns things into other shapes:

The power . . .
.....
. . . which nature thus
Thrusts forth upon the sense, is the express
Resemblance, in the fullness of its strength

Made visible—a genuine counterpart
 And brother—of the glorious faculty
 Which higher minds bear with them as their own. (13.84–90)

In these lines Wordsworth is placing emphasis upon the human faculty of imagination, or the “glorious faculty” (13.89) of “higher minds” (90), rather than on “The power . . . which nature thus / Thrusts forth upon the sense” (13.84–87), i.e. nature’s power that transformed the landscape surrounding Mt. Snowdon. If the imagination is thus assigned a primary place, and natural phenomena secondary, it will follow that external nature is dependent upon this human faculty for its ontological status. Nature’s spectacularly creative work is relegated to an imitation of imagination. In this sense the Snowdon passage can be considered a restatement of the Alpine climbing of Book 6, as external nature becomes framed by the internal power of human consciousness.

Both the Alps and Snowdon passages constitute truly great literary moments. They succeed in affirming the creative supremacy of human consciousness. On the other hand, these literary tours de force fail to take into account what remains outside the perspective of imagination. The unexpected appearance of the “soulless” image of Mont Blanc can be regarded as such an outsider. The sight of the mountain stands out as alien, and the meaning of this haunting presence remains unaccounted for in the poem. The giddy prospect of the Gondo Gorge is such a strong menace to the poet’s consciousness that it can be suspected that this violent ravine scenery is not really tameable by imagination. The Alps passage thus contains factors that could potentially overturn the poet’s scenario of enclosing nature by imagination.

This other face of external nature can be related to its physical aspect from a modern ecocritical point of view. Kate Rigby’s article “Earth, World, Text” establishes a perspective that bridges the otherness of nature and its physicality. Rigby refers to photographic artist Harry Nankin’s project. The artist tries to capture a nocturnal image of coastal waves on a large sheet of photographic paper. However, accidental occurrences characteristic of outdoor conditions, such as clouds blocking moonlight or the sea current ripping apart parts of the sheet, frustrate his intention. The product in the end was never what he had initially planned to make. However, Rigby claims that nature’s physical presence can be discerned in such representational failure. Nature itself may be ultimately invisible because when represented in human media, it has been translated into a set of man-made semiotic signs. Yet, as in this photographic project, nature influences human cognitive attempts with physical force, which is characterised by otherness that cannot be directly approached from the ordinary human sphere (Rigby 434–35). Mont Blanc’s soullessness in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* can probably be regarded as an example of the otherness of nature that Rigby refers to. Like the unanticipated outcome of the said artistic project, this mountain image is beyond the control of the perceiver Wordsworth and defies interpretation and

enclosure. And it is there undeniably inscribed in the text.⁵

Wordsworth in *The Prelude* does not elaborate on nature's otherness and physicality further. To pursue the significance of this issue, we need to broaden our scope and include literature from the other side of the Atlantic in discussion. Thoreau's travel writing, with its concern with nature, its otherness and materiality, comes into our view as a text to be considered. I shall then proceed to look at the chapter on Mt. Ktaadn in his representative travelogue, *The Maine Woods*.

3. Thoreau's Ktaadn: Material Nature and Humanity

"Ktaadn," the first chapter of *The Maine Woods*, is a detailed record of a journey to the mountain of that name that sits in the deep woods of the State of Maine.⁶ An autobiographical piece, a travelogue of a mountain ascent, and a writing concerned with the issue of nature's otherness and materiality—these features make "Ktaadn" an appropriate subject of comparison with Wordsworth's *Prelude* passages examined above. It should also be recalled that the literary careers of both writers have common factors, as stated in the introductory section of the current article. Of particular importance is that they respectively had a philosophical mentor who entertained a pantheistic view of the world.

The early Thoreau was under the strong influence of Emerson the Transcendentalist. Among his several prose pieces focusing on mountain climbing before the writing of "Ktaadn," "Wachusett" perhaps most clearly attested the presence of Emerson's metaphysical view in Thoreau. The quotation below shows that Thoreau tries integrating the features of natural scenery into the pantheist system of his teacher:

We could at length realize . . . how they [mountains] come into the general scheme of the universe. When first we climb their summits and observe their lesser irregularities, we do not give credit to the comprehensive intelligence which shaped them; but when afterward we behold their outlines in the horizon, we confess that the hand which moulded their opposite slopes, making one to balance the other, worked round a deep centre, and was privy to the plan of the universe. (Thoreau, "Wachusett" qtd. Oelschlaeger 138.)

Thoreau supposes the existence of "the comprehensive intelligence" in the world and gives it the credit of creating mountains in the way that they fit "into the general scheme of the universe." Things are in harmony with each other in this scheme; for instance, mountain slopes are balanced with those on the opposite side, as if to constitute a complete whole by the hand that worked "round a deep centre." The

5 The current author elsewhere discusses nature's otherness in Wordsworth's shorter pieces. The discussion relates the materiality of nature to its invisible, unrepresentable otherness. See Koguchi, "Shadow of the Non-Corresponding Other."

6 The mountain's name, now officially spelled "Mount Katahdin," had different versions in the past. Thoreau used the spelling "Ktaadn." The present paper follows Thoreau's usage throughout.

completeness of land form, thus assumed, gives witness "to the plan of the universe." As Oelschlaeger notes, Thoreau is here evidently drawing on the view of orthodox Emersonian Transcendentalism, echoing physico-theology and the argument from design (138).

The younger writer, however, was not entirely content with his mentor's teaching. He soon started exploring nature and its meaning from his own independent standpoint. As he had a strong inclination towards natural science, Thoreau became concerned with first-hand experience of wild nature. In "Natural History" he remarks that "The true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men" (131). Through immediate contact with the wild, Emerson's legacy was tested, and sometimes fundamentally questioned. The climbing of Ktaadn is among the most important of such questionings.

During his journey towards Ktaadn, Thoreau witnesses human activities on the outskirts of the Maine woods. In the region where "land virtually costs nothing, and houses only the labor of building, and he [a settler] may begin life as Adam did" (Thoreau, "Ktaadn" 14), settlers apply themselves to forestry. Thoreau accordingly observes fire burning for "clearing and planting" (14). It seems that "the whole of that solid and interminable forest is doomed to be gradually devoured thus by fire" (17). That nature is gradually being encroached by culture is probably a faithful depiction of North America in the mid nineteenth century. The objectivity of observation is also supported by his awareness of the economic mechanism of "*supply*" and "*demand*" (11) behind land development. These disturbances in nature are not quite containable within the view of Emersonian Transcendentalism. Already at the outset of his Ktaadn journey, Thoreau's observations go beyond his mentor's teaching.

This does not mean that he is free from his mentor's influence, though. Close to the end of his journey, his description somewhat reverts to an Emersonian vision of harmony and divine benevolence. On his return voyage downstream a series of lakes, he sees that once "terrible" and "angry" waters now look "tamed and subdued" into "submission" (77). The landscape assumes an appearance that seems to be upheld by Transcendental Nature, as the scenery surrounding Thoreau is characterised by the same pastoral mode as Wordsworth found on the French plane on his journey towards Mont Blanc and again on his downhill walk on the Italian side of the Alps. Thoreau writes:

Who shall describe the inexpressible tenderness and immortal life of the grim forest, where Nature, though it be mid-winter, is ever in her spring, where the moss-grown and decaying trees are not old, but seem to enjoy a perpetual youth; and blissful, innocent Nature, like a serene infant, is too happy to make a noise, except by a few tinkling, lisping birds and trickling rills? (81)

Beginning with a slightly disconcerting tone, "Ktaadn" concludes with a reaffirmation of Emersonian nature, the nature equivalent to what Thoreau had found in wilderness in "Wachusett."

While walking among the Alps, Wordsworth had “an under-thirst / Of vigour” (6.489–90), or a strong wish to feel exaltation on some high point in the Alps. Thoreau’s ambition seems to be similar to Wordsworth’s mountaineering psychology. He emphasises that his tour was intended to reach the summit of Ktaadn, the highest point in Maine and “the second highest mountain” (3) in entire New England. Halfway through his journey, a partial view of the mountain impresses his mind with its otherworldly height, which seems to be “connecting the heaven with the earth” (33). Then closer to the mountain, Thoreau’s aspiration is again acutely felt. From a short distance of less than a day’s walk, he “started for the summit of the mountain” (56), repeatedly referring to his goal: “. . . we struck at once for the highest peak . . . we determined to steer directly for the base of the highest peak . . .” (56).

Up until this stage, Thoreau’s expectation probably did not go far beyond the Emersonian world of divinely pervaded nature. With all minor disturbances, his observations were calm and objective, and the reference to an almost mythic quality of Ktaadn, i.e. “connecting the heaven with the earth” (33), does not seem to be seriously disruptive, well containable within the view of a world in harmony. Yet the real story of his Ktaadn journey begins at this point. Seen from a spot in the vicinity, the mountain discloses a hitherto unrevealed feature, “a different aspect from any mountain I have seen, there being a greater proportion of naked rock, rising abruptly from the forest” (57). This appearance is a far cry from the balanced land formation referred to in “Wachusett.” Ktaadn now assumes the look of “some fragment of a wall,” and as it is said to have “anciently bounded the earth” (57), this wall looks derived from the alien realm of a primordial time. A few pages later Thoreau repeats the mountain’s extremely irregular shape and its dissociation from the ordinary world:

The mountain seemed a vast aggregation of loose rocks, as if sometime it had rained rocks, and they lay as they fell on the mountain sides. . . . They were the raw materials of a planet dropped from an unseen quarry. . . . This was an undone extremity of the globe. . . . (63)

As Wordsworth was shocked to see the image of Mont Blanc devoid of soul, so Thoreau is facing a phenomenon in nature that cannot be understood in reference either to his previous experience or to his old cognitive frame of Transcendentalism.

Thoreau is not Wordsworth, however. Artistically active half a century later than the English poet, Thoreau could not rely on the Romantic creative imagination. He thus cannot immediately frame and make sense of what he sees. He just continues to write about it, in contrast to Wordsworth, who gave a decisive interpretation to the wild side of nature from a human perspective and left unaccounted for what was not interpretable. From an ecocritical perspective, Thoreau’s elaboration of this alien other is particularly significant.

After seeing the otherness of Ktaadn, Thoreau becomes more aware of the unfriendly aspects of the

natural surroundings. He turns attention to “the hostile ranks of clouds” which obscured “all objects” from his sight (63), and this brief appearance of inhospitable nature leads him to reflecting further on nature’s change of character on Ktaadn:

She [Nature] does not smile on him as in the plains. She seems to say sternly, why came ye here before your time? This ground is not prepared for you. Is it enough that I smile in the valleys? I have never made this soil for thy feet, this air for thy breathing, these rocks for thy neighbors. I cannot pity nor fondle thee here, but forever relentlessly drive thee hence to where I am kind. Why seek me where I have not called thee, and then complain because you find me but a stepmother? Shouldst thou freeze or starve, or shudder thy life away, here is no shrine, nor altar, nor any access to my ear. (64)

Wordsworth did not come this far. The English poet merely gave a passing remark on soulless Mont Blanc. And the potentially grave perceptual disturbance in the Gondo Gorge was incorporated in a story of creative imagination. Nearly half a century after in America, Thoreau delved deeper into what Wordsworth had left unexamined.

As we read on, we see again that Ktaadn is in a different realm from ordinary human experience. Nature symbolised by that mountain is “the unhand-selled globe” (70), the ancient mother earth that is not yet submitted to human use. Nature on Mt. Ktaadn, residing beyond the realm of humanity, is ungraspable by human cognition. The mountainscape is in fact described in a series of negatives: “not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste-land” (70). The only positive definition is that it is “Matter, vast, terrific” (70). We have seen that Rigby recognises nature’s otherness in the traces of dynamic natural force recorded as failure in a photographic art work. These traces suggest the material presence of nature that eludes semiotic representation, which is usually the only path for human consciousness to approach external nature. By discerning the otherness of nature on Mt. Ktaadn in a series of negative definitions, Thoreau seems to have reached recognition similar to Rigby’s twenty-first century insight. Exploring deep into the wilderness of Maine, Thoreau is faced with the other side of nature, or “Matter” stripped of all human terms.

Thoreau’s pursuit does not end here. He still has more to say about material nature because he comes to realise that he himself, as a physical human being, partakes of nature’s materiality. Walking towards Ktaadn, which appears in the form of “a vast aggregation of loose rocks” made of “the raw materials of a planet dropped from an unseen quarry” (63), he has a strange feeling that human existence is reduced to matter by being deprived of consciousness and thinking:

Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends. . . . There is less of substantial thought and fair understanding in him, than in the plains where men inhabit. His reason is dispersed and shadowy, more thin and subtile like the air. (64)

The beholder's "vital part" probably refers to a higher intellectual faculty like reason or understanding. As this vital part goes out of the spectator's body from between his ribs, he gradually loses his "substantial thought and fair understanding." His reason becomes almost attenuated to an insubstantial level. Thus "inhuman Nature . . . pilfers him of some of his divine faculty" (64), i.e. the faculty of reason. Now with Ktaadn right in front of him, Thoreau feels that this place is "to be inhabited by men nearer of kin to the rocks and to wild animals than we" (70–71). If a human being wishes to grasp the material otherness of nature, he must give up some part of his humanity and become more akin to purely material existence like a rock. He must cross the boundary of organic and inorganic, living and non-living. The revelation Thoreau received on Mt. Ktaadn is that the dichotomy of human and non-human, or culture and nature can be destabilised.

The above quotation from Thoreau refers to "animals" (71) as well as to "rocks" (70). In addition to denying the dichotomy of organic and inorganic, this statement intends to deconstruct that of human and animal, or of spiritual and corporeal. The awareness of the animal physicality of the human body is strengthened by a further encounter with nature's otherness described in an immediately following passage: "We walked over it [the "Burnt Lands" area] with a certain awe, stopping from time to time to pick the blueberries which grew there, and had a smart and spicy taste" (71). Burnt Lands are similar to Mt. Ktaadn in that their bleak appearance forces Thoreau to realise the otherness of wilderness that goes beyond Emersonian nature. His eating of wild blueberries, occurring in this context, probably suggests that the action of taking food connects the human being with the environment at a material level. Indeed, in *Walden* Thoreau links the genius (i.e. soul) with the physical by assigning an inspirational role to food: "I have been inspired through the palate, that some berries which I had eaten on a hill-side had fed my genius" (*Walden* 196). James McKusick comments on this sentence by saying, "By eating wild foods, Thoreau gains access to the wild mind" (155). I take this "wild mind" as partaking of the material presence of the wild woods from which these berries derived, as well as of the "genius," or the spiritual aspect of Thoreau's existence. Both in "Ktaadn" and *Walden*, the author is stepping in the direction of more immediate contact with the physical by recognising material sharing between the human body and the wild.

As a breakthrough to a new level of recognition, the encounter with the materiality of nature and of his own being can be very disturbing. After the otherness of nature has been exposed to him in the form of Mt. Ktaadn, Thoreau becomes more aware of the material nature of his own body as an awful, inexplicable part of his existence:

I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one, —that my body might, —but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan

that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! Think of our life in nature, —daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, —rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense*! *Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?* (“Ktaadn” 71)

As a man of post-Enlightenment times, Thoreau recognises himself principally as an intellectual existence. He therefore does not fear the spiritual; for they reside in the same non-material dimension as his soul does. He says, “I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one.” The bodily side of his existence may feel afraid of such spirituality—“that my body might”—but his central being never has such a fear. On the other hand, once recognised through the Ktaadn experience, the material aspect of nature and of himself begins disturbing him. His body is the corporeal part of him, and like a Titanic being, it takes hold of him under control. Furthermore, the apprehension that this body is not fundamentally different from external things, “rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks,” confounds his normally stable sense of the inside and outside, self and non-self. It becomes hard to locate his own being in the multifarious dimensions of the post-Ktaadn world. Thus the usually reassuring “*solid* earth” and “*actual* world” perceived by “the *common sense*” are now disrupting his identity. Seeking the immediate link with the world, or “*Contact*,” Thoreau is now thrown into a crisis of identity that makes him utter, “*Who are we? where are we?*”

Thoreau's anxiety about identity suggests that in the above passage he does not have an effective frame of reference. As I argued earlier, on a return journey after this Ktaadn experience, Thoreau seems to have regained an Emersonian world-view. But on Ktaadn, he is in confusion, not knowing how to come to terms with the otherness of nature, the materiality of his own physical existence, and the continuum of materiality between his body and external nature. If he were Wordsworth, he would attempt a rather lengthy meditation to contain his experience in the framework of imagination. Not being able to follow in the footsteps of the English poet, though, he gives vent to his disrupted psychology in more straightforward verbal expressions. They constitute that great prose passage on the recognition of the Titanic material body, his seeking for “*Contact*” with things in nature, and the confounded sense of his own identity. In it he discloses a mentality different from that of the self-standing human existence of modernity centred on the rational self. Thoreau on Ktaadn started and ended with relatively stable modern subjectivity, but in between he indicates a post-enlightenment self that is about to lose its autonomy by being encroached by the otherness of material nature. Hence Thoreau, perhaps more than Wordsworth, has the potential to contribute to deepening the present-day exploration of ecocriticism. We might say that his insight is just as new and acute as Kate Rigby's theoretical discussion in the twenty-first century.

4. Conclusion: Nature's Agency

My argument has indicated that both Wordsworth and Thoreau are surprisingly close to the view of material ecocriticism. But only some aspects of the similarities have been treated in my discussion. I shall therefore conclude by referring to some passages from these authors that show their affinity with another important issue of material ecocriticism: agentic nature.

It is well-known that Wordsworth believed that external nature had life. Among so many appropriate lines to be quoted, below are from his relatively early blank verse fragment:

There is an active principle alive in all things;
 In all things, in all natures, in the flowers
 And in the trees, in every pebbly stone
 That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
 The moving waters and the invisible air. (1–5)

Following these lines, the fragment reads that in nature there is a “Spirit” (9) that is “the soul of all the worlds” (11). By claiming that nature is alive inspired by a central active principle, this blank verse passage almost seems to be predicting recent ecocriticism’s claim of the “enchantment” of material nature: the experience of spirit as a vital force permeating all matter including human beings (Johnson 607). Furthermore, nature here has agency, or spontaneous activity that has an effect on other existences. Wordsworth also writes that “All beings have . . . a power by which they make / Some other being conscious of their life” (6–8), and these lines clearly read that he is imparting agency to non-human natures, in line with material ecocriticism’s argument.

Wordsworth’s lines might be less convincing to modern readers as they were written in the context of late-eighteenth-century pantheist thinking. They are perhaps too outright religious and metaphysical. In this sense, Thoreau’s similar insight can be more acceptable, as he was operating in the more secular atmosphere of mid-nineteenth-century America. He assigns an animal-like agency to inorganic things by blurring the distinction between living and non-living: “. . . rocks, gray, silent rock, were the flocks and herds that pastured, chewing a rock cud at sunset” (61). Then conversely, living birds are compared to a rock. This again confounds the organic-inorganic border: “Now and then some small bird of the sparrow family would flit away before me, unable to command its course, like a fragment of the gray rock blown off by the wind” (65). In a similar vein, the aforementioned Burnt Lands, which some might think of as the human product of slash-and-burn agriculture, are in reality created by nature’s hand. The lands are there by being “burnt by lightning” (70) and actively contribute to the life of other beings like “the moose and deer” (70) as “a natural pasture” (70). Similar to Egdon Heath in Thomas Hardy’s *Return of*

the Native, alluded to by Iovino and Oppermann in their discussion of nature's agency (80–81), Burnt Lands are exerting their effect on other existences in the nature world.

Thoreau's view here is different from Wordsworth's in some important respects. Wordsworth in "There is an active principle alive in all things" postulates an *a priori* "active principle" (1) and a "Spirit" (9). The living activity of external nature is to be seen in reference to this assumption. This is also true of the Thoreau of his Emersonian phase. In "Wachusett," the earlier piece of Thoreau discussed above, he was convinced that "they [mountains] come into the general scheme of the universe" (138) and that God's hand observable in their formation is "privy to the plan of the universe" (138). The mature Thoreau's agentic nature should be distinguished both from the English poet's metaphysical view and from the Transcendentalist thought of his own younger days. Later in *Walden*, Thoreau writes about the movement of a sandbank, which, unlike "Wachusett" and Wordsworth's fragment, cannot be reduced to a single metaphysical principle:

When the frost comes out in spring, and even in a thawing day in the winter, the sand begins to flow down the slopes like lava, sometimes bursting out through the snow and overflowing it where no sand was to be seen before. . . . As it flows it takes the forms of sappy leaves or vines, making heaps of pulpy sprays a foot or more in depth, and resembling, as you look down on them, the lacinated lobed and imbricated thalluses of some lichens; or you are reminded of coral, of leopards' paws or birds' feet, of brains or lungs or bowels, and excrements of all kinds. (272)

The movement of sand is multivalent; it is based on the physics of gravity and fluidity, but at the same time it reflects the principles of vegetable growth and animal organisation. The moving sand also reminds us of the composition and activity of the human body, since "a man" is compared to this "mass of thawing away," his "fingers and toes" to the extremities of the flow, "the hand" to the "lobes" of lichens, and the "nose" to a "congealed drop" of water containing minerals (274). Rather than listing a series of conceptual analogies, Thoreau's observation on the sandbank seems more like superimposing a number of diverse dimensions in a physical, matter-of-fact manner. The vegetable, animal and human realms are identified in this sand ecosystem without having recourse to an all-unifying metaphysical principle.

In this radically new perspective, the boundaries of nature and culture, matter and spirit, internal and external become undermined. The notions of humanity and nature, which have long upheld the ideology of Western modernity, may become untenable. In their concern with revising these fundamental notions from a present-day perspective, the emerging schools of material ecocriticism and the New Materialisms must have something important to learn from this nineteenth-century American writer.

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